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# Beyond the Black Horizon

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BEYOND THE BLACK HORIZON: PERSPECTIVES OF  
AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGIANS WHO STUDIED  
ABROAD

BY

AARON IAN BRUCE

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## **ABSTRACT**

Although U.S. colleges and universities continue to discuss creative ways to increase the number of African American collegians participating in study abroad, this research is limited when revealing the unique perspectives of African American collegians who have studied abroad. Traditionally an emphasis on program success has been placed on the quantity of study abroad participants rather than the quality of African American student support and engagement; the personal reflections through the lens of African American race and identity are often overlooked. A series of culturally responsive, guided interviews were conducted with African American collegians from a variety of institutions across the United States, to learn their perspectives on their study abroad experiences. This research reveals that culturally responsive mentoring and guidance are valuable in helping African American collegians deconstruct or make sense out of their study abroad experiences, both during and upon reentry. Also, African American collegians use the method of finding “home abroad” as an important coping tool for support, social adjustment, and cultural validation. Combined, these findings suggest that African American collegians who have studied abroad benefit from culturally guided reflection and learning experiences in which their race and identity are taken into consideration.

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Coleman, Anna Julia Cooper, Harry Haywood, Colonel John Robinson, Paul Robeson,  
George Washington Williams, Rayford Logan, Ralph Bunche, James Baldwin,  
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Van Henry, and others who dared to explore the world before me, may your spirits  
continue to inspire others to fly beyond the Black horizon.

Awaken the sleep, protect the weak, and guide the strong.

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## **Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION**

This study was designed to gain a better understanding of the unique experiences of African American collegians who had recently participated in a study abroad program. Through a series of qualitative interviews, students shared their perspectives on identity and cultural inclusion within the context of study abroad.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Research exploring the perspectives of African American collegians who have studied abroad is limited. Although significant statistical data exists documenting the *numbers* of African American collegians who study abroad (Institute of International Education, 2008), minimal research is available that captures their voices or their perceptions of study abroad through the lens of racial identity. Recent legislation acts such as the Child Improvement Act of 2010 demonstrate the national desire for an improved global knowledge base (Lantos, 2007). As cultural understanding, national security, and global economic competitiveness become more important to all Americans, teaching that reflects inclusion and best practices in study abroad is increasingly vital. African Americans share similar concerns around global understanding and economic growth. To that end, universities must gain a more comprehensive understanding of how African American collegians respond to their experiences abroad.

This study focused on the perspectives of African American collegians who took part in both short- or long-term study abroad experiences within the past five years (2005 to 2010). For the purpose of this study, “African American” referred to an individual residing in the United States, of African ancestry, who identified him or herself as Black, African, African American, biracial, or multiracial. Through a series



of digitally recorded audio interviews, the participants were given an opportunity to reflect on a variety of experiences related to race, ethnicity, and identity within the context of study abroad. The purpose of the study was to explore how issues of race and identity impacted the study abroad experience for African American collegians. Furthermore, as an African American researcher and senior diversity administrator myself, I had a professional and personal connection to the topic that allowed for an informed introduction of potentially in-depth discussions around race and identity.

This research uncovered the perspectives of African American collegians vis a vis study abroad, bringing a more inclusive view to the existing literature. Moreover, this study revealed how African American collegians perceived their racial identities, and how study abroad influenced their identities. In this study, I explored how the experience of studying abroad impacted the lives and perspectives of African American collegians and how the opportunity to reflect on the study abroad experience helped African American collegians make sense of their experience.

### **Justification for and Significance of the Study**

For more than a decade, various national and regional conference workshops, panel discussions, special interest groups, and individual researchers have contemplated the topic of African American involvement in study abroad (Gliozzo, 1980; Day-Vines, Barker, & Exum, 1998; Craig, 1998; Cole, 1990; Landau & Moore, 2004; Association of International Educators (NAFSA), 2001). Forums focusing on funding, advising methodologies, and marketing models have been presented, yet the voices of African American collegians remain in the background. What African

American students have to say about their study abroad experiences through the lens of cultural empowerment and cultural identity is largely absent.

Study abroad programs are educational programs taking place outside the geographical boundaries of a student's home country. These global learning experiences include both credit and noncredit programs. The length of time spent abroad ranges from a few weeks to up to a year. Study abroad can be a transformative experience that presents unique opportunities for social and cultural reflection. Although I argue that the purpose of studying abroad is often to discover and explore new cultures, one's acquisition of knowledge is directly connected to previous experiences that a person can use as a springboard to greater understanding.

Exploring perceptions of one's self in a global context can lead to reevaluation of cultural identity (Coffman, 2000; Talburt, 1999, Day-Vines et al., 1998). Tatum (1997) emphasizes that the absence of insight surrounding racial identity in the learning process can limit personal aspirations and hinder achievement of African American students. As Pollock (2004) points out, "All Americans every day are reinforcing racial distinctions and racialized thinking by using race labels; but we are also reinforcing racial inequality by refusing to use them" (p. 4). As a country, we struggle to discuss race, thereby perpetuating the inequalities we strive to overcome. Avoiding the discussion of race or difference in the classroom exacerbates disparities that exist in the learning process (Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Phinney, 1992; Steele, 1992). Exploration of racial identity and the incorporation of culture into the learning process both provide African American students a forum for deconstructing the dynamics of race, power, prejudice,

discrimination, and other institutional barriers that challenge student success. In doing so, students are encouraged to explore the world in a manner that is culturally empowering and personally meaningful to them.

### **What Do We Know About African Americans and Study Abroad?**

The limited literature related to African American collegians and study abroad consistently reflects on a national discussion to increase African American student participation. The two areas of particular concern are: one, the perceived challenges of financing study abroad; and two, the role race and relationships play in African American student transformation.

Colleges and universities around the U.S. are making efforts to increase the racial and ethnic numbers of participants in study abroad, but they are having little success (Lincoln Commission, 2005). According to the most recent study conducted by the Institute of International Education's (IIE) *Open Doors* (2008), the change in African Americans studying abroad between 2006 and 2008 is minimal and continues to be low when compared to their Caucasian peers. One might argue that the terrorist tragedy of 9/11 may have made some African Americans apprehensive about international travel. Unfortunately, even prior to 9/11 the numbers of African American collegians participating abroad were low. Since 1993, the number of African American students studying abroad has never been higher than 3.8% of the total study abroad population (IIE, 2008). The decades of low numbers exhibited by the IIE *Open Doors* report has led concerned individuals to continually question why more African Americans don't study abroad. However, what happens when they *do* study overseas is a topic that remains unexplored. Whether 3 percent or 70 percent of African Americans are studying abroad, what is the quality of their experience?

In 1991, the Council on International Education Exchange (CIEE), through extensive research, analysis, and discussion, found four major reasons for the limited participation of African American collegians in study abroad: financial constraints, curriculum requirements, perceived lack of support from faculty and advisors, and marketing. Hembroff and Rusz (1993) found that when compared to Whites and other minorities, African American collegians were less likely to study abroad because “they could not afford to go, were concerned about language differences, cultural differences, and perceived lack of support for participation from advisors; they were fearful, also, of discrimination” (p. 22). Additional research generally concurs with the CIEE findings.

### **Financing Study Abroad**

The topic of financial challenges as a barrier to participation emerges in the literature exploring Africans Americans and study abroad (Carter, 1991; Day-Vines et al., 1998; Dass-Pickard & Ganz, 2005; Gliozzo, 1980; Perdreau, 2008; Bailey, 1991; Burkart, Hexter, & Thompson, 2001; Raby, 2005). Bailey (1991) asserts that the limited African American collegian participation in study abroad programs is connected to their lack of knowledge of what financial assistance is available through scholarships, grants, and loans. As sociology professor and Director of Semester abroad at the University of Wisconsin, with extensive experience in accompanying college students abroad, Bailey notes that 80% of the students that he takes abroad receive a Stafford student loan. Carter (1991) echoes the idea that “for minority students, particularly African American students, the financial constraints may create insurmountable barriers.” (p. 9). However, she asserts that “campus culture, lack of support, and stereotyping of faculty” (p. 9) also play significant roles in limited

African American study abroad participation. Disadvantaged backgrounds, poor academic preparation, and lack of interest also emerge as common justifications for low levels of participation (Carter, 1991).

In contrast to Carter (1991), Bailey (1991) and others suggest that African American and White students are equally likely to know about financial aid and scholarships as ways of affording the opportunity to study abroad; however, African Americans were significantly less likely than Whites and other minority students to actually take the plunge (Hembroff & Ruzs, 1993). Hembroff and Ruzs (1993) note that the financial concerns extend beyond the actual expenses associated with studying abroad; the loss of potential earnings can also be a major constraint. Moreover, there is a conflicting perception of value connected to study abroad for African American students. The research of Hembroff and Ruzs indicates that students clearly know how to pay for study abroad through financial aid or various scholarships, yet may not view study abroad as a lucrative way to spend their money. Although the topic financing study abroad brings up issues of class and the intersection of race, the primary focus of this study examines race

### **Race and Relationships Matter**

Having discussions with peers, faculty, mentors, or advisors has significant benefits in motivating students to study abroad (Kim & Goldstein, 2005; Hembroff & Ruzs, 1993). Higher levels of trust, credibility, and familiarity can lead to improved levels of research and thus greater student participation levels in study abroad programs. Hembroff and Ruzs (1993) found that race mattered in the establishment of mentors for minority students interested in study abroad. Students were more likely to

participate in overseas programs when they could connect to their mentor culturally, as a sense of trust and credibility was easier to establish in situations where the students' racial backgrounds proportionally matched those of faculty.

Kim and Goldstein (2005) conducted a survey of college freshmen and found that small group discussions, focusing on attitudes towards others, helped improve student values and their interest in study abroad and foreign language acquisition. In 2010, the University of Wisconsin–River Falls (UWRF) hosted several focus groups for students historically underrepresented in study abroad. The focus groups included the UWRF Asian American Student Association, the Latino Student Organization, and the Black Student Union. The gathering of 15 African American students from the African Student Union led to a candid discussion about the challenges associated with study abroad. The students noted that instructors and advisors who were connected to study abroad were significant motivators; these types of faculty possessed a “credibility” that students valued. Students also shared additional challenges associated with employment and family (Brux & Fry, 2010). These in-depth, guided conversations led the researchers to conclude that a short-term study abroad, like an alternative spring break or 2 or 3 weeks, was likely more feasible for African American collegians.

### **People of African Ancestry and International Education**

While interest and feasibility for study abroad may appear limited, the historical roots of people of African descent in the academy suggests otherwise. In a formal sense, the documented origin of higher education is in Africa. The first universities originated on the northern part of the continent, in the region that is now called Egypt (Diop, 1974; Sertima, 1976; Asante, 1990). The area was initially called Keme, or

—the Black Land, on account of the color of mud found on the banks of on the Nile River (Bennett, 1971). This was where the first universities, then known as learning temples, were established. Egypt was a society of organized religions, mathematicians, scribes, architects, engineers, standing armies and generals, stone and brick masons, carpenters, artists, sculptors, cloth makers, farmers, teachers, and gold- and silversmiths. As a result of African migration patterns, African spiritual and architectural influences are still present in Spain, Greece, and around the world today (Williams, 1987).

The history of Black Africa and organized higher education begins at the —Universal City, Thebes, —the most important single city in the entire history of Black people (Williams, 1987, p. 87). Scholars from foreign lands, including Greeks and Romans, traveled from their homelands to study at Thebes. At its height of existence, Thebes represented a major trade hub in Africa. Serving as the capital of Egypt during the period of the Middle and New Kingdoms, Thebes was a seat of African political and cultural growth. As a result, caravan routes emerged as a customary form of travel to the north and west, encouraging the exchange of knowledge and natural resources for African people.

Travel has always played a significant role in the lifestyles of Africans and people of African descent (Campbell, 2006). Whether their motives were related to the search for freedom, exploration, migration, trade, the acquisition of land, or technology, travel has long been has been a significant part of their history (Okafor, 1997; Sertima, 1976; Clarke, 2002). The tradition of travel amongst African people spans centuries (Campbell, 2006). From 600 A.D. to 1600 A.D., the trans-Saharan trade routes between North and West Africa spurred the growth of African empires in

Ghana (622–1203 A.D), Mali (1235–1500 A.D.), and Songhai (1475–1600 A.D.). Along with the exchange of goods in trans-Saharan centers of trade like Timbuktu, Africans also shared technology and language (Okafor, 1997). East African, pre-colonial intra-African trade routes beginning around the 10th century A.D. led to the development of cities like Mombassa and Zanzibar. Indian, Chinese, and Arabs traders would frequent East African coastal cities in search of gold throughout the 17th century (Okafor, 1997).

Historically, those of African descent have not limited their travel to the continent of Africa. Diawara (2010) researched the writings of Egyptian scholar Ibn Fadl Al-Umari, who in 1342 documented the 1312 trans-Atlantic ocean voyage of a Malian ruler in 1312. Diawara concluded that the epic voyage was conducted by Malian king Mansa Abubakari II, who led a fleet of 200 ships across the Atlantic more than 100 years before the 1492 voyage of the European explorer Christopher Columbus. Given the presence of West African artifacts and language that exist today in Mexico and throughout Central and South America, several scholars (Hyman, 1999; Sertima, 1976; Joseph, 2003; Heyerdahl, 1971; Bennett, 2007) support the notion that Africans traveled to the Americas well before Columbus.

In his book *They Came Before Columbus*, Sertima (1976) argues that some of the earliest tools, knowledge, and trade in the Americas came directly from Africa. He states that the people of Nubia and Kemet were the earliest African settlers in the Americas, proven by the 1858 discovery of a gigantic self-portrait with traditional Afrocentric features (broad nose and full lips) carved out of a single basalt and dating back to 800–600 BC. It was discovered by a hacienda worker in the village of Tres



Zapotec one of the major Olmec capitals of Mexico. Seventeen of these heads have since been discovered all over South America. Although major aspects of Olmec culture and history remain unknown, archeologists have recovered enough artifacts to demonstrate a significant African presence in the Americas many centuries before the advent of the African holocaust (Clarke, 2002) of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Some scientists have even concluded that the Olmec civilization may have originally been an African settler-colony (Lawrence, 1962; Sertima, 1987; Weiner, 1992; Wuthenau, 1982). This historic notion is relevant, because it establishes an important thread connecting Africans and African Americans to a tradition of international travel pre-dating the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Moreover, it establishes the exchange of culture and technology globally.

### **Post-Slavery African American Travel**

After the holocaust of American slavery, racism, and the post-Reconstruction terror against African Americans, many African American academics, writers, artists, and activists were forced to leave the United States (Coles & Hodges, 1999). The prominence of life-threatening conditions in the United States became the catalyst of migrations to African countries, Canada, and Europe.

International travel and study abroad is not a completely new concept for African Americans. African American scholars like historian George Washington Williams migrated to the Congo in 1890 (Franklin, 1998). The 1920s back-to-Africa movement, led by Marcus Garvey, was one of the largest mass movements of African Americans in the history of the United States (Weisbord, 1968). Charles Hamilton Houston, the first Black editor of the *Harvard Law Review*, studied abroad during the

1920s and later went to the University of Madrid to pursue a doctoral degree in civil law after graduating from law school. He later went on to become dean of the Howard University Law School (McNeil, 1983). Also during the late 1920s, African American musician Robert Nathaniel Dett, more commonly known as R. Nathaniel Dett, studied at the Fountainebleau School of Music in Paris (Southern, 1997). Nobel Peace Prize recipient and Harvard graduate Ralph Bunche conducted his doctoral research through the Rosenwald Fellowship; this opportunity enabled him to conduct research in Africa for his dissertation comparing French rule in Togoland and Dahomey, West Africa, in 1932–1933. He later went on to study at Capetown University in South Africa (Bunche, 2001). Former international advisor to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Rayford Logan was one of the first African American historians to study the history of the Republic of Haiti (Janke, 1997). In 1948, author James Baldwin left the United States for Europe in search of freedom from the oppression as an African American and as a gay man. Bessie Coleman decided to study abroad because she was denied an opportunity to study for her aviator's license in the United States. Determined to succeed, Coleman moved to France, and in 1924 she became the first African American woman to receive an international pilot's license. In 1925 Harry Haywood, founder of the Maoist New Communist Movement, studied abroad in Moscow. He began his studying at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, and continued to the International Lenin School in 1927 (Haywood, 1978). These groundbreaking African Americans are important because their stories exhibit the historical presence of African Americans in study abroad throughout the world.

In spite of these success stories above, the oppression of African Americans in the United States also deterred African Americans from traveling internationally. For example, in 1950, Paul Robeson was denied a passport and the right to travel abroad. The State Department noted that he was denied due to his association with Communists and representatives of African colonies seeking independence (Duberman, 1988). African American leaders like W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, and Martin Luther King Jr. also faced challenges obtaining their passports, based on the premise that their activities were un-American in nature. This history contributes to understanding current study abroad practices because it frames some of the unique barriers to global access African American leaders experience beyond the academic arena.

The role of African American leaders as cultural markers, shapers of identity, and mentors has lost its prominence in the learning experience. The stories of the struggles and success of African American leaders globally is absent from the minds of African American youth. During the early 1900s, the role of racial pride and achievement was a prevalent factor in the African American (then Negro) learning process (Perry, 1975). African American children were regularly exposed to the positive accomplishments of African American leaders by African American teachers. Mentors were readily available as sounding boards for exploration. The walls of classrooms in segregated schools were covered with culturally familiar images serving as motivators to youngsters born into a frequently turbulent environment. Those images served as markers of those who had persisted and achieved in the face of adversity. Today, many of those culturally relevant individuals have been eliminated

from the learning experience of African Americans, from pre-kindergarten through doctoral study, leaving adolescents and young adults to wonder —Who am I?!, —Who can I become?!, and —What does the world have for me?!

Although a global African American presence has existed for over 500 years, the dynamics of a two-sided American identity continues to create unique challenges, both domestically and abroad, for African Americans. The singular experience of being defined as both —African! and —American! is illustrated through the voice of W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) in his book *Souls of Black Folks*:

After the Egyptian, and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 9)

The unique duality of the African American experience deserves further exploration. By examining the exceptional transformation created by travel beyond the borders of the United States, one can potentially capture a greater clarity of the African American experience as it relates to the rest of the world. Undertaken at the intersection of domestic and international realities, this study facilitates a highly warranted discussion connected to African American collegians and their thoughts about studying abroad.

### **My Perspective**

My life has been profoundly transformed as a result of international travel and study abroad. As a teenager, who was almost failing Spanish in high school, a trip to

Venezuela motivated me to apply myself to learning another language. As a collegian, my studies in Cuba and Mexico sharpened my sense of global politics, education, health, and humanity. As a professional, working in Mexico and Kenya, I discovered an appreciation for relationships, conversation, and intercultural understanding. I met my wife while living in Kenya. As a father and educator, I have learned that there is much more to learn and more places to go. I am inspired to inspire others to explore the amazing world in which we live. It is not merely money or marketing that will inspire others to travel. It is the rich conversations that reflect our love for humanity and exploration that will ultimately inspire African Americans to venture beyond their familiar horizon. “We need to affirm ourselves and touch our own horizons as we work to fuse with others, as we offer more and more pathways out of the fixed and the ordinary, pathways toward what might be” (Green, 2001, p.190).

### **What Follows**

In Chapter Two, the literature review, I examine study abroad research and how it connects to race, and the acquisition of cultural capital. I discuss study abroad, framing it as a valuable form of experiential learning. I argue that acquisition of cultural capital through study abroad plays a part in creating access to codes of power in, and identity development for, African American collegians.

In Chapter Three, I describe the qualitative research methodology used in the collection and analysis of the data. I share the culturally responsive strategies framing my approach to the research topic. Pulling from Black Feminist Theory, I argue that cultural competency and sensitivity in the research process play an important role in the empowerment of African American collegians, and what they reveal. I outline the

demographics of the participants, how they were identified, and the approach I used in collecting and coding the data. I also discuss the limitations associated with this particular research project.

Chapter Four, the Findings chapter, is broken into three parts. I begin Chapter Four framing the role of the guide, chaperone, or mentor is an integral part of the African American collegian experience abroad. I share the voices of students to support the premise that the trust and credibility established through culturally responsive mentoring contributes to creating rewarding experiences for African Americans studying abroad. I also discuss how mentoring abroad as an important tool in assisting students in deconstructing or finding meaning in unfamiliar encounters. Additionally, at various points throughout Chapter Four, I briefly acknowledge moments where the intersections of race, gender, and class play a role in how students view the world.

In the second of the three parts of Chapter Four, I introduce how the concept of finding home abroad emerges a common strategy for African American collegians. I include the narratives of students, citing examples of how students maintained their cultural and social balance in isolating, unfamiliar, and sometimes hostile situations. I argue that finding home abroad consists of a variety of important coping tools African American collegians adopt to endure social and cultural challenges associated with international learning experiences. To support my argument, I present a series of ways African American students discussed finding home abroad. I continue by examining the significance of common experiences and the fictive kinship of people of African descent in the context of study abroad.

In the third of three data sections of Chapter Four, I argue that culturally

responsive mentoring and guided reflection play a critical role in the academic, social and cultural development of African American collegians. I discuss the lack of opportunities for reflection, examples of faculty who guided reflection, and how culturally responsive reflection helped students with their reentry. I describe the unique challenges associated with the reentry of African American collegians upon returning home after their studies abroad. I note that the limited access to a network of friends and family who are familiar with studying abroad puts African American collegians at a disadvantage when trying to make sense of their international travels. Moreover, the absence of faculty and advisors who understand the unique nature of African American student experiences abroad compounds the challenges associated with reflection and transformation for those students.

In Chapter Five, I indicate several conclusions that emerged through my data analysis of this study. Three distinct conclusions from this research study contribute to the literature around African American study abroad. First, finding home abroad provides important moments of social, cultural and academic validation for African American collegians. Second, closure is missing from the study abroad reentry of African American collegians. Culturally responsive mentoring before, during, and after study abroad provides African American students with an essential space for reflection and development. Third, moments when culturally responsive guides were available made a significantly positive impact on African American students' overall experience abroad.

## **Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Study Abroad, Race, and Cultural Capital**

This study draws from three major interwoven camps to inform the theoretical view and analysis of study abroad programs and the African Americans who participate in them: experiential pedagogy, race/cultural identity, and the acquisition of cultural capital through inclusive teaching.

#### **Experiential Pedagogy**

The theoretical framework behind my view of study abroad is linked to experiential education. The concept of experiential education is often used as a framework when studying educational practices like internships, community service, professional development, and training. Although all study abroad experiences do not qualify as experiential learning, the main beliefs behind this theory can also be applied to study abroad. Educational theorists like Dewey (1938) and Freire (1970) embrace the concept of experiential education as a philosophy grounded in the premise that learning is a transformative and liberating process. Experiential education focuses on the role of educators in creating rewarding learning opportunities for students, while empowering students to reflect and build upon what they encounter in their daily lives.

Dewey believes that genuine intellect comes from the acquisition of new encounters that are then combined with a reflection on previous experiences (Dewey, 1938). Arguably one of the strongest proponents for experiential education, Dewey stands firmly on a platform embracing the notion that education is just as much about the acquisition of knowledge as it is about learning how to live. To that end, Dewey



notes that educators must serve as guides or facilitators in the learning process, providing students with spaces to develop their own sense of understanding the world through experiences. However, he cautions that “The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative” (Dewey, p. 25). He reminds educators that the foundation of good learning experiences are experiences that support student’s intellectual and personal growth, as well as contribute positively to society. To assist in achieving these types of optimal learning experiences, Dewey urges teachers to refrain from imposing their own views or biases in the learning process. Rather they should serve as partners, guiding student’s independent exploration. I believe that guided exploration is important in the context of study abroad, because of the culture shock associated with international experiences.

Helping students make the connection between the past and present is the role of the teacher. Adopting a banking method (Freire, 2000) or —narrational approach (Wittel, 2001; Heaney, 1995), while taking less time, eliminates the experiential encounter and can create a misleading, incomplete, and less stimulating lesson (Keeton, 1979). Successful learning requires active student participation in order to connect lessons to daily life. This idea doesn’t warrant the dismissal of important academic concepts attained through independent experience and reflection. However, when experiences are accompanied by the appropriate guide, teacher, or mentor, students receive a valuable sounding board for processing reflective learning. Experiential education as an objective in study abroad is important to this study, because it provides a framework for understanding learning experiences that take place outside of the traditional classroom. It defines the roles of both the teacher and

the learner in such ways that can be easily translated into a variety of study abroad situations.

Weiland (1981) echoes the sentiment that experiential learning opportunities can open new doors for students marginalized in the traditional classroom setting. Given that many scholars agree that present traditional classrooms in American are not working to the advantage of African American students (Woodson, 1998; Kozol, 1991; hooks, 1994; Kharem, 2006), experiential learning can “help the less academically inclined to become more motivated to learn, feel more comfortable in the learning process, and tap more deeply the reservoirs of talents and abilities” (Keeton, 1976, p. 43). Thus, the experiential learning opportunities framing study abroad programs are highly beneficial for disadvantaged youth (Keeton, 1976; Kolb, 1984).

Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich (2002) found international experiential pedagogy important in developing globally oriented citizens. In response to global terrorism security concerns and the increasing national interest in study abroad, they began to examine international experiential pedagogy, focusing on the role of study abroad as a tool for increasing intercultural understanding. Looking beyond the use of study abroad as a method of improving language acquisition, Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich (2002) note that study abroad can be used as a tool in developing global citizenship. They argue that , “study abroad in and of itself does not lead to the development of global citizenship, but that it can do so when it is designed with that goal in mind, putting into practice the principles of experiential education” (Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich, 2002, p. 43). Furthermore, they share that not all study abroad programs adopt an experiential learning model. Although one might

assume that international travel in and of itself is an experiential learning model, Lutterman- Aguilar and Gingerich argue that there is a spectrum of levels within the realm of experiential learning abroad.

“there is a continuum within study abroad from programs that simply transfer academic credits from one traditional discipline-based institution to another without intentionally utilizing the international experience as the basis for learning, to those that try to incorporate some aspects of experiential education such as the use of learning contracts to programs whose design is thoroughly grounded in the principles of experiential education” (Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich, 2002, p. 43).

Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich state that universities vary significantly in their approaches to when and to what level they facilitate experiential learning models in study abroad. Which leads to the premise that quality experiential learning abroad depends greatly on the manner in which it is facilitated by the professor, guide, or chaperone. Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich, argue that:

“Experiential international educators need to pay special attention to issues of dominance within culture and design study abroad programs that will not only teach students about intercultural communication but also about the complexities of the host country, enabling students to come into contact with diverse sectors of the host country, including non-dominant groups such as ethnic minorities, poor people, and other groups whose voices often go unheard in academia” (Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich, 2002, p. 67).

The concept of dominance within the cultural design of a program is particularly important in understanding how race and identity shape the commentary of the participants in this study.

### **Race/Cultural Identity**

The discussion of race is fundamental to this study. The concept of race is an elusive one that receives a great deal of emphasis and analysis in American society. Lopez (1994) defines race “as a vast group of people loosely bound together by historically contingent, socially significant elements of their morphology and/or ancestry” (p. 7). He points out that race must be viewed as a *sui generis* social phenomenon. In other words, race is a social construct that has its own unique characteristics, allowing it to exist unaccompanied as an entity or reality. From a scientific or biological perspective the construct of race is unfounded, leading race to exist as a separate reality. Beyond the presence of melanin or other unique physical traits human beings share based on historical geographic points of origin, we are all biologically the same. Yet, society places a significant emphasis on race which perpetuates the maintenance of various power structures. Lopez further notes that race is

neither an essence nor an illusion, but rather an ongoing, contradictory, self-reinforcing process subject to the macro forces of social and political struggle and the micro effects of daily decisions as the connections between physical features, races, and personal characteristics. (p. 7)

The result of the race construct is the classification of people in terms of their social affiliation, such as Black, White, Asian, and Latino. However, they are all groups of people that, in scientific terms, are not genetically distinct (Helms, 1990).

The concept of race is a modern idea. The division of people based on physical differences is something that was not prevalent amongst early inhabitants of the planet

(Lopez, 1994). Ancient societies were separated along religious, class, or linguistic affiliations. Race is a human social construct that has no genetic foundation (Lopez, 1994; West, 1993; Welsing, 1991). The construct of race in the United States continues to serve as a method for the justification of social differences and marginalization of groups of people.

The existence of race and racism as human constructs creates social and political realities that cannot be overlooked as part of the American educational experience (Tatum, 1997). African American college students have a unique academic experience in the United States. Since the beginning of our nation, African Americans have fallen prey to the oppression of a White supremacist ideology (racism), which continues to undermine the efforts of people struggling for freedom and self-determination (Delpit, 1995; West, 1993; hooks, 1994, 1995; Dyson, 2007; Kozol, 1991). The power of White privilege (McIntosh, 1989) is extremely difficult to combat. However, overcoming racism in America, whether individualized or institutionalized, requires a readjustment of political and social ideologies often perpetuated by an educational system framed in Eurocentric terms (Woodson, 1998; Carter & Goodwin, 1994). In American society, race significantly influences students' perceptions of self and how they respond to the social challenges associated with their own racial identity.

Ogbu (1992, 1998), who is well known for researching the impact of African American student identity perceptions on academic performance, notes that race matters to both teachers and students in the educational system. He explains that African American youth create a culture of underachievement as a coping response to

the stressors associated with racism. Fordam & Ogbu argue that U.S.-born African American students develop a unique cultural identity in opposition to the dominant or mainstream American culture, hindering their ability to achieve academic excellence. He posits that African American students and the African American community view high academic achievement as “acting White” (Fordam & Ogbu, 1986).

In contrast, Carter (2005) uncovered very different reasons behind African American student’s resistance to “acting White”. Her research continued an investigation of race dynamics in the classroom, as she interviewed 68 African American and Latino students from low-income households ranging in age from 13 to 20 years old. She found that African American student actions are more about preserving their own “cultural identity” (p. 53) than rejecting the standards of academic success concurrent with Fordam and Ogbu’s conclusions. Her conclusion is that although African American and Latino students express differing cultural identities from White students, their motivations for preserving their cultural uniqueness have little to do with low academic performance. Both White students and non-White students have similar attitudes and motivations around academic success. Nevertheless, African American frustration with the U.S. educational system is linked to the larger racialized socio-economic portrait of the United States. In the context of study abroad, perhaps the same themes of oppression hold true.

Although one must be mindful to understand that African Americans have diverse realities within the American experience, the conscious and/or subconscious impact of racism continues to permeate their academic, social, and economic experiences. Jackson (2001) Compares the various levels of African American race

consciousness or stages of identity development to looking through a lenses of eye glasses. “Each lens has a different prescription shaped by the experience of growing up as a member of the Black community in a racist society and influenced by the many aspects of Black culture (p. 11)”. Although African Americans may see the world through a similar lens, each lens has a different magnification or prescription. Thus, one’s response to racism in America and abroad may not fit each individual. Race in the United States dictates how people construct a sense of self. It influences social privilege and the way Americans develop their own identity. The concept of racial identity development is the “process of defining for oneself the personal significance and social meaning of belonging to a particular group” (Tatum, 1997, p. 16). Noguera (2008) notes that as African Americans get older, they become more aware of the social and political challenges associated with race. And although they may not be able to articulate it, African American students are more cognizant of the prejudice and racial biases prevalent in throughout American society. In integrated or predominantly White learning environments, Noguera (2008) African American students can be negatively impacted by a “hidden curriculum” dictating what “certain students [African Americans] can and cannot do because of who they are” (p.12). Steele (1992) supports a similar notion, arguing that racism embedded in the learning experiences of African Americans creates a “stereotype threat” perpetuating negative social structures in American classrooms. Ultimately these negative learning environments create barriers to the positive identity development and academic success of African American students.

To appreciate the complexities of race and identity in America, one must acknowledge that the intersection of the two is dynamic. Jackson (2001) notes that “the understanding of racial identity development is constantly evolving in response to changing social dynamics, ongoing research, and the fluidity of our understanding of both race and the experience of racial groups in the United States” (p .2). I amend that the racial identity of African American collegians is also influenced by the constant social, economic, and political changes taking place globally. The African Americans’ views of the world and their cultural self-perceptions are important pieces to include in a critical analysis of racism and global understanding. For some African Americans, the exploration of identity through study abroad crystallizes their understandings of American social isolationism.

Discussions with African American participants in this study allowed me to explore each student’s sense of identity as it was realized during his or her study abroad experience. This process of self-realization is linked to the constructivist tradition of educational research theory. Constructivism is based on the idea that students build schema, or cognitive structures, in response to what they are feeling and experiencing. These feelings emerge in an unconscious way over time, and influence how students form meaning about the world they live in (McClelland, 1996).

Learning to comfortably define oneself in the context of an oppressive environment, whether in the United States or internationally is a process that requires numerous levels of reflection. Giving students the opportunity to reflect on experiences abroad through a cultural lens has the potential to assist participants in peeling back layers of social and cultural mis-education (Woodson, 1998). Initiated by



White educators seeking to enforce an air of superiority over African Americans, Woodson frames mis-education as educational practices and structures designed to maintain and strengthen a White power base. “When you control a man’s thinking you do not have to worry about his actions” (Woodson, 1998, p. xix). Similarly Dewey (1938) notes that “Any experience is mis-education that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience” (Dewey, 1938, p.25). This study examines the voices of students who have been influenced directly and indirectly by the often oppressive social structures of the United States and the fallout of those experiences in an international context.

### **The Acquisition of Cultural Capital through Study Abroad**

In this study, I am also informed by theories of social and cultural reproduction. Bourdieu (1973) put forth a theory of cultural capital that provides a framework for addressing educational institutions and their ability to empower students. He notes that institutions play a role in reproducing social inequalities by impeding access to various forces that promote success. Cultural capital is comprised of knowledge or skills that “may yield social and cultural power” (Anyon, 1980, p. 69). It is a social commodity that provides a sense of empowerment and entitlement to people who wield it. It is comprised of the skills, experiences, and education that enable people to achieve and maintain higher levels of status in mainstream society (Lareau & Weininger 2003).

Although Anyon (1980) notes that “skillful application of one’s cultural capital may ultimately lead to social power and financial reward” (p. 69), it is the acquisition of cultural capital through activities like study abroad that also yields a “socially legitimated knowledge” (p. 69) of how the world, power, and society are connected.

From a historical perspective, people who are typically well-traveled tend to hold a higher level of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1973) argues that these experiences, although not visible or easily attainable, have a significant value. Those who are not as worldly are lacking cultural capital. Elite or upper-class students are able to utilize their cultural capital to translate the meaning behind collegiate curricula as well as their daily experiences. By understanding specific communication methodologies and ways of interacting with others, students are able to gain access to the codes, or rules, needed for successful participation in various environments (Crichlow, 1998).

Possessing a strong knowledge of the “codes of power” that exist in the context of an academic setting also leads to success academically, socially, and often economically (Delpit, 1994). Delpit (1994) describes the “culture of power” (p. 282) in American schools as one that favors White and upper-middle class students. She claims that these students tend to excel academically because they already have the cultural capital that gives them a clear understanding of the value systems and discourse patterns prevalent in our educational system. Delpit warns that students lacking the cultural capital congruent with the dominant ideology in academia are likely to suffer. These marginalized students, typically students of color or those who are economically disadvantaged, are expected to be familiar with a set of rules and codes to which they have never been exposed. Therefore, they struggle to interpret a system of values and discourse that is unfamiliar. Similar challenges exist outside of the classroom for students lacking cultural capital. For example, students who are accustomed to international travel are familiar with the importance of arriving at the

airport at least two hour before their flight. Their families may have previously taken vacations abroad, thus exposing them to the social norms associated with international travel. However, students without international experiences might assume that they can arrive ten minutes before departure. However small, these deficits in cultural capital accumulate quickly, and leave some students with a significant disadvantage. Thus, the ability to interpret the codes of power provides a unique competitive advantage over those who are not familiar with the techniques needed to navigate a new environment. African American students are frequently positioned at a disadvantage because they are not part of the culture of power; they have a different set of needs, rules, and goals. Study abroad offers one mechanism by which to acquire this.

There is a link between study abroad and cultural capital. Although Bourdieu (1973) is not directly referring to travel when discussing cultural capital, his perspective provides a solid bridge for understanding the connection between the teacher and student in the context of study abroad. If chaperones/cultural guides are unable to engage students in valuable discussions or motivate critical reflection about study abroad experiences, they are contributing to the reproduction of social inequality and hindering the acquisition of cultural capital. Through interviews with students, this study uncovers issues that encourage a further exploration into perspectives of engagement and cultural inclusion in the context of study abroad.

### **Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY**

This was a qualitative study, based in semi-structured interviews, or guided conversations. This method allowed the discussion to focus on interesting areas of inquiry during the interviews. I gathered data from semi-structured discussions with African American collegians to provide an in-depth perspective that went beyond the traditional post-study abroad surveys.

Conducting a qualitative study enforced the premise that there are a variety of ways to make meaning of the world we live in (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Maxwell, 2004; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The process of qualitative research is inductive. Meaning, the methodology of my research was focused on building theories, concepts, and hypotheses found in the data I collected. My interview format revealed findings that could not always be achieved through statistical or other quantifiable methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Moreover, encouraging students to use their own voices provided emancipating and empowering tools to individuals frequently marginalized by a system of oppression. Semi-structured interviews allowed for a greater understanding of the study abroad experiences from the perspectives of African American collegians. The manner in which I presented, built upon, and shared questions was a method of investigation in which the students were empowered to explore their feelings about the material presented (Wolf, 1987).

#### **My Positionality**

I define myself as a transculturalist or someone who strives to transcend cultures. I spend a significant amount of time immersing myself in new and unfamiliar communities. Because of my lifestyle and career dedicated to diversity, inclusion, and social justice, I embrace the unique identities of the students I interview. My approach

to this methodology is greatly influenced by my own positionality. As an African American male, who studied abroad, and has facilitated international learning experiences for students of color, my unique view of the world made it easy for me to initiate conversations that placed the identities of the participants at the center of the conversation. Furthermore, I am highly cognizant of how the intersections of race, gender, class and sexual orientation influence ones view of the world. Physically resembling the students I interviewed potentially assisted me in bypassing their initial apprehensions and established a significant level of trust. By disclosing my role as a diversity professional who had also participated in several studies abroad, students gained notion that I potentially had a greater than average understanding of their experiences abroad. One of the greatest benefits associated with my positioning as a researcher was sharing the realities of race and international education with the participants. This important common ground allowed me to quickly establish trust and initiate in-depth conversations. Accompanied with a heightened sensitivity to topics that are not always prevalent in mixed-race conversations, I was able to encourage rich dialogues revealing student's sincere feelings about race and identity. The intersection of race, gender and class inform my process, analysis and the product in this dissertation.

I made every effort to make sure that the participants felt comfortable with sharing their experiences with me. Conducting the interviews in spaces they were familiar with helped put their minds at ease. I was sincerely excited to hear about their adventures abroad. The tone of my voice, posture, and facial gestures reflected, interest, understanding, and empathy. As they shared their comments, my responsive nods, and statements like "alright" or "I hear you" from time to time, affirmed their

statements and provided room for them to continue their testimonies.

In some cases, interviews by a male researcher might deter female students from disclosing various details about their experiences abroad. However, as a male who self identifies as a feminist diversity professional, I was extremely conscious of the role my gender played when interviewing women. When delicate subjects like gender bias, sexual assault or harassment emerged, with women participants, I was very careful not to pry or pursue a line of questioning that made them uncomfortable. When sensitive topics emerged with women, I was very aware of the male dominant position of power in society, and left the women room to share to the extent they were comfortable. Moreover, I was conscious of not making any gender biased comments in response to their negative encounters abroad. On the contrary, because of my prior professional and personal experiences, I was able to positively engage the women participants, and shift the conversations in a manner that validated their identities as African American females. My profession and diverse experiences around social justice provide me with a broad perspective on role of power and bias in society. It is important to note that my ethnicity, class, and gender position me with a unique view of the world that in some cases may be significantly different from others conducting similar research. Therefore, my analysis of the data is informed, influenced, and biased by my position in society as an African American, middle-class, male. This means that, although I am aware of my biases, I may not always pick up on the diverse nuances associated with those different from me. However, my unique positionality also supports a valid and potentially deeper understanding of the material in question.

## **Black Feminist Theory**

Researchers Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett (2003) present a unique viewpoint for understanding the power of qualitative research. Although my research was not rooted in Black feminist theory, that perspective proved useful in understanding how qualitative research could be conducted with African American participants. Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett discuss the importance of “monitoring the symbolic power” (p. 205) and “caring associated with qualitative research involving race, gender, and identity, specifically in regard to African American women. Throughout history African American women have continually encountered significant amounts of oppression in the United States. Black feminist theory provides a framework for creating safe spaces for groups that have been traditionally powerless in structure dominated by White men. I chose to conduct research while taking into consideration the social position of participants as a historically marginalized group. As an African American researcher, I was able to utilize this method during discussions that transcended the traditional boundaries associated with qualitative research. The traditional framework associated with qualitative research rarely includes race empowerment explicitly. Although cultural and racial differences are explored in traditional qualitative methods, they may be addressed from an intellectual perspective, overlooking the sociopolitical consequences of racism (Sue, Arrendao, & McDavis, 1992). Indeed, traditional qualitative research often provides a holistic and contextual perspective based in an ideology of epistemological racism (Scherurich & Young, 2002). Because traditional qualitative research has been dominated by a primarily Eurocentric perspective, it has also reinforced that perspective through research practices. Therefore, Eurocentric ideologies shaping research topics and

methodologies, have been placed intentionally and unintentionally, at the center of research foci. One's frame of reference can influence his or her research.

Delgado Bernal (1998) describes using Chicana feminist epistemology and the concept of cultural intuition, both of which stem from personal experiences, as ways of resisting traditional research methods. She notes that traditional qualitative methods often distort the views of ethnic minorities like Chicana, Chicano, and African Americans (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Similarly, Black feminist qualitative methods are purposefully juxtaposed against those traditionally exclusive and marginalizing research methods. It is important to "begin new discourses, create new paradigms and models of educational research that are not only inclusive of culturally sensitive research approaches for African Americans, but also have the potential to significantly change their lives and communities in emancipatory ways" (Tillman, 2002, p. 9). Through culturally responsive methodology, I was able to empower students, and in some cases I gave them a place to heal. By including my own cultural understanding as part of the discussion, the collection and interpretation of the data acknowledged their race and the social contexts of their experiences abroad. In other words, I was interviewing students, conscious of how their race, class, and gender played a role in their experience.

As Tillman (2002) notes, culturally sensitive research presents a framework where "shared knowledge and understandings of phenomenon under the study are implied, and the individual and collective knowledge of African Americans is placed at the center of the inquiry" (p. 3). She goes on to share that when it comes to African Americans and research of this type, there is only a small body of research represented in mainstream journals. Tillman argues that the "knowledge and experiences of



African Americans are often subsumed under categories minorities, people of color, and women and minorities” (p. 3).

Dillard (2000) states that the cultural viewpoint of the researcher, as well as that of the participant, play a role in research design, collection of data, and the interpretation of the data. The analysis of student performance in the academic realm must also take into consideration the wider society, the school, and the classroom, while paying close attention to group interpretations of schooling (Ogbu, 1992). This method built on my own personal and professional frame of reference, or my “theoretical sensitivity” as a researcher (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Theoretical sensitivity is shaped by the researcher’s awareness of the subtle meanings of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 42). Kershaw’s (1990, 1992) Afrocentric emancipatory methodology focuses on using qualitative methods to “generate practical knowledge about the forces that affect the lives of African Americans; on the cultural, historical, and contemporary experiences of African Americans (p. 5). Ultimately the research conducted should generate a practical and emancipatory knowledge (Kershaw, 1992, p. 161). Since African Americans clearly see the world through a different lens (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2004), a method that acknowledged that viewpoint was logical. Qualitative inquiry provided my participants with an opportunity to reflect on their study abroad, share their motivations, and offer their perspectives on sensitive topics like student/teacher relations, racism, bias, and cultural identity.

I believe culturally responsive qualitative inquiry provides an important map for this specific type of research. Black feminist qualitative methods, Chicana feminist epistemology, and Afrocentric emancipatory methodology provide me with scaffolding for generating emancipatory knowledge. This framework is validating for me and

reinforces the identities of participants. Notions like doing no harm in the research world are a given. I argue that “doing good” or validating one’s identity through research, specifically in the areas of race, gender and class, can be easily lost through the limited cultural competencies of researchers and their biases. For example, without a clear understanding of the African American experience, and the role that the intersections of race, class, and gender play, one may lean toward generalizations, and overlook the notion that the perspectives of African American women and men are unique. Black feminist theory provides a safe space to explore African American identity without being overshadowed by the Caucasian or Eurocentric masculine perspective. The African American identity is no longer positioned as the “other”, often reinforced through the societal positioning of “whiteness” or “white privilege”. This framework provides me with the tools to acknowledge that there are interlocking power structures of racism, sexism, and class oppression, which influence the African American reality. Most importantly, the aforementioned methodologies help me focus on race as primary lens of analysis. And although race is unarguably linked to other oppressive structures, this methodology provides the freedom to explore the intersections of race, gender and class when the data leads me in that direction. It means that I can have a conversation about being African American with all of the positives and negatives associated with that identity, cognizant of the layers of oppression surrounding race, gender and class. The fluidity of this methodology allows me to begin with race, without constantly isolating race at the top of a hierarchy of oppression. In other words, I can walk the path race while acknowledging other important intersections and influencers along the journey. These important markers guide me as a researcher and shape my collection and analysis of the data.

## **Participants**

The participants in this study were students from colleges and universities throughout the United States who self-identified as being of African American or of African ancestry (Black, biracial, or multiracial), and who had taken part in a short-or long-term study abroad experience within the past five years. In the following chapters, I present their names as pseudonyms that were created by a random name generator program online. To further protect the identities of the participants, I do not reveal names of their home colleges, universities or study abroad service providers (Appendix E). I do however, give a general description of their schools, limiting the characteristics to their regional location, size, and other identifiers associated with their mission [public, private, HBCU, religious affiliation]. Given that several of the participants were the only African American students to participate in study abroad at their university, any additional information would make it easy to identify who they were and who facilitated their experience abroad. The sample size for this study was 20 individuals. The small sample size owed to the time constraints associated with the methodology and the financial constraints associated with traveling to numerous geographic locations for interviews. Due to the small sample size (less than 30), I gathered the participants using a maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling method (Patton, 1990, 2001). The premise of this method was to deliberately try to interview a very different selection of African American collegians so that their aggregate answers reflected a broader experience. And although this type of qualitative research is not to be generalized, I made a significant effort to include a broad spectrum of African American collegiate experiences reflecting a broad set of socio-economic

backgrounds. To that end, in addition to gender parity, the respondents came from of a cross-section of institutions, including private, public, religiously affiliated, and junior colleges, as well historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) from throughout the United States. I contacted the participants initially through email, by connecting with a variety of relevant local and national professional associations, study abroad groups, and social networking websites. However, participants did not constitute a random sample. The participants were self-selected students motivated to discuss their experiences abroad.

I used both social and professional networks acquired throughout my career in locating participants. Electronic listservs, social networking sites, email dialogues, conferences, and conversations with study abroad coordinators and faculty provided access to a diverse group of participants. Some of these groups included the Diversity in International Education Network, National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE), the National Association of International Educators (NAFSA), the Council for International Education Exchange (CIEE), and the School of International Training (SIT). Additional contacts are located in (Appendix A),

I conducted my data collection in mutually agreed upon locations, such as college multicultural centers and public cafes, where participants would likely feel most comfortable. Depending on the campus and the participant, multicultural centers generally provided a safe and neutral space where African American students felt welcome and culturally supported.

### **Data Collection and Instrumentation**

The data included recorded audio discussions collected through as many as three interview sessions per participant. The bulk of the data was recorded during the

first live interview. The two remaining discussions allowed for clarifications or follow-up. Whenever possible, several days prior to the first interview, I gave participants a preliminary questionnaire (Appendix B), which provided me a general background on the students being interviewed. Although the questionnaire was not required, nor designed to fully examine the central constructs of this study, it respectfully pre-qualified the participants while verifying their racial identity. This strategy addressed my potential concerns that some students who appeared to be of African American or African ancestry would not self-identify as such: For example, a student could have been Filipino or Latino and not identified with the African American experience. Whereas, other participants lacking stereotypically strong Afrocentric features, might have self-identified as African American through paper or verbal verification. Presented to students ahead of time, the interview guide (Appendix B) provided a framework for questions that were expanded upon during the discussion. Moreover, the questions served as an important platform for emancipatory dialogue, which ignited the voices of African American students.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations to the study. The sample size of 20 people only provided a small glimpse into a very diverse African American community. Due to the social, economic, and cultural diversity that exists among people of African descent, a greater sample size might have produced different results, themes, or topics not unveiled in this study. The students identified in this study were primarily self-identified as being of African descent. However, it is important to note that although the students' ancestry is African, the amount of time or the number of generations that their families lived in the United States may have also played a role in their global and

racial perspective.

Another limitation of this study was the reality that many African American students are not always afforded with opportunities to freely discuss issues around race, identity, or difference. Some participants may have lacked a comprehensive understanding of the unique topics discussed. For example, a few students who self-identified as biracial might have adopted a different perspective on the topic of race than those who identify as traditionally African American.

Additionally, the amount of time since their return to the United States also may have played a role in how participants responded to discussion prompts. Although travel and study abroad are parts of a transformative experience (Kiely, 2004; Kauffmann, 1992), some students may have required more time to process the personal growth they went through.

A final limitation of the study is the level of immediate trust and confidence I was able to establish with the participants. Having corresponded with most of them previously through social networking sites, email, and or by phone, I was able to build a minimal rapport. However, since I did not have a long standing relationship with any of the participants, there is still a limit to the level of disclosure or trust they may have considered establishing with a total stranger. Being African American and having studied abroad myself helped put all the participants at ease. Nevertheless, having a closer mentoring relationship or personal familiarity with the participants may have produced a higher level of confidence and disclosure.

### **Data Analysis**

I digitally recorded the interviews and transcribed them. Beyond the immediate notes taken during the discussions, the initial stage of the analysis required my

listening to the recordings and noting various topics and statements that formed themes or patterns. Using the raw data as a guide, I then synthesized the voices of participants to search for what could be learned (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). To assist in breaking the data into manageable pieces, Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe the process of —open coding.¶ Rather than coding by hand, I created several electronic color codes that supported the process of coding. I used the highlighter function found in Microsoft Word and categorized themes (coding) while I listened to the recordings. The Microsoft Word software provided a multicolor format for creating useful categories that were clearly visible through my analysis process.

Prior to collecting data, I found it was helpful to create a table titled —Data in Context for the Study of African American Collegians Perspectives on Study Abroad¶ (Appendix C), which laid out a variety of potential influencing factors in the thought process of African Americans during study abroad. Each grid segment potentially played a unique role in how a student responded to the discussion questions. For example, the participant’s year in college demonstrated a maturity and personal development and often the ability to reflect on study abroad in a more inclusive manner. Parental educational background also impacted the student’s level of social or cultural capital related to study abroad. Use of this grid provided a framework to understand the numerous factors that could influence a student’s feelings about study abroad.

## **Timeline Overview**

The overall research process takes much longer than it may seem. Locating potential participants requires a significant amount of time and energy. Over the course of two years I became familiar with various study abroad websites accustomed to posting photos of diverse groups of college students. Each time I came across an African American student, I would make notes on where they traveled and what university they attended. I also took several months of reviewing social networking and journaling websites [facebook, blogger, and my space]. Sites where African American collegians may have briefly mentioned studying abroad or posted photos of themselves in other countries provided important clues to pursue. I would immediately try to connect with the students. Sometimes weeks would pass before I received a response. Upon approval of my research proposal, I immediately began the process of interviewing participants. I had already established a database of tentative agreements to interview several African American collegians throughout the country, so locating students eager to share their experiences was less problematic than anticipated. The duration of the interviews went by quickly, given that many of the participants had not had a chance to discuss the topics I presented before. The interview, transcribing, and coding process took place over several months. I arranged one or occasionally two interviews per week, depending on the geographic location of the participants. Throughout the process of interviewing, I conducted an analysis of the data. Listening to the voices of the students several times, although extremely informative, also took a considerable amount of time. I conducted follow-up with participants on a sporadic basis throughout the writing of the final draft of the dissertation.



## **Introduction to the Data**

As colleges and universities continue efforts to send more African American collegians abroad, I feel that the need for research encompassing qualitative methodologies is becoming more invaluable. Capturing the voices and perspectives of students often unheard and misunderstood is an empowering and validating experience. Multicultural affairs administrators, faculty, and study abroad facilitators all benefit from research that informs their efforts in creating inclusive international experiences for all students. The purpose of my research was to contribute to the existing knowledge of African American collegians and their perceptions of study abroad. This topic warrants more research. The voices of African American students who have studied overseas continue to shape the direction educators and universities take when developing inclusive study abroad experiences.

The findings of this research are divided into three distinct, yet thematically connected sections: first, the role of the guide; second, finding home abroad; and third, the power of culturally responsive reflection. The data collected revealed that the role of the guide was invaluable in establishing a positive learning experience for African Americans. The absence of a guide motivated African American collegians to find alternative methods of coping with social and cultural challenges by “finding home” abroad. In other words, students found family and activities that validated their identities. Finally, the power of culturally responsive reflection revealed what African American collegians gained socially and academically from high-quality, culturally responsive interactions.

## **Chapter 4: FINDINGS**

### **The Role of the Guide**

“I felt like someone was definitely hearing me, and basically saying the things that I often do say in my classroom. But I always get the stare in those situations. Even though I’m still the minority sometimes in my classes, I became majority when it came to opinion, because my professor has such a loud voice in the classroom about our issues.” –Lorna, an African American female attending a private, northeastern urban university

When speaking to African American college students about their study abroad experiences, I found a common theme in many of their narratives: time after time, students talked about the positive benefits of having a cultural guide—a chaperone, teacher, or cultural mentor—to steer them through their experiences abroad. I use the terms “mentor,” “cultural guide,” and “chaperone” interchangeably here to describe the person facilitating a culturally responsive study abroad for African American collegians. Yet, generally speaking, I prefer the term cultural guide as the most appropriate way of describing the culturally responsive engagement and multicultural mentoring described by African American collegians in this chapter. It was clear from my interviews that the trust and credibility established through those mentoring relationships played a significant role in shaping African American perspectives on studying abroad, and that conversely, the absence of those key, culturally responsive mentors diminished certain study abroad learning experiences.

Through our discussions, African American collegians shared the unique challenges and benefits associated with finding culturally engaging mentors while abroad. They revealed that the people providing this culturally enriching direction often existed beyond the traditional scope of faculty mentors, but that the availability of culturally responsive mentoring and guidance was extremely limited. In all

contexts—regardless of the race of the study abroad facilitator, the material being studied, or the destination country—I found many cases where African American collegians had difficulty accessing culturally engaging professionals overseas. My research led me to believe that this limitation is due to the fact that few people see the world through the same lens as African American collegians studying abroad.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of mentoring in the context of multicultural navigation. I continue with examples of how both the presence and absence of culturally responsive mentoring shape the learning experiences of African American collegians abroad. I present compelling examples of students' voices supporting my argument. Woven throughout this chapter, I explore the theme of trust. During my research, I discovered that trust played a key role in the establishing positive and nurturing relationships between mentors and protégés. When African American collegians referred to the relationships they valued before and during their studies abroad, the connecting thread of trust held together their positive perceptions of quality mentors.

The cultural responsiveness of educators is paramount in fostering a rewarding learning process for African American students (Nieto, 2000). Nieto (2000) notes that culturally responsive education provides a space for students to contribute to the learning process through the lens of their own identity and cultural realities. The American educational system has been “consistently, systematically, and disproportionately unequal and unfair for students who are different from ‘the mainstream’” (Nieto, 1999, p. 20). The voices and realities of African American collegians and other historically marginalized groups have long been dismissed by

mainstream teaching and learning. Culturally responsive education positions African American students' unique perspectives at the center of the discussion, where they are validated as legitimate contributors to the learning experience for all students. Nieto frames culturally responsive teaching as a tool for empowerment, one that connects a student's realities to the learning experience. Successful teachers are able to engage learners by relating course materials to the circumstances surrounding students' lives. This type of cultural responsiveness is equally important to the experiences of African Americans studying abroad.

One way to create this kind of culturally responsive setting is via the careful hands of a cultural guide who can help students reflect deconstruct, or unpack unfamiliar encounters (Kolb, 1994). In a traditional lecture-based classroom setting, questions that emerge through new encounters are controlled by the teacher and not mutually constructed by the student and teacher (Carlsen, 1991). Furthermore, the relevance of the topics presented through domestic teaching and learning experiences are often controlled by the instructor or guide (Zohar, 2004; Kharem, 2006). Thus, there is little room for a student to participate as contributor to the learning experience through the lens of his or her own identity. In an international context, a similar premise holds true. African American collegians often find difficulty in establishing rewarding cultural connections to the material presented by professors while studying abroad. This is one reason why culturally responsive guides are important to African American collegians.

One of the themes I found central to this study was that mentors, cultural guides, or chaperones played significant roles in influencing culturally rewarding

experiences abroad for African American collegians. My conversations with African American collegians revealed that students responded favorably to having access to culturally responsive faculty or mentors while abroad. They provided students with a sense of safety, reassurance, connectivity, and a valuable sounding board for culturally relevant reflection. Students' engagement with faculty included the integration of culturally relevant topics both in and outside the classroom. Students left their experiences abroad feeling validated and supported. In the rare instances in which a cultural guide was available, those guides reinforced the notion that the student's African American identity mattered. Yet the absence of culturally inclusive faculty presented challenges that forced the students to quickly adapt to their new international surroundings. The cultural responsiveness of educators is thus paramount in fostering a rewarding learning process for African American students (Nieto, 2000).

### **Understanding Mentoring Abroad**

The word "mentor" is founded in *The Odyssey*, Homer's Greek tale of the Odysseus, King of Ithaca. Before leaving to fight in the Trojan Wars, Odysseus entrusts his son Telemachus to the care of a friend and wise man named Mentor. Mentor provides the advice, guidance, support, and security to Telemachus during his father's 10-year absence. The term is a familiar one today. Mentoring is a process whereby individuals possessing an advanced understanding, ability, or status facilitate the guidance, instruction, and counseling of others for the purpose of assisting in their development (Blackwell, 1989). In addition to facilitating psychological adjustment and identity development (Austin, 2002; Jacobi, 1991), mentoring helps set an

environmental tone that encourages risk-taking, as well as confidence development (Baker, 1991). Beyond traditional teacher-student roles, the opportunity for quality relationships emerges between an individual (mentor or guide) who is acquainted with a particular environment or context, and another individual (mentee, student, or protégé) who wishes to gain a successful experience in, or greater understanding of, some topic or issue (Jacobi, 1991; Leon, Dougherty, & Maitland 1997; Sloan, 1996; Watkins, 1998; Williams, 1997). These bonds foster valuable meaning and clarity to otherwise unexplainable encounters abroad. Mentoring students through unfamiliar experiences and encouraging risk-taking endeavors like studying abroad is invaluable in enriching the learning process of African American collegians.

Faculty, guides, and mentors are also valuable resources for students in helping them deconstruct or unpack unfamiliar experiences. I learned through my conversations with African American collegians that culturally responsive faculty assisted them in acquiring a greater understanding of both themselves and the surrounding environment while abroad. However, the “lack of cultural awareness on the part of a mentor can adversely influence the quality of a mentoring relationship” (Crutcher, 2007, p. 1), thus hampering the success of African American collegians in the acquiring of knowledge while abroad. The absence of faculty capable of presenting relevant topics and actively engaging African American collegians abroad can be attributed to the influence of hegemonic ideologies on learning, as well as the limited cultural awareness of mentors. Crutcher (2007) argues that “mentors coming from the dominant culture must overcome their fears, biases, and stereotypes about other races and ethnicities, and they need to find a way to empathize with and understand their

mentee's personal life situation" (p. 1). Although exemplary mentors need not be the same race, or possess the same social characteristics as their protégés, they do need to be aware of how those differences impact their pedagogy (Crutcher, 2007).

Assisting in understanding the complexities surrounding mentoring African American collegians abroad, Carter (2005) goes beyond the traditional view of mentors, framing the final stage of their evolution in expertise as "multicultural navigators" (p. 149). She describes multicultural navigators as guides who "demonstrate how to possess both dominant and non-dominant cultural capital, and how to be adept at movement through various social settings, where cultural codes and rules differ" (p. 149). While she refers directly to African American high school students negotiating predominantly White spaces, her definition easily translates into the realm of African American collegians studying abroad, where students frequently find themselves struggling to deconstruct and navigate multiple social settings in foreign countries. Carter frames "multicultural navigators" as guides possessing a social appeal, similar to that of American hip hop music celebrities, noting that their appeal to African American students is not because of their fame, but their ability to "keep youth invested in the dream of upward mobility and show them how to retain their social and cultural origins" (p. 150). The students interviewed in this study expressed a need for maintaining a socio-cultural connection while studying abroad, while at the same time being guided to explore the value of, and meaning behind, the unique intersection with others. Carter (2005) suggests that "multicultural navigators" are not there to defuse students' political consciousness about their position in society. Rather, they are present to help students understand, deconstruct, and negotiate social

boundaries and structures. Although Carter is not referring directly to African American collegians abroad when discussing the concept of multicultural navigators, she provides an important perspective for understanding what African American collegians find valuable while exploring unfamiliar social terrain internationally.

One's immediate response to the concept of "multicultural navigators" might be that they are merely folks good at code switching (Poplack, 2000) or adept at alternating between two languages or cultures. Yet, there is a much deeper meaning to the skill sets they foster, as well as the subsequent relationships of trust and cultural support they maintain. These navigators are people who become a fountain of social capital and understanding for traditionally marginalized African American collegians. They become the cultural translators for people exploring a different world, by helping students maneuver through unfamiliar structures and codes of power (Crichlow, 1998; Delpit, 1994). Therefore, they are potentially providing a space for a more inclusive and culturally comprehensive learning experience while abroad. Ultimately, "multicultural navigators" are specialists, capable of engaging African American students on multiple levels (cultural, academic, and social) in order to help them achieve optimal intellectual growth and development.

Allen (1992) argues that African American collegians, "like most human beings, develop best in environments where they feel valued, protected, accepted, and socially connected" (p. 39). Although he notes that these nurturing environments are frequently located on the campuses of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU), he explains that these types of institutions create spaces that make it "safe to take risks associated with intellectual growth and development" (p. 39). These



environments provide African American collegians with important guides who, regardless of their ethnicity, are willing to give “positive feedback, support, and understanding, and who communicate that they care about the student’s welfare” (p. 40). Chism and Satcher (1998) assert that African American collegians attending predominantly White institutions view one of the main obstacles to academic and social success as being the limited support of faculty and administrators. Although frequently underfunded and understaffed, some predominantly White domestic university campuses do maintain multicultural centers or multicultural student affairs offices. Unfortunately, these structures offering culturally nurturing pockets of empowerment for African American collegians do not exist abroad. Interviewees’ comments consistently revealed that although educators possessing these unique sets of supportive characteristics and abilities were highly valued, they were very rare in an international context. Therefore, the students were immediately marginalized by the social and cultural hegemony of a predominantly White learning experience while abroad, even in countries where White people were not in the majority. These encounters of marginalization led to an array of social and cultural risks warranting the intellectual and cultural guidance of committed mentors.

Like other American students studying in foreign countries, the African American collegians interviewed faced a variety of challenges related to culture shock while transitioning into a new environment. As they confronted the challenges associated with living in unusual surroundings, students encountered a deep sense of despair. Eventually, however, most of the found an emotional equilibrium and were able to function normally. Oberg (1960), who first coined the term “culture shock,”

breaks the experience down into four stages; honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and adjustment. Although going through culture shock may be stressful, Ting-Toomey (1990) argues that students may emerge with higher levels of confidence and self-esteem. During our conversations, African American collegians shared that although they returned home with higher levels of confidence, their experiences abroad included adjusting to the unique positive and negative dynamics associated with race. In addition to experiencing the traditional stages of culture shock, they revealed a certain benefit in finding moments of emotional equilibrium through race reflection. In other words, being African American abroad generated a new set of emotions around the topic of race that were worthy of guided discussion and reflection.

Addressing the challenges associated with African American cultural stress (Bennett, 1989) and cultural adjustment abroad (Paige, 1990) is important to creating an enriching learning experience. When prompted to talk about the role of faculty or mentors in influencing their decision to travel, and later in helping them to deconstruct their experiences abroad through the lens of race, those interviewed shared two key points. One, African American collegians placed considerable value on the presence of a trusted and culturally responsive guide/mentor. Two, they revealed significant concern associated with the absence of someone who could help make sense of their international experience through the lens of race.

The interviews I conducted showed that the role of a culturally responsive guide is important both before, during, and after studying abroad. The success of the guide begins with establishing a strong sense of trust and credibility in the eyes of the protégé. In the next section, I examine the role of the mentor in establishing trust and

credibility from the perspective of African American collegians. I provide examples of when the trust of same-race and different-race mentors influenced African American collegians decisions to study abroad. Following those examples, I discuss the role of culturally responsive guides in assisting the deconstruction of challenging experiences. Lastly, and most importantly, I examine moments when the absence of culturally responsive mentor deterred students from having an optimal learning experience.

### **Mentor Trust and Credibility: Inspiring African American Collegians to Study Abroad**

Mentors are resource persons and counselors with whom protégés can clear their thoughts and sound out the validity of an important decision. A mentor is an individual whom the protégé can trust to have his or her best interest at heart, someone who would risk telling them what they need to know even though it might be painful to them. A mentor is someone whose perspective and judgment a protégé values and trusts implicitly (Missirian, 1982, p. 66).

In the interviews I conducted, African American collegians referred to one of three key factors that inspired them to study abroad: first, a deep-rooted, early personal desire to go beyond perceived societal boundaries set for African Americans, intended to prevent them from seeing the world; second, an early exposure to international subject matter; and third—the focus of this section, and the most profound motivating factor—the presence of a highly credible or trusted individual who encouraged them to study abroad. This influential person, who students also framed as a teacher, mentor, or guide, was available to students as many as several years prior to embarking on a study abroad. Students talked about the importance of having someone around who inspired them to go further than they themselves thought they could. This person was able to establish trust while helping students to expand the possibilities of

their own academic and professional abilities. The establishment of this trust is an essential attribute in a quality mentor/protégé relationship (Johnson-Bailey & Cevero, 2004; Clawson, 1980).

African American collegian's perceptions of race-related social barriers are historically associated with limited trust for leaders, faculty, or mentors from the White community. The history of systematic, institutionalized racism maintained by biased media, educational, and legal systems perpetuates the African American distrust for the White establishment. Yet the barriers connected to limited trust can be also be attributed to the lack of cultural sensitivity or awareness exhibited by faculty.

Atkinson, Neville, and Casas (1991) also reflect on the importance of cultural competency in mentoring. Their research notes that students of color with same-ethnicity mentors perceived their relationships "more positively" than as those who had mentors of differing ethnic descent (p. 338). The ability to encourage students to participate was easier when students could connect to their mentor culturally. A sense of trust and credibility is typically easier to establish in situations where the difference in student racial backgrounds proportionally matched those of faculty (Ensher & Murphy, 1997). Even when mentors/mentees do not share the same racial identity, a successful mentor must possess a high level of cultural competency. Mentors and teachers who have an empathetic understanding of the oppression and social challenges associated with being African American are able to build relationships of confidence and credibility with their protégés. Conversely, if teachers are not culturally competent, they will have difficulty making deeper academic and cultural connections with African American collegians. These connections are important in

allowing the teacher and student to build on each other's perceptions, ideas, and realities before, during, and after studying abroad. Without trust, African American collegians may be hesitant to share their perspectives, concerns, and questions while studying abroad.

Just as the trust plays an important role in the relationship between mentor and protégé, the intersection between trust and race for African Americans is significant. In the case of African American collegians I interviewed, establishing connections through the lens of race was important in the context of studying abroad. Due to a shared history of slavery and continual oppression, as well as academic, social, and economic marginalization, some African Americans have difficulty trusting people outside of their own race, specifically White people. Although in some cases the influential person or mentor may not be of African American descent, race plays a role in constructing meaningful and trusting relationships abroad. Keith who attended a Historically Black College noted that having someone around who could see the world through the same cultural lens was highly beneficial to African American collegians.

“The role of the guide in any study abroad is a very crucial especially for those students of color. I personally was very well influenced by our guide [African American male]. He provided valuable and insightful information that helped prepare me to cope with trials that we would face. In China many foreigners are still seen as objects of obscurity that are snapped photos of, and gawked at. This fact is exacerbated by the fact that we are African American, our appearance and by our media hyped culture. This can be extremely frustrating and annoying. Jamal, our director helped us to cope with these problems. His help allowed us to deal with this unabated. He mixed giving advice while also allowing us to explore on our own. I personally enjoyed the freedom that was given while others liked the attention that they needed. The way a person perceives a study abroad adventure is drastically shaped by the advice given. Some students have been sheltered from dealing with other cultures by attending an HBCU and having someone who has already experienced this type of climate change can be an invaluable tool” (Keith, personal communication, April 16, 2010)

Crutcher (2007) notes that the establishment of trust is more prevalent in same-race mentoring relationships “because the mentee automatically assumes a similarity in values and worldviews with the mentor” (p. 1). Hembroff and Rusz (1993) found that race mattered in ease of establishing mentors for minority students interested in study abroad. Santos and Reigadas (2004) concur that students with faculty mentors of the same race perceive their mentors as more supportive and committed to their personal growth and professional success. Their research notes that students possessing the same race as their mentors also tend to meet with them more often. Penn and Tanner (2009) argue that “the major issue of contention concerning Black students and study abroad is the lack of academic and social connections to show how international education is a vital part of their college education” (p. 278). These valuable connections are created through the established trust and credibility of mentors and peers. Their research concludes that there is clearly a need for additional “education, mentoring, and support” for African American students to increase interest in studying abroad (p. 278).

For African American collegians, the successful establishment of trust and credibility with mentors before and during a study abroad experience leads to a variety of connections and cultural revelations. O’Neil and Wrightsman, (2001) discuss six key activities framing quality working relationships established in student/faculty mentoring situations. Their list includes “(a) making the critical entry decision, (b) building mutual trust, (c) taking risks, (d) teaching skills, (e) learning professional standards, and (f) dissolving or changing the relationship” (p. 122). They note that when a mentoring commitment has been established, “gradual and reciprocal

development of confidence, self-disclosure, and reliance on the other” take place (p. 122). They stress that a mutual disclosure of strengths, weaknesses, hopes, and fears aids in establishing trust in both parties. By breaking down these common social boundaries, students are able to develop a stronger connection with mentors, knowing that said mentors are sensitive to their racial identity and unique perspective on the world. O’Neil and Wrightsman (2001) describe this connection as diversity sensitivity, which “reflects the degree to which mentors and mentees can discuss differences and constructively use them to enhance their relationship. . . . This parameter of mentoring is essential for mutual acceptance and trust in the relationship” (p. 118). They also note that “sensitivity to diversity also includes a heightened consciousness about how discrimination and oppression can be personally internalized and how this may affect the mentoring relationship” (p. 118). Rose (2003, 2005) introduces her Ideal Mentor Scale (IMS) as a way of determining the qualities that students value most in mentors. Although her studies do not focus solely on African American collegians, Rose identifies key factors college students find valuable in mentoring, including integrity, guidance, and relationships. She states that “mentoring involves sharing more private or intimate content, such as personal problems, social activities, and life vision or worldview” (p. 490).

In general, mentors tend to provide a broad type of guidance often connected to assisting students in achieving various tasks, such as where to exchange foreign currency or how to use public transportation. However, African American collegians noted that they benefited from deeper and/or more individualized mentoring relationships while abroad. Having culturally responsive mentors supported students’

deconstruction of unfamiliar situations while providing valuable moments of affirmation. The presence of culturally responsive guides abroad was essential in the learning process for African American collegians. This cultural responsiveness also aided in bridging the gap of mistrust often felt by African Americans. Although one might analyze the limited trust or mistrust felt by African American collegians abroad as unfounded fear or borderline paranoia, Whaley (2001) notes that the psychological construct of cultural mistrust is a reality founded in the common thread of oppression experienced by African Americans. Grant-Thompson and Atkinson (1997) concur that African Americans with high levels of cultural mistrust are likely to have less favorable views or expectations of mentoring opportunities presented by White faculty or staff. Cultural mistrust “is a legitimate method of coping with racism and discrimination” (Whaley, 2001, p. 560).

American Indians have similar views of trust as African Americans, given their shared history of oppression and marginalization throughout the United States (Katz, 1997; Minges, 2004). Calhoon, Wildcat, Annett, Pierotti, and Griswold’s 2003 study of American Indian collegians reveals the importance of cultural sensitivity in the learning experience abroad. They conclude “that mentoring students was a key component to creating a sense of community, security, and connectedness among the faculty and students” (p. 54). Their research stresses that by developing intensive mentoring relationships with faculty, students are able to overcome cultural, economic, and social barriers, ultimately establishing higher levels of trust. The American Indian faculty facilitating these unique international experiences for collegians demonstrated an exemplary commitment to the cultural, social, spiritual,



and academic success of their students. In a similar way, same-race mentors can play pivotal roles in establishing the kind of trust that can lead African American collegians to study abroad.

Still, my conversations with African American collegians revealed that even under same-race mentoring circumstances, developing a sense of trust and credibility with faculty or mentors can take considerable time before the idea of studying abroad evolves into action. The overwhelming idea of leaving the familiar surroundings of home, only to face the unpredictable circumstances associated with being abroad, is daunting, especially for individuals who possess a limited frame of reference on studying abroad. For example, it took one African American professor at a large, public, western university close to four years to develop a relationship in which trust and credibility were strong enough for Ayana to be inspired to study abroad for 10 weeks in Ghana:

I always wanted to go to Africa, but if it was left up to me I probably would never have made it there. Since I was younger, when I was freshmen, Dr. Lundy and her husband were telling me, “You should look at this Africa trip.” They just kept telling me throughout the years. I finally decided, I applied for the program and I got in. So we went over there. (Ayana, personal communication, May 1, 2010)

This relationship with important faculty members shows that trust does matter to African American collegians considering studying abroad. Dr. Lundy began mentoring Ayana during her freshman year when the two connected through a class Dr. Lundy was teaching. Gradually, over time, Ayana’s confidence began to build. Yet initially, the idea of studying abroad, away from her parents, for what Ayana considered a long time, was not a viable option:

I live at home. So not only I would be without my parents for like 10 weeks ... but also I am going outside the country, all the way to another continent for 10 weeks. That is a long time. (Ayana, personal communication, May 1, 2010)

Penn and Tanner (2009) note that African American faculty should be viewed as “essential stewards to help move Black students into international education” (p. 280). The idea of leaving the country for the first time, even when accompanied by caring and concerned faculty of the same race, is not a risk Ayana or others are always willing to immediately take. Therefore, investing the trust and credibility in someone else becomes pivotal in establishing that this new experience abroad will be beneficial and safe — not just physically, but financially, socially, and culturally, as well as emotionally. For African American collegians to envision themselves traveling abroad requires the inspiration and motivation of individuals who can envision them studying abroad as well. Subsequently, as that vision evolves, it is shared and supported by trust and sincerity over time.

Trust can also be established in the short term by multiple same-race mentors. Eric, an African American male who attends a top-tier, mid-Atlantic, public university, spent time studying abroad in Rome. He noted that one of his mentors studied abroad during her undergraduate matriculation, while another mentor acquired international experience while attending the U.S. Naval Academy. In addition to all of his mentors being African American, Eric noted that they all served as “foundational guides” for his study abroad experience:

Many of my mentors provided verbal, monetary, and written advice that aided in my transition to Rome. As a student of color, I am humbled by an authentic support system across a diaspora of professions; the relationships that I have built with my mentors also aided in my experience before and after my international experience. (Eric, personal communication, April 15, 2010)

Eric's mentors took the time to share their unique personal experiences about studying abroad from an African American perspective. His description of an "authentic support system" means that it was a trusted support system. He is referring to the truthfulness, and trustworthy commitment of his mentors. Echoing Eric's sentiment, Spencer (2006) notes higher quality mentoring relationships are "marked by authenticity, engagement, and empowerment.." (p. 288). She found that when are students considering mentors, authenticity was "critical to developing trust in their mentors" (p. 298). Authenticity is the foundation of a relationship of trust.

These moments of connecting with mentors represented important markers in building culturally-based, trusting relationships for Eric. They showed evidence of culturally responsive engagement and the establishment of credibility. Eric's mentors also gave him money to encourage his study abroad. These unique bonds of cultural and financial support mirrored a connection one might associate with trusted family members. Connecting with culturally responsive mentors helped him to prepare for the possible successes and obstacles associated with being African American abroad.

The trust established by same race mentors opens doors to conversations that may not exist in relationships with mentors of different races. Adelisha, a student at a large public university, studied abroad in South Africa. She found having the presence of African American mentors added valuable to her trip. Their presence established trust, which gave Adelisha permission to share her perspective. "I hold back with people when I am telling them stuff... I learned that it is okay to express how it [being in South Africa] really made me feel." (Adelisha, personal communication, March 27, 2010).

The candid conversations with her mentors over meals reinforced the level of trust Adelisha needed to ask more questions and ultimately gain more from her study abroad. “It opened me up to the fact that I should be talking more ... I wouldn’t have been as involved myself as much... I feel like they came with knowledge on this trip ... If they weren’t there, I would have been off by myself.” (Adelisha, personal communication, March 27, 2010) Her statements emphasize the perception that same race mentors come with knowledge and abilities to engage students in ways that mentors of other races may not always possess. However, other students noted situations when trust and credibility was established by mentors of different races.

### **The Trust of Different-Race Mentors**

The important bond of trust established with African American students is not always limited to same-race faculty. For example, Krista, a community college student, developed trusting relationship with a White faculty member over a few semesters: That faculty member eventually encouraged her to study abroad in France:

I wanted to pick up a second language and my French teacher from that point encouraged me to do a study abroad program. I thought she was crazy because I was a full-time employee and I wasn’t a full-time student.... It was something that I was just doing. I went to couple information sessions about it later 2008 and early 2009. I stopped my involvement because I thought it was not possible. After February, March, I stopped my involvement. In June, the situation changed at work, and couple days before, I got a few calls from the travel agent asking if I still interested in going. And things just came together, and I ended up going. I am glad that I did because it was a great experience. (Krista, personal communication, April 24, 2010)

Krista shared that it was the encouragement and conversations with her French professor who helped make her journey to France a reality. Her professor could

envision Krista being in France, well before Krista thought it was possible: “It was a series of conversations. Because when she first mentioned it, in my first semester, I just smiled and I said, ‘It is a good idea,’ but it was so unrealistic to me.” The demands of her work and personal life made studying abroad seem not a likely option. Moreover, Krista didn’t think that she could afford to pay for a study abroad trip. Connecting with her French professor the first semester didn’t present enough of an opportunity to establish trust and credibility. However by the second semester, Krista’s relationship with her professor led to a higher sense of familiarity, opening a door for reflection, growth, and exploration:

In my second semester, with the demand of work and demand with a lot of volunteering, everything took a lot of my time. So I really was unable to devote a lot of energy to French outside the classroom. So the teacher said: “You’ll really benefit from immersion in the French culture and the French language. Just completely immerse in it, and it will help you pick up the language more.” (Krista, personal communication, April 24, 2010)

Krista’s professor succeeded in building a trusting relationship and encouraging student growth in an individualized manner. She opened a window of opportunity through which Krista was able to envision her own potential as well as the benefits associated with studying abroad. Trusted mentors often make the impossible seem possible for African American collegians.

Pamela, who attends a large, western, public university, shared that her inspiration for studying abroad emerged through the trust and credibility established with a White woman who was her sixth grade social studies teacher. A positive learning experience, accompanied by a credible mentor, flourished into a rewarding study abroad in Spain several years later. Although this encounter took place prior to

Pamela attending college, it played a significant role in her choice to study abroad. In addition, that same relationship became the catalyst for Pamela attending college:

During her vacations, she would travel and send us postcards. I used to think that it was so cool, and I began to think that I really wanted to travel. I used to ask her: —How do you do to get to travel? She said, —You can go to college, there are programs there for that. So she was the reason that I wanted to go to college, because I learned about it through her. (Pamela, personal communication, May 6, 2010)

The motivating factors encouraging Pamela's study abroad were based on the special bond and trust established between her and her sixth grade teacher. By enthusiastically sharing her own international experiences, the teacher was able to inspire Pamela to pursue her own travel dreams.

Similarly, Michelle, who studied abroad in South America, attributed her motivation to her mother, who also studied abroad while in college. Establishing a bond of trust with her mother through her childhood and teen years laid a foundation of interest in travel that was easy for Michelle to maintain.

My mom actually had studied abroad. She went to Mexico while she was in college. So ever since I was growing up, she enforced the wonderful experience she had, how she learned to speak Spanish, and how that has helped to open doors for her. Therefore, her enthusiasm made me want to go to study abroad somewhere. (Michelle, personal communication, May 8, 2010)

Eric's mentors, Ayana's professor, Pamela's sixth grade teacher, and Michelle's mother were able to lower student's apprehensions about studying abroad by building greater levels of trust and confidence through encouragement and disclosure. They were comfortable with sharing parts of their own journeys abroad as a method of inspiring and building confidence in their protégés. In addition, it is important to note that when same-race mentors revealed their prior personal experiences abroad to students, they were able to build credible relationships. These

connections gave students room to imagine the possibilities of study abroad through a lens similar to their own. Continuing the trend of trust and credibility while abroad was essential in maintaining a favorable international mentoring experience for African American collegians.

### **The Role of Trusted and Culturally Responsive Mentors Abroad**

The need for trustworthy and credible mentors stems from a students' desire to predict what will happen to them while they are abroad. The fear of not knowing what African American students will experience upon leaving the United States leaves students in search of credible, authentic, and trustworthy answers. Perdreau (2008) notes that one of the most significant obstacles in considering studying abroad for ethnic minorities is connected to their concern with how they will be treated once they leave the United States. Given that disengaging from an established support network of faculty, friends, and family often requires the encouragement of someone trusted, the difficulty lies in finding someone trustworthy. The lingering question—will I be okay when I leave the United States?—warrants different responses depending on one's race, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion, and the chosen country of destination. Therefore, the person who is responding to the student's query needs to have a strong understanding of the person they are speaking with. Moreover, they should possess a significant knowledge of the unique challenges and benefits associated with the student's identity abroad. Faculty engaging students in a limited way will not develop a better understanding of student identities or build meaningful relationships. Although the literature reveals that a key factor in motivating African American collegians to study abroad is connected them to financial

resources (Carter, 1991; Day-Vines et al., 1998; Dass-Pickard & Ganz 1991; Gliozzo, 1980; Perdreau, 2008; Bailey, 1991; Burkart et al., 2001; Raby, 2005), I propose that trust, credibility, and personal connection also play significant roles in the decision to travel, as well as the quality of the experience abroad. The following section expands upon the positive aspects of the trusting and validating relationships established between mentors and protégés, citing examples of success stories while abroad.

Lorna, a student at a private university in the Northeast, had never attended a class taught by a professor of African ancestry. When she went abroad to London, she was delighted by the level of validation that came from having two Black professors who could mentor her and help her connect to her racial identity during her time abroad.

I loved my professors. Actually, that was the first time in my [Northeast private university] college experience that I ever had a Black professor. And then to have two, it was just phenomenal. One was a Black British woman, and the other one was a Black Ghanaian who moved to London to teach. Both of them had different teaching styles, but so empathetic, very close with both my professors. But they were very approachable. The [British] woman was into the Black urban studies, and the Ghanaian taught African literature and perspective on African experience. (Lorna, personal communication, April 10, 2010)

Lorna's perception of her professors' approachability reinforces the notion that she trusted them. One might make the assumption that all professors are approachable. However, Lorna made it a point to acknowledge that her professors were "very approachable"—in other words, they were able to connect with her while validating her experience and helping her process her journey abroad:

Well, as far as all the museums visited that I did, they were with my professor. So she was actually the one who was asking my class, "How do you guys feel about this?." It is amazing how my perspective as a person, descendant of the diaspora, verses a White student's perspective on the museum, and the portrayal of African history in London, were kind of different at times. [White



students] would say, “Oh, well, maybe [the exhibit] is in the basement because they don’t have as many artifacts.” I was like, it doesn’t matter. You still can do more. The fact that it is in the basement to me was offensive. Whereas, to them it was not offensive. So as a professor, she had to remain objective but she stated that “I can definitely empathize with you.” She brought it up.... As far my Ghanaian professor, he was big on current events. So we would always talk about current events in London, the state of the Black British community in London. He held his tongue for no one. He told it like it was. And a lot of the students in the class was [sic] like “He is crazy.” But I loved him for being so real. He would bring a newspaper clipping and they would have a picture of a starving African child in the newspaper and he was like, “Why are we represented like this? It is unnecessary. There are Africans who are prosperous in Africa, and people of African descent around the world who is doing well. But what is this?” He would run around in the classroom with the newspaper asking, “Someone please explain it to me.” Definitely two different teaching styles. (Lorna, personal communication, April 10, 2010)

Conscious of the heightened level of cultural engagement presented by her professors abroad, Lorna embraced a sense of validation, knowing that someone else saw the world the same way she did, even when her classmates didn’t.

Moreover, those individuals acknowledged her presence in the classroom and her identity throughout the learning experience abroad:

It gave me comfort. Because a lot of the times I would be in the metro reading a newspaper, and I would be like, what is this? So for him to actually bring the newspaper to the classroom and put it on blast like that, I felt like someone was definitely hearing me and basically saying the things that I often do say in my classroom, but I always get the stare [from classmates]. In those situations, even though I’m still the minority, sometimes in my classes, I became majority when it came to opinion Because my professor has such a loud voice in the classroom about our issues. (Lorna, personal communication, April 10, 2010)

Lorna believes that her professors were aligned with her in a manner that significantly validated her perspective on the world. Having professors available who could identify things that mattered to her was important. It made them more credible and approachable.

Conscious of the role race played in her learning experience, Lorna was delighted to have what she describes as “more personal” support in the classroom:

I had a White professor in London who taught the history of Southern Africa. And I am not going to lie, I was a bit skeptical at first. When I got into the class, I was like. “Oh boy.” Because I had situations in high school where, not because the history was not told properly, but it could have been told in a better way. There is a difference between the way that a person of African descent teaches African history, verses a White person. For me at least, I feel like the class gets more personal when it’s a Black professor who is teaching it. For me personally, in my history of Southern Africa class, I actually ended up liking my professor. Because he always took the time. And being that I was one of two Black students in the class, he would say, “From this spectrum, what do you think?.” He always made it a point always [to] ask me my opinion. Some Black students may find that offensive to be put on blast. But I like it. Because hey, he wants the opinion of someone of African descent to be shared in his classroom. (Lorna, personal communication, April 10, 2010)

Todd, a junior attending a large public university in California, spent a summer studying in Tanzania. He mentioned that as someone who grew up in the inner city on the West Coast, he had no peers or family members available at home who could relate to his experience studying abroad. He shared the significance of finding mentoring and guidance from faculty of African descent, as well as the president of the university he was attending in East Africa. Todd noted the importance of having a personal connection to faculty and administrators while abroad, emphasizing that those connections were much stronger than those with their White counterparts in the United States. The increased level of engagement included sharing personal stories, eating together, and rich conversations:

If I had their phone numbers, I would contact them and ask for a letter of recommendation much easier than I have with professors here. They used to talk about their personal lives while we were in lab and we were getting close to one another. Because we had the longest lab, sometimes we would spend eight hours on lab. At least when we could have a break, we, all the professors who were leading our research, and the president of the school would take us out to eat.... Yes, they would take us out to eat. We would eat together. This

sense of unity brought us all close. I have a professor [in the United States], I don't expect them to say anything about their personal lives. But I know when somebody is devoted. To share that kind of information, it brings you close, because it is like this person is human... It really made me feel a sense of home. It made me feel comfortable; I woke up every morning happy to go to lab, to do research. I was never happy at the lab. I am [a] biology major, so most of my classes are in the lab. I hate labs. But when I was in Africa, I had a ball, I loved the inclusive nature of research. It really made me want to go there every day. (Todd, personal communication, June 5, 2010)

### **Mentors and Mutual Disclosure**

Mutual disclosure—the sharing of fears, emotions, successes and failures—is significant in establishing trust and confidence in the mentoring process (O'Neil & Wrightsman, 2001; Wanberg, Welsh, & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2007; Hinde, 1997; Reis & Shaver, 1988). Todd reinforced the notion that personal connection and sincerity mattered to African American collegians in the mentoring process abroad, saying that he knew when somebody was “devoted..” According to Todd, the idea that a professor or mentor was able to share their feelings or perspectives on a personal level “brings you close.” Moreover, it made the mentor more approachable and accessible to dialogue and in-depth conversation. The barrier between student and faculty was lowered because, in Todd's words, “it is like this person is human..” From the solidarity of this bond came trust, positive feelings, and rewarding learning experiences.

Like Todd, Constance, a student at a large public university, found comfort in the solidarity and daily conversations she had with her African American professor and mentor while studying in South Africa:

The conversations were throughout. They took place before and during the trip. Sometimes they would be one-on-one, and at other times group conversations. She was the person who facilitated the debriefing discussions... because she has been there so many times. She mostly shared with me about her personal

experiences, and that was very helpful... It was something very important because I never thought in that way before, and after I reflected on that, I started to look at the trip in a different way. (Constance, personal communication, May 11, 2010)

Mentoring for African American collegians abroad is about finding someone capable of helping them see the world in a way that makes sense. For Constance, her professor helped her to see her journey in a “different way..” Through the mutual exchange of personal and culturally relevant experiences, Constance was able to gain more from her overall study abroad.

A similar relationship emerged with Ayana during her study abroad in Ghana. Guidance from her mentor, an African American professor, was embodied by a single phrase: “Recalibrate your mind.” In other words, to paraphrase, as I guide you through this journey, check the accuracy of how you are viewing the world, modify your thoughts, and perhaps your actions. This simple phrase was the catalyst for important reflection and dialogue:

Dr. Lundy and Mr. Lundy really helped with that, because they were there for the first two weeks and Mr. Lundy always used to say: “Recalibrate your mind, because what you see may be entirely different from what you are used to”.... It was very important, because when we first got there the four of us were all scared and we had Ms. and Mr. Lundy to lean on if we needed help or whatever. Especially the airport situation. Because it is scary to go through immigration or customs. Even if you don’t have anything, it is a scary experience. And to get used to the food and everything. So they were there to talk us through the experience. (Ayana, personal communication, May 1, 2010)

Ayana described the meaningful dialogue shared with her mentors as “they were there to talk us through the experience.” Adept mentors who are culturally engaging are able to empower students by building on their identities and experiences abroad:

“Throughout the journey, the mentor has been assisting the protégé to articulate a sense of meaning and purpose, to explore personal standards by which to judge

oneself, to recognize that it is possible to have control over what matters” (Goodlad, 1998, p. 242). What mattered culturally and socially to African American collegians was not always what mattered to their professors or peers of other races. It was apparent from their comments that students held a perception that other-race mentors were not capable of or committed to mutual disclosure. The dynamics of race created boundaries which hindered the development of meaningful dialogue.

### **The Absence of the Guide**

African American collegians I have met all agreed that their experiences abroad were enriching and eye-opening. Yet they shared numerous moments when an enriching exchange with a well-equipped mentor would have been valuable but did not exist. Through our conversations, they all found significant benefits in spending time reflecting on the dynamics of being African American abroad through guided discussion. However, African American collegians inevitably disclosed many moments when a mentor or culturally responsive guide was absent, to the detriment of their overall experience. In other words, there were not any professionals immediately available, physically or electronically, with whom students thought they could conduct racially engaging, reflective conversations about their experience abroad.

Thus, the students developed coping strategies by finding alternative methods or alternative individuals to help with processing their thoughts. If they witnessed discrimination, experienced racism directly, or were simply interested in engaging in scholarly dialogue around the topic of being of African American abroad, their ongoing challenge was finding an older individual capable of facilitating the conversation. But the process invariably proved difficult. The question I presented in

almost every conversation with African American collegians was this: Was there any person, adult professional administrator or professor, you could talk with about what you were experiencing? The data below will show that more often than not, no one was available who could understand. Whether the potential guide was Caucasian or African American, the absence of someone, such as a mentor, who could relate to their experiences had an unusual impact on African American collegians. They developed a series of coping mechanisms discussed in the subsequent chapter. Although one might argue that their experiences were associated with an isolated bad study abroad program, this section cites specific examples of what happened to African American collegians abroad who struggled to deconstruct their experiences due to the absence of culturally engaging, empathetic, supportive mentors.

Sierra, a biracial student who attends a private, religious-affiliated university, studied six months in India. A creative and highly engaging student, she was excited about studying abroad. However, due to a variety of challenges, many associated with being an African American abroad, Sierra made the decision to cut her trip short, returning to the United States a month before planned:

The first day I get there, we open the newspaper because we are all are so curious, most of the stuff is in English. I go to the entertainment section and the first thing it says something like: "To be Black is still the lowest of the all," it was something like that. The first sentence. So I am like, whammy! Let's start this trip out. I had no thought of race, none, going into this trip. No, I'm like, Indians, they are people of color, I'm going to be solid. I didn't even think about it. But I read the article a little bit more, and it lets me know that still, "The darker that you are the harder time you going to have. The worse off you are." Right off the bat, I felt I was in battle. And from that day forward I was everyday defending myself, as a Black woman. (Sierra, personal communication, March 26, 2010)

Sierra had no difficulty sharing with me the complex battles she faced with her classmates, her professor, and the society: "I had a professor, a very racist professor. I

ended up leaving a month early, just cause of everything I couldn't handle any more." Sierra described her journey abroad as "the most draining experience of my life, and yet at the same time the most empowering." She recalled the emotional strain connected to being the spokesperson for the African American community while abroad: "I didn't know how to react to some situations. I didn't know how to answer some of the questions." Furthermore, she didn't have any faculty, administrators, or mentors available who could empathize or guide her through what she was experiencing: "There was so much cultural un-spokenness in that society that it made me crazy. Because, in America we talk. We over-communicate." (Sierra, personal communication, March 26, 2010)

The combination of having to regularly engage a racist professor in her class, racist encounters in public, and the absence of an empathetic mentor made Sierra's journey emotionally and physically exhausting. While attending an annual Indian cultural celebration, she was molested, and physically assaulted in public, by a crowd of Indian men: "I was pretty much losing my mind. I was in a really dark place. I was dealing with a lot of race issues, so I was scared to go out." Sierra's heightened level of stress rapidly led to depression, insomnia, loss of appetite, and an inability to keep food down:

I didn't have the feeling that someone had the experience that could relate to me. I remember talking to [my boyfriend in the U.S.] a lot; he did very well in hearing my side of the story very open but we only talked once a week through Skype [online video call] if we had Internet for that week. There was another housemate from New York, she also grew up in a very diverse community. She really heard what I had to say. I don't remember faculty, I remember calling my parents, and I was telling them at the end, I just want let you know that this professor is being very racist... So no one stood up for me. I wasn't standing up for myself, and I just was waiting for someone to find it ridiculous, because I thought I was going crazy. (Sierra, personal communication, March 26, 2010)

Sierra's experience abroad represents a clear example of how the intersection of gender and race can negatively influence one's study abroad. She faced the harsh challenges associated with being a woman in a country where men are clearly in a position of power and control perhaps more than in the United States. Additionally, her negative encounter was compounded by the fact Sierra was a woman of African descent, further marginalized by her racial identity. Although gender is not the focus of this study, the intersections of gender and race are significant and worthy of noting. Sierra's story shows that in some situations, African American women experience the world very differently from African American men. Given the sensitivity of the topic, I decided to pursue a different line of questioning.

Sierra's assertion that she was "going crazy", may seem unusual, however is not unheard when African Americans are missing the appropriate culturally responsive guidance. Perceptions of discrimination or racism place significant physical and psychological stressors on African Americans (Nyborg & Curry, 2003; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Crocker, 2007). When combined with culture shock (Oberg, 1960), the mental impact of cultural isolation and the absence of culturally sensitive mentors make African American collegians studying abroad susceptible to heightened levels of emotional trauma. It is well-documented that students who are culturally disconnected from their academic experiences are less likely to be engaged in the learning experience (Gay, 2000; Banks, 1995; Tatum, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1990; Boykin, 2000). Although Sierra's story represents just one example of the trauma connected to cultural isolation, it provides an important framework for understanding what can happen to African American collegians who find themselves isolated while studying abroad. The limited connectedness to the



learning experience can result in underachievement and depression (Bonny, Britto, Klostermann, Hornung, & Slap, 2000; Karcher, 2002; Kuperminc, Blatt, & Leadbeater, 1997). In Sierra's case, an inability to eat, anxiety, and depression all emerged as a response to her negative encounters, and to her lack of a culturally responsive mentor abroad. Researchers note that students without mentors develop fewer coping skills and fail to build higher levels of self-esteem and identity development, compared to their peers who have mentors (Rhodes, Contreras, & Mangelsdorf, 1994; Cooper, Grotevant, & Condon, 1983). Some African American collegians disclosed that they intentionally chose to avoid or internalize their racially challenging experiences abroad. Like Sierra, who said "I didn't have the feeling that someone had the experience that could relate to me" or Michelle, who said "I didn't know if they would understand where I was coming from" other students didn't want to discuss or report any incidents of racism or discrimination, assuming that nobody would understand anyway. Furthermore, voicing their frustrations or concerns to authority figures could result in additional negative emotional and academic repercussions. For example, Sierra could have likely received a lower grade for reporting her racist professor. Additionally, as the one of the only African Americans in her class, she might have experienced backlash from her peers for reporting the professor's conduct. "I remember calling my parents, and I was telling them at the end, I just want let you know that this professor is being very racist" (Sierra, personal communication, March 26, 2010). Avoidance and behavioral disengagement often results in heightened levels of depression (Ward & Kennedy, 2001). The frustration with not having culturally responsive mentors who understand the dynamics of racism can lead to avoidance. This avoidance might explain why

some university study abroad administrators are not aware of the unique challenges associated with being African American abroad.

Michelle, while studying for a year in Uruguay, enjoyed staying in the home of a Uruguayan family. As the only African American student in her group studying abroad, she experienced the unique challenge of experiencing racism in another country and not having a faculty member, mentor, or administrator to turn to. Using public transportation to get around, “You can just tell, people lifting up their nose in the air, and not wanting to sit next to you, you could tell that it was probably racism..” She shared that when boarding the busses while abroad, White Uruguayan women held their purses tighter, in fear of being robbed by a person of African ancestry. Many of her classmates and strangers on the street assumed that Michelle was there on a scholarship, incapable of affording an education at the private university she was attending. One evening, when Michelle went to a local dance club accompanied by her White friends, a Uruguay man, whom she had never met before, singled her out of the group, grabbed her, and forcibly twisted her arm back. If not for one of her peers in the group intervening, the situation could have escalated into something much more severe. Although Michelle spoke to her parents about what she was experiencing, neither had experienced being African American in Uruguay, nor were they present to help her deconstruct these daily encounters with discrimination. Again, like Sierra, Michelle decided not to talk to a professor, or administrator:

I was not comfortable talking to them [Uruguayan faculty] because I didn’t know if they would understand where I was coming from. I did not want to go up to a White Uruguayan and say, “Look, I am experiencing racism.” I did talk to my host mom about it, and she was very open. She [a White woman] helped me a lot to deal with it.... I called my mom a lot and I used to tell her what was going on. I felt very homesick in the beginning from being in such different surroundings. (Michelle, personal communication, May 8, 2010)

Although Michelle's host mother provided a certain level of empathy, it wasn't the same as having someone there who could help Michelle process her daily experiences around race. Limited access to culturally responsive mentors, combined with the absence of faculty who are knowledgeable about the region, can be additionally challenging for African American collegians.

Susanna, while attending a private Midwestern university, studied abroad in Jordan. She quickly had to face the fact that not having someone to help her reflect upon or process her experience as an African American abroad was her difficult reality. However, it was compounded by the fact that the faculty she knew back home had an extremely limited knowledge of study abroad in the Middle East overall and sought her expertise. She spent more time educating faculty at her home campus in the United States than gaining from their (very limited) perspectives on how to navigate being an African American student in the Middle East. Although Susanna had access to email for general emotional support, she was still facing the absence of culturally responsive mentors who could relate to her experience as an African American abroad:

Most of my traveling took place in the Middle East. Many American institutions are not conducting study abroad programs in this part of the world. Therefore, my trips were not only a learning experience for me but for my advisors and mentors as well. Many of my advisors had never been to this part of the world and had no experience with the culture. The pre-departure orientation was helpful but did not prepare one for the cultural experiences an American exchange student might have in the Middle East, let alone a Black American student. Before my trip, orientation was a discussion of basic study abroad dos and don'ts: where to keep your passport, how to safely store your money, international student health insurance, American embassy locations, all the precautions our parents would want us to take were presented to us by the study abroad advisors. However, there was no cheat sheet about religion (Islam), how to wear hijab (Islamic head covering), offensive gestures or behaviors, no written materials on the cultural experiences one might have as an exchange student in the Middle East, and there certainly was not a handbook for Black American experiences in the Middle East. (Susanna,

personal communication, April 3, 2010)

While studying abroad, Susanna was able to share her experiences with her African American mentors through email. Although they had limited experience in the region, they, at least, were able to provide her with emotional support:

Many of them have no experience in the region and provided a lot of emotional support by sharing any knowledge they had about dealing with diversity and culture. I spoke to professors of Black Studies, Jewish Studies, and Human Rights Law, all of whom had no initial rule book on how to debrief students who had studied in the Middle East. I found that most of my mentors and advisors were fascinated with my experiences and did not necessarily have a perspective on the Black American experience or the American experience in that region. Study abroad in the Middle East is uncharted territory at the university level, and nobody is exactly sure how to deal with it. (Susanna, personal communication, April 3, 2010)

The consistent absence of faculty or mentors to talk with about race-based experiences abroad was echoed by numerous African American collegians I spoke with. Most possessed a high level of race consciousness and were able to easily identify racism when they were confronted by it. Even those students with limited tools to adequately define or deconstruct racist actions or encounters, could recall examples of specific racist incidents while abroad.

Damon, a biracial student who attends a religious affiliated university, studied in France. He recalled witnessing racial bias and discrimination while touring throughout Europe:

When I was in Europe I did [experience racism]. But I noticed it the most in Ireland. I took a five-day trip to Ireland. And I don't know if it was being American or if it was being Black, but I almost got into four different fights while I was in Ireland. Or maybe it was the fact that I was hanging out with several women they would [have] wanted to hang out with. I went out one night. It was me and one of my [white male] friends, who was also from the States.... We went to a club and then afterwards we were sitting down eating someplace, and I actually had someone throw trash at me. Like a burger wrapper at my face. I was getting ready to get up and get into a fight even though there was me and my friend. And then there were these four guys. We were with eight girls at the time. These were eight White girls? And my friend

was White. But the guy threw trash at me, then he and his friends laughed and walked out. I was getting ready to fight and I was calmed down. I was like okay, whatever. (Damon, personal communication, April 30, 2010)

Damon's experience was clearly a racially motivated incident. Of the group of nine students he was with, Damon was the only person of color. He was easily singled out from the rest of the group and selected as a target of abuse. When asked about how he processed the encounter, or if there was anyone to talk with about it, it was apparent that he had internalized the incident as a way of coping:

I basically just wrote it off as them being drunk....Outside of the initial moment of when I was getting ready to smash my glass over this guy's head.... Outside of that, once I left the country I pretty much just left that experience. I still have a negative feeling towards Ireland. In general, I have no desire to go back. (Damon, personal communication, April 30, 2010)

I asked Damon if anyone helped prepare him for his study abroad in Ireland before he went. He replied, "I had a friend who just said it was wonderful, green in the hills. She said everyone is really nice.." However, he also noted that she was a White friend, perhaps possessing a very different understanding of what Ireland was like for an African American collegian.

Conversations with African American students led me to conclude that their experiences abroad presented unique challenges worthy of the mentoring, guidance, and support of dedicated and concerned professionals. Although recent initiatives to diversify and expand study abroad opportunities are generally helpful, increasing the number of African American participants in studying abroad does not guarantee an optimal learning experience. The experience of Black students abroad mirrors the "savage inequalities" prevalent in the American domestic educational system (Kozol, 1991). As colleges and universities continue to make efforts to improve enrollment in study abroad programs, they must be mindful to take into consideration the unique cultural perspectives of students from historically underrepresented groups.

Jenetta, a senior at a large public university, served as a student representative among a small group of Americans on her trip to Japan. She noted her apprehension with sharing her reality as a woman of color in America to various audiences throughout her trip, stating, “If I was really, really, honest with everybody, they would probably be scared about what it is really like to live in America. Like it isn’t a dream, and it really isn’t.” She was conscious of diplomacy and politeness in Japanese culture. She was also very aware of the role her own race played in conversations and the how her voice as an African American impacted the rest of her peers. She chose to let the White students control the discussion, defaulting to their realities: “The White ambassadors probably felt more comfortable when explaining American life. The other guy and myself hung back a little bit”.

The absence of a culturally responsive mentor or guide meant that Jenetta’s identity and perspective as an African American collegian were not encouraged or validated throughout her trip, whereas the White students, because of their privilege, positioned themselves at the center of the conversations with limited inhibitions of what they said, or how they said it. Jenetta realized that their identities as White students were the acceptable and appropriate American norm. Her decision to “hang back” exemplified the marginalization that African Americans can experience, consciously and unconsciously, when studying abroad. The support of a culturally responsive guide or mentor helps reposition dialogue, creating a more inclusive experience for all students; the absence of same can lead to increased isolation.

In opposition to marginalization of African American student learning, Ladson-Billings (1990; 1991) and Boykin (2000) note the value of empowering

students through a lens of cultural relevance. Culturally responsive learning positions African American identity at the center of the learning experience. Like mentoring, the teacher/student relationship is built on a synergy of trust and empowerment. Boykin (2000) argues that African American students are more likely to excel in environments where teachers are positioned as members of the community, focusing instruction around giving back to the community. Students are motivated to make connections between their community, ethnic, and global identities. By valuing academic promise and social and cultural connection in the context of student learning, identities are positioned as assets. The process of mentoring under the appropriate circumstances is meant to support the development of student's identities (Daloz, 1999).

Kharem (2006) argues that “white supremacy uses education to implement a culture of silence in us, to produce apathy, illiteracy, and passivity to solidify their economic, social, and political domination along with paternalism” (p. 57). Subsequently, a question arises: If White teachers feel that the perspectives of African American students are frequently topically irrelevant, how are those students engaged in learning? Moreover, how do those same students become inspired to explore the world in a manner that is culturally empowering or meaningful to them? The same perspectives about culture and learning experiences transition seamlessly into an examination of study abroad. Although the purpose of studying abroad is often to discover and explore new cultures, one's acquisition of knowledge is directly connected to previous experiences he/she can use as a springboard to greater understanding. Culturally responsive mentoring and pedagogy provides connectivity, meaning, and direction to a journey that few understand.



One might argue, as O'Neil and Wrightsman (2001) do, that there are numerous variables associated with establishing an optimal mentoring experience for African American collegians, including “(a) the role of the mentor, (b) the role of the mentee, (c) the personality, abilities and needs of the particular persons who fill these roles, and (d) various situational and environmental factors” (p. 113). In addition, these factors are constantly changing over time. Nevertheless, the complete absence of a mentor, whether exemplary or mediocre, leaves minimal room for student growth and development. Grant-Thompson (1997) notes that “mentor ethnicity, mentor cultural sensitivity, and student level of cultural mistrust all play a role in how African American male students perceive a faculty mentor” (p. 131). She concludes that more “African American faculty are needed if African American students are to receive appropriate mentoring and succeed in higher education” (p.132). The need for empathetic and culturally competent educators of all ethnicities is essential to meet the expectations of African American collegians.

Although much of the aforementioned literature clearly states that African American collegians need to develop rewarding relationships with African American mentors, one must consider that this bond of trust is founded in a common cultural and social perception of the world, which is often juxtaposed against a reality of White privilege (McIntosh, 1989). Mentors play an important role in creating safe spaces for African American students, spaces that oppose their historically marginalized position. In order to create successful study abroad experiences for African American students, it is essential to foster spaces where they have a “chance to breathe, the kind of space that runs contrary to the stifling air of the everyday classroom” (Hall, 2006, p. 30).

Culturally responsive mentors, whether they are administrators or faculty, must create safe spaces where power is freely shared and all students' identities are valued. These initiatives should be positioned as "holistic mentoring programs that extend beyond academic issues" (Ferrari, 2004, p. 303).

Nettles (1991) and Hall (2006) note that community involvement and mentoring both have a significant positive impact on African American student success: "Despite the apparent strength of naturally occurring support, evidence from a variety of sources suggests African American students either have limited access to resourceful adult helpers or rely heavily on peers" (Nettles, 1991, p. 138).

### **Trust Expectations Begin at Home**

When trying to understand how to best support African American collegians who study abroad, exploring the origins of their unique desire for culturally responsive mentors is helpful. I posit that part of the answer sits in the childhood homes of African American collegians. Quality, culturally responsive engagement at home or in the community sets an expectation for similar credible engagement in the learning experience and throughout life. Attachment theory researchers Allen, Leadbeater, and Aber (1990) note that family households with high levels of stability, trust, and confidence are homes where youth are likely to have the freedom to seek out mentors mirroring what they found at home. They note that close personal interaction during childhood forms the basis for students expecting satisfying mentoring relationships in adulthood (Allen et al., 1990). Thus, the rewarding, culturally framed relationships developed in childhood contribute to the expectations of African American

mentor/protégé relationships in college, and during study abroad. Culturally responsive mentoring relationships are forms of social and cultural acceptance. African American students who have a sense of acceptance are likely to acquire a broad range of coping skills and to “feel less threatened and anxious when confronted with stressors” (Rhodes et al., 1994, p. 213).

The stressors of racism, discrimination, and social isolation experienced by African American collegians while abroad require a significant set of coping skills. Without those skills or the guidance of a culturally responsive mentor, students are at a disadvantage. Therefore, those students who were missing quality mentoring relationships were more likely to face greater challenges deconstructing unfamiliar encounters abroad. They were immediately forced to create a new set of coping skills to help adjust to the unique stressors found abroad. The concept of “finding home abroad” emerged as a unique and common theme among numerous African American students. Regardless of where they might have positioned themselves on the spectrum of racial consciousness or how their travel might have been connected to their Afrocentric identity, the theme of “finding home abroad” remained prevalent in the conversations I had with African American collegians.

### **Finding Home Abroad**

*I would hang out at their house. Their parents would invite me over all the time. They would cook for me. It made me feel like home. Even though I wasn't home with my family, I felt like I made another family.*

-Pamela, a junior attending a large public university, describing the value of her connection to the Afro-Uruguayan community during her study abroad in Latin America.

In this section, I argue that African American collegians develop unique coping mechanisms in order to conquer turbulent situations and adapt to new

environments abroad. Given that mentors are often absent in the process of making sense of their experiences, many students seek out opportunities to find home abroad. The phrase “finding home abroad” originally emerged as a theme during my interviews where participants referred to the word “home” in describing their feelings or emotions connected to events they experienced abroad. Many African American students revealed a common search for a sense of home and cultural familiarity in their study abroad experiences. I begin this section by discussing why finding home abroad emerges as a common theme among African American collegians. Citing various scholars, I continue by discussing where the African American need for finding home abroad comes from. I then go on to explain how finding home abroad was identified as a pattern among the students I interviewed. To assist you in understanding this concept, I examine the common racial realities that African American collegians shared while abroad. I follow by tracing and the common “finding home” activities that emerged through those shared racial realities. These race affirming activities include; the gravitation towards fictive kinships or culturally grounded family-like cohorts; the rich culturally based conversations; and numerous forms validating social connections. This section also includes reasons why African American collegians found moments of finding home abroad valuable. Through thoughtful deconstruction of these moments of “finding home abroad” I argue that African American collegians developed this valuable coping mechanism as a way of adapting to the unique challenges they encountered while being Black abroad.

## **Why Find Home Abroad?**

I found several reasons why African American collegians were motivated to find home abroad. Their limited access to culturally engaging mentors or faculty, and their sense of cultural alienation were two factors that emerged from our conversations. What implored them to find home abroad was ultimately based on a desire to connect with others who understood their cultural pride, common oppression, and their view of the world.

The turbulent history of African Americans in the United States is interwoven with the “political, economic, social, cultural, and psychological patterns that have perpetuated Black subjugation and oppression since Blacks arrived on these shores in 1619” (Allen, 1992, p. 40). This same culture of oppression is reflected today throughout American society (Delpit, 1994; Steele, 1992; Perry et al., 2004). Scholars argue the academy is not immune from this turmoil that exists in society at large (Woodson, 1998; Dyson, 2007; Kharem, 2006; Williams, 1987; Noguera, 2008). They note that, in fact, a cycle of oppression is perpetuated by an educational system that fails to recognize the cultural perspectives of African American students. Woodson (1998) shares that American classrooms are designed to miseducate African Americans, thus reinforcing a culture of power and control. This negative cycle is maintained by educators with a bias that African American identities should be marginalized and not valued in the learning experience. This common reality presents a unique set of expectations, perspectives, and challenges for African American collegians abroad in that some of the same barriers that African American collegians

face domestically emerge in their academic and social encounters while studying in other countries.

When studying abroad, African American collegians frequently look for a racial/cultural anchor in someone or something that gives them a greater sense of security and stability. These anchors reflect support similar to what African American collegians might find at home. Although these connections do not replace the bond established with a mentor or guide as described in the previous section, participants noted an array of significant, affirmative moments that arose from finding home throughout their study abroad experiences. Thus, “finding home abroad” is a valuable survival tool, sometimes discovered and sometimes created by African American collegians, leading to emotional, academic, social, and cultural validation during study abroad.

### **Valuing Home and African Traditions; Ujamaa, Ubuntu, and Fictive Kinship**

In a domestic context, African Americans are likely to seek and build networks that foster their cultural, social, and academic success. Boykin (1986) describes the development of this network as an extension of the traditional “African ethos” (p. 65), which includes nine dimensions. One of the dimensions of the “African ethos” Boykin describes is “communalism” the commitment to fundamental interdependence of people and to social bonds and relationships. Although other cultures or communities may adopt these qualities, Boykin notes that African Americans carry these social traits and traditions of “communalism” from Africa. He goes on to say that these traits have been maintained in spite of the “hegemony of Euro-American values in every aspect of mainstream culture” (p. 66). One might argue that these traits emerge in

response to White privilege (Rothenberg, 2005; Dyer, 1997; Kincheloe, 2000; McIntosh, 1989). However, many scholars would challenge that specific traditional African and African American social networks stem from needs that pre-date Eurocentric colonization and social structures (Nyasani, 1997; Sertima, 1976; Asante, 1990; Woodson, 1998; Tutu, 1999; Clarke, 2002). The Kiswahili word *ujamaa* (collective responsibility) and the familiar age-old proverb “it takes a village to raise a child” reflect an African communal desire to support the development of young people by utilizing the strength of a social network. The Bantu concept of *ubuntu* encompasses the collective identity of African people and African culture, focusing on principles of consensus and community rather than individuality (Makgoba, 1997). Nobel laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes *ubuntu* as the essence of being human and compassionate, knowing we are connected to one another by a thread of humanity (Tutu, 1999). He notes:

A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are. (p. 31)

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) provide a partial framework for understanding “finding home abroad,” noting the African American need for belonging that is satisfied through the creation of “fictive kinships” (p. 183). They argue that African American students develop an intense sense of group ownership and loyalty extending beyond traditional family relationships. They claim that the collective identity of “fictive kinship” emerged in African American culture as a response to the oppression of African Americans throughout history. Fictive kinship is viewed as the

Black Americans' group response to structural limitations in the social system ... a superordinate concept used to describe the symbol of group unity among Black Americans; it is a concept representing the emergence of a sense of peoplehood within the community. The concept is employed to delineate the tendency in the Black community to emphasize group loyalty, boundary maintenance, and collective identity systems, as well as to negatively sanction behaviors thought to be at variance with group symbols, cultural entities, etc. (Fordham, 1985, p. 9)

The separation of African American families through slavery created new perspectives on family structure, and underscored the unique need for a cultural unity essential for survival (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). The historical turbulence associated with White and African American conflicts became a catalyst for close non-biological relationships, analogous to family units in the African American community. Fordham and Ogbu's research shows that these relationships continue to thrive in domestic classroom settings:

Black children learn the meaning of fictive kinship from their parents and peers while they are growing up. And it appears that the children learn it early and well enough so that they more or less unconsciously but strongly tend to associate their life chances and "success" potential with those of their peers and members of their community. (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 185)

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) frame "fictive kinship" as a mindset that African Americans embrace though a "collective identity" (p. 184); however, this only partially explains the relationships African Americans establish while finding home abroad. "Fictive kinship" is a term created to help understand African American relationships and their collective identity in a domestic context. While some African American collegians may begin with the establishment of "fictive kinships" during studying abroad, they "find home abroad" by adopting a series of strategies and coping mechanisms relevant to global encounters. This progression is likely due to the fact that there are so few African Americans available to connect with, presenting a



new paradigm for social and cultural survival. Allen (1992) echoes the justification for “finding home abroad,” noting that African American collegians establish their own social networks “in order to remedy the social exclusion from their wider White-oriented university community” (p. 29). Innocuous to Caucasian students’ learning experience, finding a space for unity and pride that reinforces one’s African ancestry is the foundation for “finding home abroad.” African American collegians purposely adapted to their surroundings by changing their lifestyles and activities throughout their travels abroad; these changes left them feeling good about themselves and their heritage.

Adelisha, a sophomore from a large public university, reflected on her study abroad to South Africa. She shared a moment when she saw a play featuring a South African cast of characters. The music and the story embraced her African American identity, leaving her with an unusual sense of pride. Although Adelisha could likely experience some sense of validation in a domestic context, experiencing a pride that reinforced her African American identity while studying abroad represented the distinct feeling associated with finding home abroad:

I felt the music vibrating through me. I felt in a sense, I don’t know if this is weird, but I felt like at home, that greater sense of being African, one with the continent. I felt that unity. The idea of the play was being together. I felt like I was extremely proud. (Adelisha, personal communication, March 27, 2010)

My initial impression was that the participants were simply recollecting their appreciation of a newfound link to their ancestral roots. However, beyond the stereotypical connection African Americans might have with the motherland of the African continent, students shared other feelings or moments in which they encountered a sense of home. They articulated that there was something much deeper

going on that was unique to the African American collegian experience abroad. For them, “finding home abroad” meant finding the safety of a familiar community while achieving a sense of belonging established through “fictive kinships” (Fordam & Ogbu, 1986). It was sharing an experience with others who saw the world through the same lens of race, while constructing the meaning of it all. Most importantly, “finding home abroad” provided African American collegians with a validation that their identity really mattered in the world. Their perspectives mattered, their experiences abroad mattered, and their heritage mattered.

While living at home in the United States, African American students often have direct access to affirming communities, comprised of a network of familiar events, friends, relatives, mentors, parents, spiritual advisors, and faculty. Those community connections frequently aid in creating an atmosphere of support and stability in the academic and social growth of a student. However, the African American collegians interviewed revealed that in an international context, those familiar cultural connections were often not present. Therefore, students had to be creative in finding alternative methods of engaging in culturally supportive and nurturing relationships while abroad. “Finding home abroad” was also part of a student’s adaptive response to the absence of a guide or mentor, integral to support or help in the reflection process. Throughout our conversations, participants mentioned the significance of these encounters and relationships in their study abroad experience.

### **Common Racial Realities**

Race matters in study abroad situations, just as it matters throughout educational settings within the boundaries of the United States. The common realities

that African Americans experience create a sense of connectedness, sense of community and universal identity throughout the diaspora. The establishment of a connected identity gives students opportunities to do three things: first, create meaning from unfamiliar experiences; second, develop a sense of ownership while maintaining their identities; and third, establish a feeling of belonging and validation (Tatum, 1997). Students with an Afrocentric-based view of the world often share language, food, stories, social activities, the expectation of audience participation, movement, and music (Asante, 1990). Scholars argue that the shared oppression known by African Americans continues as an undeniably prevalent issue in education and society at large (West, 1993; Tatum, 1997; Kharem, 2006; Feagin, 2000).

When African American collegians find home abroad, regardless of the presence or absence of an empathetic facilitator, they can freely express their common realities as African Americans without hesitation; they are able to share their personal experiences through the common lens of race. This natural social bridge opens the door quickly for rich dialogue. Through my interviews, I learned that creating connections through a common racial reality provided African American collegians with an important foundation for understanding what study abroad looked like through their eyes. From the first days of their journeys, finding the familiarity of home abroad was something that brought them closer to their peers of African descent, even as it distanced African American collegians from some White classmates.

### **Let's Get Together and Feel Alright**

Some African American collegians were “finding home abroad” through the process of what one student defined as self-segregation. They voluntarily separated

themselves from their peers along the lines of race. The majority of participants in this study made efforts to connect with or spend time with someone who looked like them. In some cases those connections were made with individuals who spoke a different language or had a different nationality, yet they shared a common African view of the world. For example, students of color regularly spent time eating together, living together, traveling together, and talking together. From the onset of their international adventures, students made a conscious effort to interact with others who saw the world as they did. As their studies abroad progressed, these connections opened doors to conversation and essential moments of emotional support. Thus, African American students found the comfort of home through the familiar surroundings of a new community abroad.

Krista, an African American female, studied abroad in France while enrolled in her local community college. The story below illustrates the way that connecting with others of African descent emerges as a way of finding home abroad for African American collegians:

There were 20 students from X Community College who went abroad in this particular trip and of all those 20, 3 including myself were [of] African-American descent, one of them was my roommate because we knew each other before the trip. And within 24 to 48 hours the group had sectioned off by race. My roommate and I were together because we knew each other before, and the third African-American person on the trip had a roommate who was Caucasian. There were six, maybe seven people from Latin American descendants of different countries, and the balance was Caucasian. What happened was that we went to school together, ate together, traveled together, and maybe by day two or three, the third Africa-American came out to us and she said I am going over here and she was going by herself. So after that, on the third day you could start to notice people of Latino descent were together. Then the small pockets of Caucasian students were together. It was an interesting dynamic because any time my roommate and I would go anywhere we would reach out to the other African-American [to see] if she wanted to go with us so she

would not be out by herself, but it kind of naturally happened. (Krista, personal communication, April 24, 2010)

Krista's story shows that, although she thought it "naturally happened," there was a conscious effort by African American collegians to connect to one another early during their study abroad. Her ease in establishing connections with other African Americans may have felt natural. However, Krista's outreach to another African American student, even beyond her African American roommate, demonstrated the active need for solidarity amongst those who potentially share the same racial reality.

Connie, another African American collegian, shared excerpts from the journal she kept while studying abroad with a racially mixed group of American students in South Africa: "I wrote in my notes: I am having an amazing connection. I am, and every part of me feels at home." She shared some photos from her study abroad while describing a boat ride to Robben Island, the legendary prison and now museum that incarcerated President Nelson Mandela during the apartheid era of South Africa. Like Krista, Connie noticed self-segregation amongst her peers:

I have a picture that I think really defines it. You have to take a 40-minute boat ride to get to Robben Island and I put in the caption here, "Are we self-segregating?" Because all of the White students, and I took a picture of it. So all of the White students were together (showing the photo). And then some of the Black students here and us on one side, and this side ... I was more analyzing than feeling [it] at that point. But when I addressed that at the debriefing, a freshman White girl said that I was hurting her feelings and then she said that I made a racist comment. But this is what I actually said: "Are we self-segregating?." I asked the question and brought it out. I did not say, "The White students are self-segregating or the Black student are self-segregating." I did not say an ethnicity or race, I only asked, "Are we people from America self-segregating in the place that has a history of apartheid?" To make a long history short, the White student ended up crying. I had another interaction with her and she said, "I want to talk to you more about race". I replied to her, "Do you know what, I did not come to Africa to teach students about anything. I am a student myself. One of the great things about America is that we have wonderful libraries systems so when you go back home you can check out

some books. I can help you with that but I will not do that while I am here.”  
(Connie, personal communication, May 11, 2010)

Connie’s and Krista’s stories demonstrate that students are aware of race and potentially the role it plays in their personal well-being while studying abroad. Most people gravitate towards one another because it is familiar. However, self-segregation as a means of finding home abroad immediately puts African American collegians in situations in which they can connect with others who potentially understand. The burden of explaining their unique reality, position, or perspective to others is quickly removed. When Connie was approached by a White student who wanted to discuss the topic of race and segregation, Connie’s response was “I did not come to Africa to teach students about anything.” She did not want to be distracted by the responsibility of teaching others about her reality as an African American collegian. It wasn’t that Connie had any personal animosity towards her White peers, however, she didn’t want her engagement with her white peers to detract from the significance of her own journey. Committing the time and energy to debating White students who were unaware or misinformed about the dynamics of global racism detracted from her purpose for being there. Connie said, “I am a student myself”. She was there to learn and grow. The easier alternative for her was to self-segregate, which Connie did for the remainder of her study abroad. Exercising her option to develop a knowledge of herself, while building on the perspectives of her African American peers was important. She shared an excerpt from her journal: “How do I enact or practice my understanding of disappointments while in South Africa?,” referring to her interactions with White students. “It helped by talking with Trent, Tana, and Lida and Sharon,” students who were African American. Connecting with others who understood her reality and were willing to have deep discussions meant that Connie

could focus on the development of her own identity while abroad.

African American self-segregation is well examined by Tatum (1997), who discusses groups of African American students sitting together in the high school cafeteria. University campuses in the United States offer the same environmental structure for self-segregation (Antonio, 1999). Tatum notes that the key motivators for student self-segregation by race are founded in the psychological responses to the environmental stressors of racism (Tatum, 1997). A useful coping strategy involves connecting to one's peers to construct a sense of one's identity, because they are involved in the same process. The desire to connect to others who share the same sense of reality vis a vis race emerged in most (but not all) of the study abroad experiences described.

Although students of color may not always share the same racial identity, the divide between students studying abroad frequently falls between those possessing White privilege (Rothenberg, 2005; McIntosh, 1989) and those who do not. Several African American students shared observations about the comments and conduct of their White American peers while abroad that demonstrated their contrasting views of the world. African American collegians thus sought out people who shared a common understanding of race in order to counter this disparity.

Tyrelle, an African American male attending a large state university who studied abroad with a group of American students in the Dominican Republic, discussed his frustration with the majority of his classmates. Conscious that many of

his peers see the world through a different lens at home and abroad, he decided to segregate himself from the majority of Caucasian students in his group:

I remember going to a small Haitian community where it was abject poverty. I had never seen anything like that before. But I have seen the hood before. And to say that it is the same, no. But there are things that are very common in that environment that if you have been to a city that has an area like that, you would be accustomed to it. But we were traveling in a group of people that it was very obvious that they had never ever been in a situation like that before. So this was kind of, “How do they eat this food? How do they live here without running water?” kind of thing. I don’t know if it is just racist. But I had this kind of feeling like you just don’t have a frame of reference to know that there are people in your own country live like this. Just because you haven’t seen it doesn’t mean it is because we are in a third-world country kind of thing... I felt an overwhelming need to kind of separate myself from that. I went in with the mindset that I’m going to see some things that I’m not accustomed to seeing, I will eat things that I have not eaten before, I will meet people before that I have never met before, so that was the approach that I took to it. And then I realized that there were some people that weren’t going to be that positive and that open to what new kinds of things that would be happening there. In that effort, of separating myself away from that, I looked around and I realized that there were other people who were doing the same thing. (Tyrelle, personal communication, June 8, 2010)

Finding comfort and validation amongst like-minded peers just as this African American student did with his Filipino classmate is a reoccurring theme in this investigation.

One in particular was a female in my class. She is Filipino. And as a sidebar, it is interesting with her because I don’t even acknowledge the Filipino struggle. You know, I didn’t grow up with a lot of Filipino people, especially not any who were racially opinionated. And to be around her and see, because she refers to herself as a woman of color. And I remember the first time I heard her saying that, I said, “What you are talking about?.” Because in my brain, that engenders a vision of a Black woman. And I realized how wrong I was to think that way. Having conversation with her throughout the year not just in the program, made it easy for me to realize that she was part of the half glass full group that I was referring to, I was glad that she was there too. So she was someone that I could have this kind of conversations with. (Tyrelle, personal communication, June 8, 2010)



Tyrelle went on to share with me that the close relationship he established with his classmates and their common dissatisfaction with many of their White peers. He was upset by the way his White peers responded to the poverty they encountered. The frustration that Tyrelle and his friends shared was a disappointment with the codes of power surrounding race, poverty, privilege, and social justice: “We had these going on joke between the two of us. We referred to them as “negative Nancys.” So we tried to keep them away.” He shared the story of an economic impact study they were assigned to do in a very poor, rural Dominican community. The two began a class assignment to conduct interviews with people in the community. Tyrelle quickly had the realization that they wouldn’t be able to help these people: “I realized that those people were giving us these answers because they truly needed, and believed that we were there to make sure those things come to fruition for them.” The assignment focused on collecting information for the survey, not to physically creating infrastructure or social services needed to develop the impoverished community:

I had to tell her [his Filipina classmate], I feel like we are dangling hope in front of them. She was like, “Well, we may actually be able to help some people.” She was very positive about that. And that was very necessary for me at that time because I didn’t really feel comfortable with the trip. It was the high point of my uncomfotability, with our presence there. It was her that I was able to have that conversation with. (Tyrelle, personal communication, June 8, 2010)

In this case, Tyrelle realized that his Filipina classmate, another student of color, shared his perspective. They both wanted to make a difference in the lives of people living in that impoverished community. As students of color, they could both empathize with the oppression the local people were facing, perhaps better than their more privileged White classmates. Tyrelle was able to embrace his classmate’s

optimism and support at a high point during his study abroad where he felt uncomfortable. Upset by his White classmates who failed to see the same reality, Tyrelle was able to have conversations with someone who could understand what he was experiencing, which ultimately drew the closer and validated his perceptions. In this way, he found home abroad.

Perceptions of economic and social privilege can also exacerbate the racial divide established by students on study abroad. Tyrelle also shared a story about when the group of students visited a sugar plantation for a tour and dinner. Their meal, beans and rice, was prepared for the entire group by people on the plantation. He was upset by way his White peers were wasting food, oblivious to the impact their actions were having on the people who prepared the food:

It was interesting to see the people that had prepared the food for us, watch us eat or not finish some of the food. The tourist nature of the country made me to understand why they allow or didn't respond to the fact that it was happening. To make the quantity of food they were making and to watch that quantities that were being tossed away had to upset them. And it was something that I noticed while I was there. "I don't want to eat rice and beans anymore," [referring to comments made by White students] and we were throwing away large plates of food... I know I love eating rice and beans every day. We [my Black classmates] didn't have too much problem about the food. It is something that definitely can be divided along the racial lines. Not to say that all Black people like rice and beans. But the food they were making for us were very good. But it was obvious there were quite a few students that were not comfortable eating the food that was prepared for us. Either because of presentation, how they feel, maybe how it was prepared or lack of information about the food. That was definitely something that I remember being an issue throughout. I felt embarrassed to see what kind of reaction they were having, to see us throwing way all that food. It was good (gesturing to his White peers). What are you guys doing? It wasn't that I felt bad about being an African American, I was just embarrassed that those people were so excited to share their food with us and our classmates could not understand what was going on. (Tyrelle, personal communication, June 8, 2010)

Tyrelle's experience is an example of how some African American collegians are aware of a different reality:

[My White classmates] couldn't see that even just showing that they were enjoying the food would have had a much better impression on the people that we were being served by. Than, you know, whole tables of people throwing entire plates of food away. (Tyrelle, personal communication, June 8, 2010)

Seeing the world through a different racial lens is an emotional and often isolating journey for African American collegians who are conscious of race dynamics abroad. Their White peers, or in many cases White professors, often "have no idea." As Anisha recalled, "Susi was the girl that I lived with [a White female], and she tried to understand, but I think it was very hard for her because she is not Black. She didn't understand when I say I got a funny look today. She doesn't get it, even though she tried to" (Anisha, personal communication, July 1, 2010).

Sierra revealed the importance of having another student of color on the trip to whom she could relate. While studying in India, Sierra also noticed that what she and her friend Sarah (who self-identifies as Dominican) were experiencing was completely differently from what their White peers were experiencing. Sierra and Sarah stayed in a house with 30 other American and international students, yet gravitated towards one another for support throughout the trip: "The other girl Sarah was furious that they never talked about race. The other girl Maiden (who was White) would just play like a Barbie doll, and going shopping all the time, pretending that it was not even an issue! (Sierra, personal communication, March 26, 2010). Although sometimes emotionally painful, they shared a common perception of reality that led to frequent discussion.

Conversations around a common racial reality often provide valuable opportunities to deconstruct race and codes of power. Aware that their experience

abroad was often very different from their White peers, Sierra provided a glimpse into the conversation she had with her Dominican friend during a night out on the town:

We get there, and there was a huge billboard of skin whitening cream. Sarah and I were like, “This is outrageous!” We started this dialogue about no matter what, no matter what, being darker means you are the labor class all these things. She did a report on entertainment and being White and Black, how Beyonce has colored herself lighter. We were talking about all these things. We were just talking about this. So the conversation went from there. When we were actually dancing, we noticed that we were never hit on. We were just like, Wow, this is interesting. We are always over here with ourselves. (Sierra, personal communication, March 26, 2010).

This conversation is one of numerous moments throughout this study exhibiting the connectedness that African Americans have around the social construct of race while abroad. Sierra and her friend of color were seeing the world through a very different lens. Whereas a White student may not even notice or be offended by the billboard for skin whitening cream, the students of African ancestry acknowledged the dynamics of power and White privilege at play and began a dialogue. At the same time, the two were aware that while at the dance club, they are experiencing the same reality, whether by choice or not, of not being hit on or approached by any men. In fact, she describes their paired isolation as “always over here with ourselves.”

The two women of color would talk frequently during their study abroad in India. They saw the world through the same lens of race and gender. When I asked her to expand on the nature of that unique connection made on the trip with another woman of color, Sierra’s response was clear and heartfelt. The connection mirrored a deep sisterhood “finding home” found in a shared reality that White peers could not relate to:

She just knows where to go with the conversation. She was just an amazing backbone. And she broke down a lot. She had a really hard time like me. And her and I talked about ... we just let the house know very clearly if we both are having a hard day because we went out and all we saw was how we were dealt with.... The time we both came back and I remember both of us just crying because of the racism that had happened. And our house was so sad for us. But we were just like, you have no idea. (Sierra, personal communication, March 26, 2010)

Sierra discussed with me moments of frustration associated with knowing that her reality (often a position of marginalization) was completely opposite of the privileged position of her White peers. With hopes to deconstruct this reality, African American collegians like Sierra gravitate to those who see the world from their point of view:

I remember a lot of the trips we went would be with our group and all the guys were White. I remember it would be so hard because we would sometimes be held up at the train station and miss our train because all these Indian men wanted to take pictures with all the White guys. You know, on their cell phones. It was funny at first but then just realizing that they were having a completely different experience, this was hurtful. Because I would never have that experience that they were having. Know when people ask, should I go to India? Yes, if you are White male, you should totally go. You will not only have an excellent time, but you will probably live there. (Sierra, personal communication, March 26, 2010)

The strong connections forged between African American collegians abroad were based on their unique perspectives. They realized that they shared a more complicated view of the world that was clearly difficult for White students to relate to. However, their discussions while abroad were not focused on criticizing their White counterparts. The students were simply connecting with like-minded individuals and were focused on making sense of international experiences.

Like many of the African American students I have interviewed, Kenneth, who studied in the Dominican Republic, was frustrated by the conduct of his peers. He expressed his need for finding home abroad:

If I go to study abroad with a class and to have some group of people that I do not control, I would like to have some African Americans or people who understand me to a certain level, so I can have some type of personal connection. It makes the trip so much easier when you know there is someone who going to have the same ideals as you in terms of wanting to see some things or to have someone who you can discuss things with. Like I said earlier, it was the most ignorant group of people that I have ever traveled with [referring to his White peers]. And the trip would [have been] that much more difficult for me if I didn't have a strong connection with the other African Americas individuals on the trip. (Kenneth, personal communication, June 4, 2010)

There are important social benefits relating to the connections formed by African American collegians while studying abroad. As Kenneth put it, "The trip would be that much more difficult for me if I didn't have a strong connection to African American individuals on the trip." The benefit of that cultural bond found while abroad could be framed as the acquisition of "social capital." First introduced by Coleman (1988), the concept of "social capital" is used to describe the resulting positive outcomes, or social benefits, of relationships between individuals and groups of individuals. African American collegians are able to rely on each other, or in some cases other students of color, for guidance and direction, which in turn assists them in deconstructing unfamiliar experiences abroad. The knowledge acquired from their peers has a clear value when connected to their personal and cultural well-being. Although not quantifiable, that knowledge becomes a resource shared and distributed among members of the group. As Kenneth said, "It makes the trip so much easier when you know there is someone who going to have the same ideals as you in terms of wanting to see some things or to have someone who you can discuss things with."

The foundation of these unique and highly selective connections abroad is based on the emotional support derived from these relationships. Putnam (2000) frames the frequent gravitation of students from similar racial, social and cultural backgrounds towards one another as a form of social capital “bonding.” He notes that the bonds established through these relationships tend to be stronger than social capital “bridging,” which occurs between dissimilar groups. For example, in a global context, “bridging” refers to moments when African American collegians establish connections with White students or with others in the country they are visiting. While studying abroad, some African American collegians were able to “bridge” cultural divides, acquiring information and making connections with their White American peers. Yet the students I interviewed stated that the information shared had a very different cultural foundation and purpose than the social capital “bonding” established with their peers of the same race. Examples of social capital “bonding” are prevalent throughout the data.

Which social capital is better? Some researchers argue that the two dimensions of social capital gained from both bridging and bonding likely work better when both are achieved (Horvat, Weininger & Lareau, 2003). Social capital bonding is clearly valuable to African American collegians studying abroad. However, exclusive self-segregation can hinder access to information, social connections, and resources available outside of the same-race network. In most cases, students managed to find some type of social balance during their study abroad. They described a series of bonding activities with their same-race peers, which seemed to strengthen the overall

quality of their experience abroad while creating a sense of community. The following section provides a glimpse into some of the shared cultural activities and lifestyles that enhanced the study abroad for African American collegians, also helping them to find home.

### **Common Cultural Lifestyle and Activities**

My interviews clearly demonstrated that African American collegians possessed varying levels of race consciousness (Brown, 1931; Lee, 2001; Durant, 1997). Although they were not always aware of the dynamics of race abroad before they left the United States, African American students became intentionally and/or unintentionally engaged in moments of valuable race connectivity. In other words, African American collegians found a variety of ways to establish culturally validating connections with their own race while studying abroad. These actions are a result of what Brown (1931) describes as a “loyalty, devotion, pride,” and participation in a “group consciousness” based on the commonality of race (p. 90). The results of these needs for cultural affirmation and expressions of pride emerged through a variety of activities I describe in this section. Additionally, I learned that these experiences were not just limited to countries in Africa. The students I interviewed described their connections to common cultural lifestyles and activities that took place in destinations throughout the world. Whether the students were presented with the opportunity to connect with other African American classmates on the trip (self-segregation, previously mentioned) or not, the participants shared their unique efforts to engage in common activities that affirmed their identity as people of African ancestry, essentially finding home abroad.



It is important to note, in my interpretation of the data, common racial realities (as described above) serve as a precursor to culturally affirming activities and lifestyles. Furthermore, I have learned that those culturally validating activities manifest themselves in different ways. Viewing this concept from a domestic perspective may be easier to understand. For example, a wealthy African American with an advanced degree may not embrace the same activities as an African American with a limited income and no education. Having more money and education might dictate a different set of culturally affirming activities. The affluent African American might have active membership in various nationally recognized African American professional or social organizations, and attend a predominantly African American church. The African American with less income, meantime, might gravitate more towards local recreation, social networks, friends, and family while also attending a predominantly African American church. Another easily recognizable example would be both individuals attending a barbershop or hair salon that catered to African Americans. Despite their disparate incomes, both seek to validate their identities as African Americans through a series of activities supporting who they are racially. I learned that these validating activities also emerged during study abroad. Whatever their financial means, or level of consciousness, each student found home through activity. This led me to conclude that the common racial realities of African American collegians were the catalyst for seeking activities linked to finding home abroad. These activities included engaging in daily conversations or moments to reflect through the lens of race, finding African diaspora communities and social events, organizing frequent home-style meals together, decorating rooms together, traveling together, conducting independent

research, writing race-centered blogs, and emailing to African American friends who were also abroad.

Finding home abroad involves going beyond the superficial conversations one might have with casual classmates. Students shared that they searched for venues where they could be themselves in order to reinforce their identity through conversations and experiences that validated who they were. Krista noted the unique nature of same-race conversations and the way she used personal familiar items to create a sanctuary for herself and her African American roommate. These are examples of physically and emotionally finding home abroad:

I was just reflecting back to my college experiences when I had different roommates of different cultural backgrounds. It goes back to when I was saying I would see someone who looked African or of African American descent, that kind of connection just kind of flows. The conversation just happens. Whereas when there is someone in your inner space, like a roommate in a study abroad program that you don't have a connection with, then it is like being at work so the conversation is a little be more superficial, maybe a little more professional, a little more courteous. Courteous in that you are taking efforts to not say anything offensive. I don't know what to touch.... You know, keep your stuff there, I keep mine here. The other African-American that was on the trip came to our room and noticed we were living in the room. I mean we had stuff on the desk, on the shelves, we bought couple things we put them up so people could see them. We were living in our room and there was comfort there. In the bathroom I had my toiletries out. She had her toiletries out. Whereas, the other African American, she was like, her stuff, she just puts it, packs everything back away and puts it away. She was being courteous not to invade, you know, in the room because her and her roommate hadn't developed or discussed or established or connected to be able to have that. (Krista, personal communication, April 24, 2010)

Krista observed a clear difference in the living arrangements between roommates of the same race and those of different races. The established level of comfort in displaying personal items like toiletries or hair products that are often connected to one's race or cultural identity was easily achieved for two students of the same race.

Krista established a level familiarity with her roommate equivalent to living at home. She emphasized the fact that she and her roommate were “living” in their room. “Living,” in this context, means the state of being yourself, comfortable, safe, and welcome, often achieved when one finds home abroad.

For African American collegians, the act of comfortably talking or sharing through the lens of their racial identity is part of finding home abroad. It is important to note that although culturally grounded [linguistically and in content], these particular activities may not always present themselves as physical activities like exercising or dancing. These activities or conversations replicate aspects of the African American experience, by maintaining a racially and culturally enriching community. Although African American collegians might have common racial realities while abroad, the opportunity to share those realities with each other, or others of African descent is where finding home abroad emerges. For some students, finding home abroad was about connecting through a common lens of racial socialization, exhibited through a shared awareness of positive and negative experiences. Those relationships were solidified by connections made through conversations; sharing perceptions of humor, common perceptions of oppression, and common perceptions of relationships. For example, Tyrelle, an African American male, discussed the conversations he shared with his African American peers over the common perceptions of women of color while abroad. Their conversations often led to the topic of relationships and their common experiences with women of color in the United States:

Since we were all males and we were in an environment with so many beautiful people, some of the conversations gravitated toward relationships.

How different our perception of Dominican women were, compared to American woman of color, that was in pretty common things throughout. Just because, there are so much of those assumptions about Black women here in the United States being abrasive, loud, not caring [about] things in that nature. Right or wrong, we felt it was different with the Dominican Republic. We had this overwhelming feeling of wanting to take care of [the women]. The husband and things like that. (Tyrelle, personal communication, June 6, 2010)

Tyrelle's conversation about women of color with his African American peers represents an important moment connected to finding home abroad. His story paints a picture of the common activity of sharing cultural perspectives through conversation, which reinforces a bond founded in race. The topic of his conversation is exclusive to African American men. It mirrors the unique socio-political, comedic, and sometimes taboo conversations found in African American barbershops. To follow the significance of the Tyrelle's discussion, one must examine the historical context of African American male female relationships, and how they have been influenced by the political and social structure of White privilege in America.

I posit that African American men steer away from discussing with White men the dynamics of relationships involving women of color or African American women. This social taboo could be attributed to the historically racially strained relationship White males have had with African American men and its direct connection to the sexual power in America (Block, 2006; Hodes, 1999). To see this proof of this racially driven sexual tension, and opposition to Black masculinity, one needs look no further than the 1955 story of Emmett Till, an African American boy from Chicago, who was killed in Mississippi for looking at a White woman (Whitfield, 1991). Or the heinous acts of Jon Burge, a White police commander in Chicago, who between 1972 and 1991, tortured over 100 African American men, including; suffocation, playing

Russian roulette, and forcing confessions by electrocuting their testicles with a cattle prod. The history of numerous castrations, genital mutilation, and lynching of African American men paints a clear picture of why male/female relationship conversations stay in the background (Ginzburg, 1988; Patterson, 1999). This premise is compounded by the historical manipulation and sexual aggression towards African American women by White men throughout history (Welsing, 1991; Hodes, 1999). From the inception of slavery, through present day African American men are not typically in positions of power. Therefore, they are not always able to financially support African American Women as they may want to. Historically viewed by their White slave masters as pieces of property, White men dictated all aspects of the African male female relationship (Welsing, 1991). Tyrelle mentions his peers' desire to support or "wanting to take care" of the women they encountered in the Dominican Republic. I argue that Tyrelle's racially based conversation is grounded in a history African American men's desire to attain social power, maintain Black masculinity, and a respected position in traditional African relationships. Given that White men have different relationships with African American women, and face a different set of social challenges, Tyrelle's conversation with his peers mirror an activity and topic exclusive to African American males at home. Thus, he was able to find home abroad.

Another student, Krista, explained the value added to her trip by having another African Americans on the trip with her:

For example, a lot of the Spanish speakers would speak Spanish constantly in front of non-Spanish speakers all the time.... That was a connection for them. Sometimes with the three of us there was this connection that we had as African Americans, whether it was just humor, experiences at the workplace. Sometimes, being challenged more so than others. (Krista, personal communication, April 24, 2010)

## **Conversations That Build Community**

Finding home abroad is about sharing the common depression, common celebration, and common reflections on the realities of studying abroad as an African American collegian. That found community often emerge through the collective challenge of not having access to anyone abroad or at home in the United States who can relate to the reality each student is experiencing. This sense of isolation reinforces the need to find home while abroad. Although students from other common cultural identities might respond to isolation in a similar fashion, the activities and conversations that emerged though finding home abroad for African American collegians were uniquely connected to their racial identity.

Ayana spent a summer studying in Ghana with three other African American women from different universities throughout the United States. The bond the four established through their conversations and activities became a way of finding home abroad. They all lived together in the same house, spending every possible moment together. Since their families and friends in the United States couldn't relate to their experiences abroad, they often found comfort in speaking with one another. Beyond sharing their intercultural victories in bartering with local vendors down to the best prices, the students collectively reflected on the fact that they were in a place that their African American peers and families would never get to see. There was a significant sense of pride and accomplishment Ayana shared with the other young women; they were proud to be in Africa. And as young African American women, they acknowledged the shared social, cultural, and academic meaning behind their journey.

In the absence of family and close friends, they relied on each other to vent, reflect, and celebrate their experience:

The four of us girls [all African American] who were living in the same house, we talked to each other and I would call home and speak to my parents. But they didn't understand because they were not there. It was hard because I would call my friends but nobody would pick up the phone because they didn't want to have a huge phone bill. You can't even talk to the people that you are used to being around. (Ayana, personal communication, May 1, 2010)

Towards the end of each day together, the women spent time reflecting on their encounters:

We talked about how the day went and laughed about what happened with the local people... Sometimes we would just talk about, "Oh, I can't believe I am in Africa because it is different, it is completely different." But you are in this house and you are lying in bed while you guys are all hanging out, and you think, "I can't believe I am really here." We were laying in bed in Africa and it was like, "Well, we really did it." We crossed the Atlantic Ocean and went to Africa we got this opportunity most people don't get. It was a big deal because most people don't get this opportunity. I am in Africa, where a lot of African Americans came from, and it is like we need to enjoy this experience because I may not be getting this opportunity again. (Ayana, personal communication, May 1, 2010)

Finding home abroad for Ayana was being part of a community that understood exactly how she viewed the world. "Well, we really did it" meant that Ayana and her peers could celebrate their accomplishment together. Even when Ayana attempted to call home, with hopes of finding someone else to share her experience with, the experience was different. Ayana and her friends were aware that most people they knew would never have the same opportunity to travel and study abroad. More than just getting on an airplane and showing up to another country, Ayana realized that as an African American collegian, "it was a big deal" for her and her roommates to be studying abroad. Moreover, she was in Africa, a place that had an unspoken meaning for everyone in the group of four. They found home abroad as they lay awake in bed

talking at night. Their conversations provided a reassurance that the group didn't need to explain the significance of their trip to one another from the beginning. Somewhere in their shared activities, shared culture, and common thread of their African ancestry, they simply knew how each other felt, because they were all experiencing the same thing. Although the student may have had a common racial reality, it is important to note that their activities together, like conversations lying awake in bed, reinforced their identities. This is what makes it part of finding home abroad.

The bonding that Ayana was doing with her African American women friends can also be viewed through the lens of race and gender intersectionality. For example, African American women celebrating their accomplishment, as powerful women of African descent, returning to the motherland is significant.

Kenneth, who studied in the Dominican Republic, laughed as he shared the belief that African Americans had a common view of the social terrain abroad. His conversations with his African American classmates revealed their shared understanding that they could feel welcome in a country they were not from. Beyond having a common view of their experiences, their conversations validated their collective realities. Having access to those types of enriching and culturally validating conversations is another example of finding home abroad:

One thing that we noticed was that they [referring to Dominican people] thought we were Dominicans. So it was like, "Oh my God, we fit in, in a country that we are not from..." This was something that we connected upon. Another thing was that this was the first time that my White counterparts felt out of place. We could see in their eyes, they did not want to go to some places. (Kenneth, personal communication, June 4, 2010)

One might assume that finding home abroad is initially limited to reaching out to like-minded peers or classmates of the same race. However, several students found validation through their encounters with other people of African ancestry they met



while studying abroad. Krista described it as a “natural gravitation to people who look like us:”

One example was that there was a tendency for us to reach out and communicate with other people of African descent. One of my friends and I went to Italy for the day while we were in Nice and there was a woman of African descent speaking English in the shoes store and we started a conversation with her. My friend joined in. I don't think necessarily [if maybe I would speak to her] if she was not of African descent and speaking English in Italy. But I didn't take a second thought about saying hi to her and asking her where she was from. I spoke with her, exchanged numbers and we ended up connecting later in Paris. So I think there was a natural gravitation to people who look like me. You know, to people who look like us. (Krista, personal communication, April 24, 2010)

A sense of validation and pride emerged with these unique connections abroad. Finding an African American identity in a global context is about finding your own value and sense of self. In other words, students are finding the same sense of belonging that they might find at home. Similar to Krista, Damon, while studying in Paris, connected with other African American tourists. While walking to class in Paris, Damon overheard an African American couple speaking with someone in English, asking for directions to the Eiffel Tower. Damon offered his assistance:

They were trying to go to the Eiffel Tower. I am standing on the corner, waiting, the cars are going. And I just lean over [and say,] “A little lost?” trying to be real smooth and funny about it. They were very relieved that they had someone to speak English with. And secondly they mentioned that I was Black. How do you like being in the city? Is it good for being Black, a Black American? I sort of answered them in vague terms. And we were going on the same way so I walked them to the metro to get them to where they needed to go. It was nice, just that random interaction. And they were very grateful for my help. There wasn't any reservation or hesitation with them. They were both probably in their mid-30s.... Something that I've noticed in the States ... is more often than I'd like, when I offer to help people who are middle-aged and not Black, they tend to be a little more reserved. They are not exactly sure of my motives or what I am going to do. But in this situation, it was complete trust. I even pointed it out to them. When I offered to walk with them there were no hesitations, like “Oh, no we can find it on our own.” It was very much, “Thank you. Yes, we want to talk to you. We want to see how you are doing.” It was an immediate trust and immediate connection. (Damon, personal communication, April 30, 2010)

As Damon found in his encounter with the African American tourists, finding home abroad involves finding “immediate trust” and an “immediate connection” that students can understand, acknowledge, and embrace. One student described the ease of encounters abroad with people of African American descent as “that kind of connection just kind of flows.” Finding home abroad is often related to finding ways to make the unfamiliar familiar. One of the ways students found ease in adjusting to uncomfortable surroundings was by making connections to the common thread of the African diaspora. Gravitating towards familiar activities gave students a sense of reassurance and connection that validated their own identity and reality while abroad. It is important to note that although these conversations may not have focused on the topic of race all the time, the common thread of a shared reality of oppression did emerge.

### **Finding Home Abroad and Identity Exploration**

Through my interviews, I learned that one of the underlying activities found in finding home abroad included African American identity exploration. As African American collegians traveled to study in other countries, their level of self-exploration increased. A heightened level of awareness of and psychological commitment to the African American experience emerged. The following section presents examples of moments in which African American collegians demonstrated a pronounced level of awareness and emotional commitment to the African American experience abroad. Although the emotional connection to their racial identity may have been present prior to their international experience, by finding home abroad, African American collegians were able to examine their own identity as it related to others in a new environment. Moreover, they were able to make emotional and sometimes physical

commitments to their African American identity. Their emotional commitment was found throughout the joys and sorrows shared during their journeys. Their physical commitments ranged from changing their hairstyles, to their gravitation towards others who looked like them, to culturally affirming expressions like a nod. They found places and people who helped solidify this valuable emotional commitment. Through heightened exploration and reflection, perhaps triggered by the new location, a renewed commitment to examining their identity and the role it played in the context of that new country emerged.

Tatum (1997) notes that it is common for several levels of identity exploration to remain untouched during adolescence. However, she argues that “given the impact of dominant and subordinate status, it is not surprising that researchers have found that adolescents of color are more likely to be actively engaged in exploration of their racial or ethnic identity than are White adolescents” (p. 53). Given that research argues African Americans are more likely to explore their identity through the lens of race than Caucasian Americans in a domestic context (Phinney, 1990; Leadbeater & Way, 1996), it is likely that a similar framework applies when African American collegians find themselves in an international setting. Why do African Americans explore their own identity through the lens of race while abroad? The answer is likely in the fact that the world views race as an identifying characteristic, whether African American collegians are in United States or abroad. Tatum shares a similar view as to why African American youth are race-conscious and interested in exploring their identity through the lens of race: “Our self-perceptions are shaped by the messages that we

receive from those around us. And when young Black men and women enter adolescence, the message intensifies” (p. 53). Perhaps one of the moments when this message can be objectively deconstructed is when one physically removes him or herself from the constant noise and distraction of racism in America and studies abroad.

When I encouraged them to share a day or a moment they felt really good about being African American while studying abroad, study participants often reflected on their encounters with communities of African descent. I learned that their common efforts to find home abroad included trying to immerse themselves in familiar sounds, faces, and foods. Whether reaching out to other people of African ancestry while visiting France, Spain, or the Dominican Republic, African American collegians searched for a sense of inclusion and validation while abroad. Even if this inclusion manifested itself in the simple yet familiar African American upward toss of the head, a nod of brotherhood, connections with people throughout the African diaspora provided a sense visibility to a group of people often treated as invisible in their own country:

When you walk in public in the States, you definitely acknowledge people who are of the same race as you. It is kind of like a little nod, —what up? Sort of to let you know, no animosity there. It is like; I know what you are going through. At least better than this guy who is standing next to me. (Damon, personal communication, April 30, 2010)

Every African guy I saw, eyes would meet and we would kind of do this head nod. I would say like, “What is up?” (head nod), unless they were selling something, then I would be like “Peace out.” (laughs) (Jenetta, personal communication, June 3, 2010)

Jenetta and I laughed about giving universal African head nods to people of African descent while in Japan. Although amusing, the encounter was very significant

to students who often find themselves invisible in the United States as well as abroad. Sometimes finding home abroad translates into a simple head nod made by two people passing on the street in a foreign land. It affirms that African Americans are part of a unique global community, connected by a common African ancestry.

One of my friends said a Black woman could be at the same time hyper-visible and also invisible. But in South Africa, it was very amazing, because I was visible, actually not only visible but valuable, important, cherished by the people who were calling me sister, and I just met them for the first time. People who were telling me “Welcome home.” . . . I felt good, it made me feel more comfortable there than [the United States]... Not necessarily feeling important, but feeling valuable and recognized, it is not even something major, but just having my presence valuable because [in the United States] a lot times I feel like, “I don’t matter.” There I felt like I mattered and I was getting a homecoming from people who I never met before. I felt at home. (Constance, personal communication, May 11, 2010)

Like other students I interviewed, Jenetta, Constance, and Damon found home abroad through their encounters with non-Americans of African descent. Their presence abroad as African Americans was acknowledged and validated by others who made them feel like they were at home. Ironically, they felt their identities in some cases were more appreciated than in the United States. Connie’s statement, “I felt like I matter,” or Damon’s nod connected with “I know what you are going through,” reinforced the legitimacy of their realities abroad. The positive feelings of connectivity associated with finding home abroad leads some African American collegians to immerse themselves in new supportive communities.

The desire to find home abroad sometimes manifests itself through moments of “blending in,” where students connect to, or adopt, the identity of a local culture with which they strongly identify. By gravitating towards groups of African ancestry, African American collegians find advantage, and racial validation (Stevenson, 1994),

filling a social void not easily found. Students' gravitation towards communities of African descent played out a theme found in the literature: attributing home as the foundation of racial socialization. Although my research data does not include the adolescent experiences of African American collegians, Stevenson (2002) describes racial socialization as the coping mechanisms African American collegians develop as youngsters to survive in often racist or hostile situations. Initially introduced by parents in the home, and then by other influential individuals in the African American community, racial socialization is the foundation for interaction between African American youth. Stevenson notes in his research that these points of positive racial socializations are comprised of the following factors: "spiritual and religious coping, extended family caring, cultural pride reinforcement, and racism awareness teaching" (p. 88). Summarized as a validation of one's racial identity, for many African American collegians gravitation to a community of African ancestry is simply a default of racial socialization, prompted by the need for survival in an unfamiliar environment. African American collegians expressed their unplanned gravitation towards one another as if it was somehow expected; however, I interpret their gravitation towards one another, and toward people of African ancestry, as the manifestation of these early coping mechanisms. The following section exhibits how these coping mechanisms emerged through the actions of African American students abroad.

The close relationships established by African American collegians while abroad filled a familial void. As Todd recalled, "The three of us would always hang out together; we would talk about our college lifestyle. We were like boys, always trying to do things together on the weekend. We would go to the movies together...."

It all worked out that we were all cool.” Todd found opportunities to connect with other African American collegians both socially and academically:

It made it a much smoother transition because I had something to do. As opposed if it was strictly work and no play. They were kind of an outlet. Because we would be out late, sometimes past dark. I remember being in the lab like 13 hours, but when I would get home it was like “Hey, (laugh) how was your day?” It gave me the social aspect that I needed, that I really value as a social person, since a brotherhood that I feel is really important to anybody; nobody wants to be a person with no friends. (Todd, personal communication, June 5, 2010)

Todd, like many other African American collegians, found home through the establishment of family-like bonds, in this case a bond of “brotherhood with other African Americans studying in his program. The manifestation of brotherhood created a greatly needed social outlet and a common sense of appreciation, both for each other and for a new place: “We all liked the sense of home that we felt. We all agreed that it felt like home and for the first time in our lives we felt like this is where we belong. We should be there as opposed of the United States.”

The unique bonding of African American men provides another example of the unique intersectionality of race and gender. Todd described his relationship as brotherhood. This relationship exhibits a bond established through gender, and typically from a cultural perspective includes race. Arguably, brothers frequently share the same racial and ethnic identities.

On a program of approximately 60 students studying in South Africa, Anisha was one of six African Americans who joined the trip. During our conversation, she shared several moments in which she found home abroad, mentioning “family dinners and” huge home-cooked meals. She could have described these frequent gathering with her African American peers as simply “dinner or “potluck. However, she described these special moments abroad as occasions one might share with close

relatives. Anisha described the intimate relationship she developed with her African American peers abroad the way one would describe bonds with siblings” staying up late talking, braiding each other’s hair, shopping together, even sticking up for each other the way an older sibling would when someone else picked on their younger sibling. She noted that the African American males closest to her affectionately referred to her as “baby girl and “my sister. For some of the participants, part of finding home abroad was finding a new family abroad. They were accessing a group of people who could relate to their experience and who also genuinely cared about their feelings. Being able to reflect on things they saw or experienced with a group of people who empathized was very important. These de facto family members may not have always walked down the same path, but they were familiar with that path:

Maybe we are walking different paths, but we can see each other . . . . And just knowing that someone else is also walking, and not just standing, or ahead of you, or behind you, but there with you, changes it. And I think, out of anyone, if I was to talk to anyone about my study abroad experience it would be with the people I was with studying abroad, they would be the ones who most understand and most connect with me. Especially that group I have been talking about. They would get it. . . We would have family dinners, cooking in the kitchen, being loud. And having music playing, and not being able to hear each other sometimes, because we are yelling and laughing and cracking jokes. Having this huge home-cooked meal with each other on a pretty much consistent basis always helped. Or going to shop for hair products, with Tonisha and Corlisse. That helped. Or have Corlisse sit there [and] braid my hair at night. One night me and her twisted Rindu’s dreads. Or [Rindu] coming up and saying, “I’m trying to grow my hair out, what do I need to do?” Just cultural stuff like that. Or I remember [Rindu] and I would just stay up nights talking about music. Him bringing me into light about so much stuff; engaging me in such a way that I can also be a part of his experience. Being comfortable enough to be myself. To cry and to have him say he was going to kick someone’s ass. Just like familiar terms, like him calling me —baby girl all the time. Or Tico calling me, “You’re my sister.” (Anisha, personal communication, July 1, 2010)

Finding home abroad gave Anisha a new family and support network, as well as a space where she was “comfortable enough to be herself. She trusted her peers



enough to collaborate on creating a space where “cultural stuff,” meaning conversations or activities around race and identity, could flourish. This space was a place where Anisha could build her confidence and pride in being an African American woman every day:

I would say most of the days I went out with my girlfriends. Because I was kind of reserved back in South Africa before I started to hang out with them a lot. The second month in my program, being with a group of African-American woman who were proud in their skin, proud of their attitude, appearance and beliefs. (Anisha, personal communication, July 1, 2010)

Anisha also expressed the pleasure of being “encouraged and affirmed” by the two African American males in her group while abroad. She noted that they would say things like “Yes, you are beautiful, you are intelligent, you are more than your physical attributes.” Her statements revealed some of the most significant points that one can say about benefits of finding home abroad. Students were proud to be part of a community that supported their cultural identity. This is a refreshing view, contrasting with the feeling of being marginalized by a larger mainstream American community, which so often occurs in the United States.

As an African American woman, Anisha was able to celebrate the intersection of her race and gender with Tonisha and Corlisse. Together, the three went shopping for hair products, an activity and tradition unique to African American women. As young girls, these activities would typically take place with their mother, grandmother or aunts. They represent an important point where the African American combined traditions around gender, race, family are valued and celebrated.

Finding a community beyond one like Anisha’s surrogate family can also be a culturally rewarding way of finding home abroad for African American collegians. Although Kenneth connected to other African Americans on his trip abroad, he also

used the process of “blending into the environment” as a way of finding home:

I wanted to immerse myself on the culture, and to do that I tried to speak as little English as possible. I tried to put myself in the position that I could speak Spanish. Outside of that, I didn’t do anything to stand out. I was not doing the tourist things, I was not shopping and buying things, walking around with a lot of bags. One thing that I did when I was in Europe is to dress the way that they dressed. (Kenneth, personal communication, June 4, 2010)

By choosing to dress like the local Dominicans during his study abroad, Kenneth was able to “fit in.” By not appearing to be an outsider, he quickly became part of a community and was able to find home abroad:

It wasn’t difficult, because it was very similar to the way that I dress in the States. It didn’t demand much on me. I did not know how the men there dress, but when I was there I realized that they dress almost the same way that I dress. Then, if I had something that would make me stand out, I would not [wear it] for the simple thing that I appreciate the culture that was there and I wanted to fit in with them. (Kenneth, personal communication, June 4, 2010)

Todd also noted that he and his African American peers tried to “indulge ourselves in the culture...Men actually held hands that were friends. I wouldn’t say it made me more in touch with my feminine side, but me and some of the guys we did research with, we held hands when we were out there.” Aware that gender norms for African American men were different from East African men, Todd chose to participate in the socially acceptable cultural norms of his new environment:

“Probably wouldn’t do it here, but we tried to indulged ourselves in the culture. Because after the nine weeks is over, it is back to the U.S..” In an American setting, one might assume that two men walking together holding hands are gay. However, Tanzanian and Kenyan men who are friends and not necessarily gay traditionally hold hands as a sign of male solidarity and bonding. Todd’s adaptation to a new environment represents another example of the unique ways African American collegians can find home abroad. Their desire to find home abroad affords them with

the courage and or independence to immerse themselves in aspects of the African diaspora. Todd, similar to Kenneth was able to fit into the local Tanzanian culture by adopting the norms of the locals, and establish close ties with his African peers.

Holding hands with another African male is a symbolic form of solidarity that can only be equated to the relationships established with family or very close friends found at home in an American context.

### **Connecting with Locals**

Connecting with local communities that resemble family members and being identified as, or mistaken for, representatives of other countries are both experiences that many students clearly enjoyed. For them, finding home abroad was making a connection to diasporic cousins of African ancestry. Said Tyrelle, “I think the day when I ran into this guy who was like, ‘You look more Dominican than me,’ and we had a conversation, it was really an awesome feeling to be in that kind of environment.” Michelle found home through her connection to an Afro-Uruguayan community during her study abroad. Although they were a small population within the country she visited, she was able to socialize with them and learn about a culture “different from mainstream culture.” In addition to her calls home to her mother, the local community of African descent provided an important support mechanism in addressing racial challenges faced during her stay abroad: “I talked to them about it and we shared experiences that were very interesting. Because my experience as Black woman in [California] was very similar to them in Uruguay.” A good day for Michelle was “hanging out with the other Blacks in Uruguay.”:

It was amazing. I mean I learned, as I started hanging out more and more with them, they were like. “You seem like one of us.” I learned their dances. There’s a dance they have called candomblé. It’s basically when they were in shakes. I learned how to do that. I even took drum lessons. It was interesting

how much the African culture is still there. And so I would go to a lot of the drumming things. I would hang out at their house. Their parents would invite me over all the time. They would cook for me. It made me feel like home. Even though I wasn't home with my family, I felt like I made another family. (Michelle, personal communication, May 8, 2010)

Being African American abroad can be emotionally challenging; moreover, encountering other people of African ancestry while abroad presents a new and somewhat unfamiliar experience. Although students often expressed joy in the encounter, some noted that they were not sure how to respond to something they had never experienced before. Some shared being caught off-guard by moments of engagement with people of African descent around the world. In other words, they were sometimes unexpectedly finding home abroad with people who appeared ethnically familiar yet presented themselves in a completely alien setting.

While shopping in a store selling hip-hop style clothing in the Harajuku district of Tokyo, Japan, Jenetta, a biracial African American collegian, was challenged with “trying to process the feelings associated with discovering people of African descent in a context she wasn't expecting. Overwhelmed by an African store owner who approached her and greeted her in English, she struggled to make sense of it all:

I saw some Africans there. Some of them had some stores and stuff. It was really a trip to me. Because, I would go in to the store with Baby Phat [an American owned clothing brand popular with African American and urban youth] and all this other stuff. I would go in, and one of the Africans would be talking to someone in Japanese. Then he would see me and he would say, “Hi, sistah” (laughs). And I was like, “Hey bro.” (laughs) (Jenetta, personal communication, June 3, 2010)

Jenetta was reluctant to initiate a conversation or interact with the Africans she encountered while in Japan. Although their features resembled those she might encounter in the United States, the overall experiences were unexpected:

It was a trip. I think was just trying to process it... There is this African guy, speaking Japanese to this one person, and selling Baby Phat at almost the same

price that New York would sell it. I think it was more to a cultural shock moment, because it was funny. (Jenetta, personal communication, June 3, 2010)

Part of finding home abroad is connecting to individuals who look like you. In other words, finding home abroad is also linked to meeting people who frequently resemble folks from your hometown or community, perhaps sharing the same complexion, hair style, or clothing. Whether they spoke the same language didn't seem to hinder students from making connections. Susanna, who studied abroad in the Middle East, was able to find home abroad by connecting to the local community through blending in as well:

Being a person of color in the Middle East was definitely an advantage as far as "blending in" than it was for my Caucasian friends. While abroad, I often resemble the natives of that particular country. This has been true in Dubai, Oman, Jordan, and Bahrain. In fact, I went to a market in Dubai where I encountered a number of Africans. I approached a Kenyan woman's booth to admire the fabrics she was selling and she said to me, "Jambo!" Jambo is the Swahili word for hello. It turns out Jambo is the only word I know in Swahili and so I responded with the same word. From my accent she could tell that I was in fact not Kenyan. My hair was twisted in a dreadlocked style and I was the same complexion as she. When I am abroad it is never obvious that I am American until people hear my accent. This has helped me to "blend in" at local markets, airports, and large crowds, which were atmospheres my White counterparts often felt uncomfortable in because they did not look like everyone else. I have to say, it was refreshing to be in a country where people of color were the majority. It was a wonderful experience to be in a place where it was not unusual to see Black people in positions of power, attending universities, and just running a county in general. In America I am a minority, but when I go abroad I am a part of the majority. For me, it was encouraging to finally be in the majority; nobody noticed that I was different until they heard my American accent, which by the way, I am proud of. (Susanna, personal communication, April 3, 2010)

While studying in Jordan, Susanna once took a taxi ride. She spoke Arabic to the cab driver the entire time. The driver kept looking at her curiously through his rearview mirror. Eventually the driver asked Susanna in Arabic, "Are you from Sudan, Latin America, Jordan, where are you from?" Susanna responded that she was from

America:

I enjoyed the confused look on his face. I didn't feel like he was staring at me because I was Black or American. He stared because I looked like him, I spoke his language, but there was something unique about me he could not put his finger on. I appreciated that he'd asked me who I was rather than assume and then complimented me on my proficient Arabic accent (Susanna, personal communication, April 3, 2010)

Susanna's experience represents another unique moment of assimilation, which often brings a sense of satisfaction and ownership to a study abroad experience for African American collegians.

### **Trying to Find Home Abroad Through Academic Coursework**

Aside from creating a surrogate family, the desire to acquire additional knowledge about one's cultural identity or African ancestry is another way of finding home abroad. Uncovering facts about the contributions of people of African ancestry validates a student's identity, giving her further insight into herself as well as the world at large. When possible, students may use course assignments as an opportunity to expand exploration into a world often eliminated from the curriculum. The frustration with being marginalized within the curriculum can be viewed as another motivation for finding home abroad. Throughout my conversations, students shared moments during which discussions around race arose, and in almost all cases they encountered disappointment. In some cases, facilitators avoided the topic completely or quickly moved onto something else.

While studying abroad in South Africa, Connie became frustrated when one faculty member appeared to be avoiding a discussion of race as part of the course. As African American students try to find home abroad, the need for intellectual engagement around race and identity is frequently desired. The absence of that cultural

inclusion proved difficult for Connie as she described what I interpret as her desire to find home abroad through academic coursework.

In addition to not creating a culturally inclusive learning environment, Connie's professor excused White students from participating in daily debriefing discussions. The professor's actions contributed to devaluing Connie's identity. The debriefing discussions were an important time at the end of the day during which students could deconstruct, reflect, and expand on their experiences as a group. However, the nature of the topics was something that the White students in the group chose to avoid. The complained about being obligated to participate in the debriefings to the professor.

Connie recalled, "I was just very upset with this. I would say, 'I didn't go to South Africa to not participate in the debriefing and discussions or have someone delegitimize the experience for me.'" Connie shared that when she approached her professor about the subject, she received a "non-response." The White students in Connie's group didn't want to discuss the topic of race: "They wanted to go to the museums, to the clubs especially, things in that nature. But they did not want to talk about Apartheid, race, or anything in South Africa." Connie's comments about being delegitimized underline the frustration African American student face when finding home is absent from the curriculum abroad.

In an effort to "find home abroad," Pamela did independent research on the African influence in Spain, with the intent of presenting this research to her class. Her choice of research topic exhibits another way of finding a cultural connection to home while abroad. This effort helped reinforce Pamela's sense of African American identity and anchored her connection to a new country and culture. Although she mentioned her frustration with the fact that she wasn't able to present to her class, apparently due to

class management issues and time constraints, she was glad to learn the information.

During our conversation, Pamela was delighted about sharing her pride in her newly acquired knowledge of African contributions to civilization in Spain:

I took a Spanish history class. We went over the greatness of the Spanish Empire. The one thing they didn't really talk about was the slave trade. They talked about the Muslims that were there. But then it was very brief stuff. I felt like that they could have talked about the huge African influence on Spain. You see it in the buildings and in the art. The fact that I didn't see it in the classes, at least not the ones that I was in, that's cool, but we did have some contributions here. Talk about it more. That would be nice. (Pamela, personal communication, May 6, 2010)

The need to explore one's identity through the lens of race is often important to African American collegians abroad. Whether the connection is expected or unexpected, the encounter provides an opportunity for affirmation. Another student, Tyrelle, shared his disappointment with a guide during his study abroad. The first day he arrived in Santo Domingo with a group of American students, he toured the city. He acknowledged the fact that the history of slavery in the Dominican Republic was mentioned during the tour. However, he felt it was too brief to be appreciated: "I feel that the message got lost." He felt to help relieve "tension in the air" and alleviate White student discomfort, the tour guides rushed through the section of the tour referring to slavery in the Dominican Republic. The three African American students wanted to have a conversation and learn more. Instead, the tour guides chose to quickly move the class forward to another location:

It was brief, I believe, because one of the buildings that we were in front of, it was a holding center, and some people were uncomfortable talking about slavery at that juncture. It was already hot outside, but I got the impression that the tour guides felt a little tension in the air and decided to move not only the conversation but the group to another place. I am the type of person who walks



into a room and people get tense. So feeling the tension in the room is not foreign to me. Whether it is in a room, or in an open space, it is something I am cognizant of and saw that. (Tyrelle, personal communication, June 8, 2010)

The opportunity to find home abroad or learn about the African influence on the Dominican Republic was a welcome moment for Tyrelle. However, he noticed the discomfort of the White students in the group with the topic:

Well, the guide was White as well. Granted, she has lived in the Dominican Republic for years. But I am sure because of how comfortable she is, even if it was an instance when a family member comes to visit her and saw how comfortable she is with the Dominican population, that might be uncomfortable. That is the tension that I was mentioning before, she probably feels too. That was probably why, maybe even if they were interested, she knew this was a topic that was potentially incendiary. So let's keep it moving. (Tyrelle, personal communication, June 8, 2010)

Race avoidance is an interesting theme that many students brought up when reflecting on their journeys. Finding home abroad is about addressing race and identity of African American collegians in the learning experience. For many of them, moments emerged when race or topics of oppression were glazed over in the academic experience by faculty or guides. There were opportunities presented to discuss the dynamics of race and power, yet they were avoided. In colonized countries like the United States that are struggling to heal from the tragic history of slavery, the settings are ripe for rich discussion. Nevertheless, potentially incendiary topics are marginalized, along with the students seeking answers, and important teachable moments are lost.

Another example of how finding home abroad emerges in the academic coursework of African American collegians was shared by Lorna. While studying abroad in London, Lorna visited one of the city's more prominent museums with her class and was upset by the lack of attention given to the African exhibits by the

museum's curators. She felt that the African exhibits were marginalized by their limited content and unfavorable locations in the museum. She took it personally because she identified as part of the African diaspora:

A lot of the Black British history in London is kind of pushed to the background. I might misquote the name, but it is one of the main British museums in London, you go in there, and the way that they separate Egypt, being this big exhibit, and then they put Ethiopia and Western Africa in the basement in these two little rooms. For me, just as a person coming from the diaspora, as a descendant of the diaspora, I was upset, even though technically it wasn't my direct nationality's history. So I was a bit uncomfortable sometimes. I went to a lot of museums of Black British history in London, and I was upset about the kind of attention. It wasn't given a lot of attention. And I think it should be given more. They have their Black History Month. I believe it is in October. Okay we have our Black History Month. But other than that, it wasn't made a big deal of. And even during Black History Month, it still wasn't made a big deal of. So I had some uncomfortable situations where I would walk into a museum and I was like, "I can't believe this. Where was the diversity? They could do a better job." That is how I feel. (Lorna, personal communication, April 10, 2010)

Whether from dispersal through slavery, or dispersal through migration and exploration, people of African descent can be found in virtually every part of the planet. Students enjoyed making these connections to their peers of African descent while studying abroad. It is important to note that the quest for these culturally empowering encounters did align with theories claiming that African American students' oppositional stance to learning is based on a fear of "acting white" (Fordam & Ogbu, 1986). At no point did they mention or elude to disengaging from academic excellence as a method of resisting or rejecting stereotypically positive views associated with White student performance. However, the positive academic attitudes shared by African American collegians while studying abroad reflected the encouragement and support encountered through finding home abroad. The positive experiences associated with finding home abroad clearly aided in improved student

retention, engagement, and academic success before, during, and after their overseas experiences.

Although it may be surprising to find that students made these connections, it is more interesting to learn that the majority of these students made these connections independently of their study abroad facilitator or program. Just as race and class play roles in the development of social capital (Stanton-Salazar, 1997), they also played a part in establishing social networks for students studying abroad. The absence of supportive leaders, who were cognizant of students' identities, and empathetic to their circumstances, presented unique challenges in the learning process abroad. Moreover, how a student adapted to that absence of guides has even greater significance. This is where "finding home abroad" emerged as a unique common theme among numerous African American students. African American collegians experience a different reality of the world (Perry et al., 2004). They therefore reflected on their time abroad in a unique manner. The guided reflection of African American collegians is essential to inclusive learning before, during, and after their study abroad.

### **Culturally Responsive, Guided Reflection**

Odysseus, who had been traveling the world away from his homeland for twenty years, returned home to Ithaca with an unfamiliarity. He stirred and awoke from sleep in the land of his fathers, but he knew not his whereabouts. Ithaca showed to him an unaccustomed face; he did not recognize the pathways stretching into the distance, the quiet bays, the crags and precipices. He rose to his feet and stood staring at what was his own land, crying mournfully: "Alas! And now where on earth am I? What do I here myself?" (Homer, 1991, p.187)

Odysseus' desire to find someone capable of facilitating the process of reflection and reintroduction to his home of Ithaca parallels the needs of African American collegians. "What do I here myself?" resembles the voices of African

American collegians in their isolation upon returning from studying abroad. They, like Odysseus, longed for a guide who could help them understand the home they left behind and how they could reconnect to it. This section focuses on the significance of culturally relevant guided reflection and what it means to African American collegians. Reentering with no guidance often means that students' perspectives on studying abroad become condensed or encapsulated (Martin & Harrell, 2004). Without a mechanism available to expand their thoughts related to studying abroad through the lens of race and identity, African American collegians are missing an important piece in their own identity development and academic growth. Conversely, students afforded with the opportunity to participate in discussions that foster personal awareness and critical reflection around their racial identity make important developmental strides (Stewart, 1995).

“Once we got back, there wasn't time for that [a debriefing and guided reflection]. It was time to go back to class, time to go back to writing your papers. This [interview] was my opportunity to look back and talk about what happened.” –Tyrelle, African American male who studied in the Dominican Republic.

“As soon as I came back, I went home and I started normal life. My parents are not educated; they were more interested in the African art that I brought back. I never got a real chance to display my research, but it is something that I have very close to my heart.” –Todd, (a senior attending a large public university).

For African American collegians, the physical return to the home country is an important point for reflection after studying abroad. Although some reflection took place throughout the study abroad, African American students shared that their reflection upon reentering the United States was challenging in several ways. They experienced reverse culture shock, mixed feelings about their return, depression, or a social disconnect. They expressed frustration with not being able to find people who

could relate specifically to the unique nature of the African American experience abroad. They had difficulty finding people with global maturity who could comfortably discuss their experiences, helping the students make sense of what they had recently encountered in another country.

Reflection clearly mattered to each student's personal and academic development. All of the students I interviewed were able to reflect independently on their study abroad. Although journaling and blogging were mentioned as a reflective activities adopted by several participants once they returned home, I suggest that that type of reflection is more a one-sided conversation, leaving little room for expanded dialogue. When available, guided reflection in the form of group debriefings, panel discussions, or general conversations facilitated by faculty or program coordinators allowed the students to explore their international experiences in a manner not attainable by themselves. The students noted that because these types reflections were more general, targeting the entire group's perspectives, specific conversations related to race or being African American were often overlooked or were not feasible. In this section, I explore the views of African American collegians towards culturally responsive, guided discussions and how those highly focused discussions helped facilitate their reentry.

### **What Is Reflection?**

Dewey (1933) established the idea that we learn from what we experience through the process of reflection. Our ability to reflect on previous experiences allows us to solve problems we encounter in the future. The term "reflection" derives from the Latin word *reflectere*, meaning to bend back. Mirrors bend or cast back images, allowing the

viewer to clearly see themselves. Experiential and practice-based learning situations provide students with valuable opportunities evaluate their perceptions of the world and activities. Viewed as an on-going process, reflection takes place during and after the experience (Kemmis, 1985; Collen, 1996). Yet it is both the process and the end result. As students' interpretation of their experiences evolves they are able to develop a greater sense of meaning around those experiences (Mezirow, 1990). They are then able to use those interpretations of their experiences to make decisions. "Reflection enables us to correct distortions in our beliefs and errors in problem solving" (Mezirow, 1990, p.1). Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) support a similar notion, framing reflection as those intellectual activities where students are engaged to —explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations (p. 19). Dewey (1933) notes reflection is the process of "assessing the grounds of one's beliefs." (p.9). It is important to note that reflection does not always occur in isolation. Knights (1985) argues that reflection does not take place in a vacuum, but it occurs as an action, impacted by external forces or other people. "Without an appropriate reflector, it cannot occur at all" (Knights, 1985, p. 85). The learning is not in the experience alone but in the reflection of that experience.

In the context of study abroad, students use moments of reflection to create bridges between international encounters and what they know about themselves and the surrounding world. Reflection opens doors for students to learn from their experiences by engaging in contemplation of the mental images and encounters captured while they studied abroad. The African American students I interviewed returned to the U.S. and began new chapters in their lives. Whether their experience

was short-term, for a few weeks or long-term up to a year, they noted that they were transformed emotionally, socially, and academically by their journeys to foreign lands. For many of those collegians, the return home brought on a series of emotions and perspectives worthy of thoughtful reflection.

Borrowing from Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985), study abroad reflection is framed in three ways: First, returning to experience, where students remember locations and significant events that transpired during their experience abroad. Second, attending to feelings, where students connect with emotions or feelings associated with their experiences abroad. Students find moments examine the empowering feelings as well as emotions that were barriers to their success. Third, evaluating experience, where students can re-evaluate their experience in reference to their original intent studying abroad. They take time to re-examine their existing level of knowledge, which in many cases includes; their view of the world, linguistic ability, and cultural understanding. This aspect of reflection addresses how their experience abroad is integrated academically, personally, and professionally into their everyday lives.

Similarly, Surbeck, Han, and Moyer (1991), identify three types of stimuli that shape student reflection: first, moments when students were encouraged to explore their feelings around what they learned or experienced during their study abroad or upon their return home; second, moments of elaborating on or comparing their reactions or experiences to others while taking into consideration their own values and identities; and third, contemplation, where the reflective focus was placed on their personal perspectives, goals, attitudes, challenges, learning, and/or social barriers that

emerged. Surbeck et al. (1991) note that the role of the facilitator in providing instruction or opportunities for reflection also influences the level of contemplation achieved through reflection. Keeping the role of the facilitator in mind, Surbeck et al. (1991) and Boud, et al. (1985) inform how I view the process of reflection in this research.

I found that trust and safety were essential factors in allowing students to open up and freely share their perspectives. Hatton and Smith (1995) note that creating a safe environment where participants are comfortable taking risks in the process of reflection is also valuable in encouraging meaningful discussion. I thus began my conversations by taking into careful consideration the unique reentry of African American collegians, since a safe space was important to culturally responsive, guided reflection.

### **Unique Reentry**

“Intercultural reentry has been defined as the process of reintegration into primary home contexts after an intercultural sojourn (an intensive and extended visit into cultural contexts different from those in which one was socialized)” (Martin & Harrell, 2004, p. 310). For African American collegians returning home to the United States after studying abroad, reentry creates a unique set of emotions and encounters. Although their international experiences might have ended several months or even years prior, they still struggled to find others who understood the significance of their journeys and were capable of assisting them in deconstructing their new global perspectives and identities. Making sense of a study abroad experience through the lens of race required a culturally competent and empathetic discussion.



Throughout our conversations, students discussed with me their difficulty or apprehension in sharing their study abroad experiences with others. Although many of their White peers had studied abroad, these African American collegians had become part of a global community, leading to a new and unique understanding of themselves and the world. Many of their African American friends and family also had contrasting views of the world, often limited by the social and economic boundaries of their immediate communities. This section uses the voices of African American collegians to exhibit their unique reentry experiences and the challenges associated with returning home.

“Reentry itself is a deeply personal experience, and a cultural [one] as well” (Storti, 2001, p. xx). Students often return to the United States with a new vision of themselves, their home country, and the world. However, for African American collegians, a study abroad experience can be “tucked away in the mind of the sojourner, and the opportunity is lost to integrate the personal growth and professional knowledge into the sojourner’s current life” (Martin & Harrell, 2004, p. 311). One of the greatest challenges African American collegians shared upon returning from studying abroad was finding someone to talk with about their recent international experiences. Several students acknowledged that I was the only person they had spoken with in any considerable depth about their study abroad. Since the overall percentage of African American collegians who study abroad remains low, students found it difficult to connect with their African American peers who had not acquired global experiences. Upon returning the United States, African American collegians generally felt disconnected from their peers who had not been abroad. Moreover, they

found it difficult to share the challenges associated with being African American abroad. Jenetta, who studied in Japan, said a lot people asked her about her trip and if she enjoyed being in Japan. She decided not to share the negative aspects of her study abroad with others: “I don’t think people want to hear about the pressure or the negative parts.... People usually only want to know about the fun part..” (Jenetta, personal communication, June 3, 2010).

Similarly, Michelle, who studied abroad in Uruguay, made it a point to “pretty much only talk about the good experiences,” purposely leaving “out the not so good parts.” She found difficulty in talking with her friends about her study abroad: “Some of my friends were interested at first, but not so much afterwards. I usually relate things to my experiences abroad, and my friends seemed to be annoyed” (Michelle, personal communication, May 8, 2010). She even posted some photos of her adventures abroad on her MySpace page as a way of sharing her journey with others. Posting photos online was another demonstration of her effort to connect with others about her travels. She felt that her friends didn’t want to hear about her study abroad. Amongst Michelle’s immediate group of friends, she was the only one who had the opportunity to study abroad, which Michelle felt was a factor in their disinterest:

Some of my friends were interested at first. But then when I kept talking about it, I think they were getting over it. Like, okay do we have to hear about this? A lot of things in our conversations, I would relate it back to my experiences in Uruguay, and they would be like okay (rolled eyes)– (Michelle, personal communication, May 8, 2010).

Like most people who travel abroad, I found that African American students were excited about sharing highlights of their global adventures with others. However, the same students disclosed struggles in finding those who were interested or were

prepared for deep discussion. Students like Todd, who studied for a summer in East Africa, told the story of how “exhausting” it was to try to explain his study abroad to others with a limited global perspective. He grew worn out trying to explain the significance of his travel abroad to his friends. He became isolated and frustrated by the fact that few of his peers or family members could relate to the significance of his journey. None of the students in his immediate peer group had ever experienced anything remotely close to what Todd had encountered while studying abroad. It was apparent that this social disconnect around study abroad concerned him:

In my social circle, a lot of people are not interested in what I’m interested in. Like “Oh, you went to Africa, how it was?” I have run into a lot people and they are like “You went to Africa? I bet you were very hot over there?” I am like, “Dude Africa is a huge continent like the United States.” Some people are stuck in their own ignorance. It is exhausting. Some of my friends back home was like, “You went to Africa?” [expression of shock]. (Todd, personal communication, June 5, 2010)

Todd shared his disappointment with the fact that his friends had no frame of reference for understanding what he had experienced while studying abroad. Although his peers might have shared the same socio-economic status or grown up in the same urban neighborhood, Todd’s study abroad had opened new doors of global understanding that shifted his level of social capital. For Todd, like other African American collegians who studied abroad, the acquisition of new forms of social and cultural capital created connections to one world but also created distance from others. There were several friends that Todd attempted to talk with about his study abroad, but he noted that they were not prepared to listen:

Me and my brother in our social circle from high school, we are the only ones who went to college. My best friend Darius, he was always encouraging, he was like, “You went to Africa, is it nice man?” He is on a different life path. He has a girlfriend who has two kids and the third by him. So I was over there,

we were talking, and he was like, “You come from Africa? How was it?” My other homeboy, he is actually in jail now, he was like, “You went to Africa? I bet you were hot as a motherfucker over there.” I was trying to explain to him that there are different climates in Africa. It was actually very nice it was tropical, and as comfortable as in Hawaii. He didn’t want to hear because he was stuck in his own mindset. They already have these pre-conceived ideas about Africa that are not true.... How I will break down this foundation they have built about Africa that has been taught to them years and years about these stereotypes? And then my experience has been different. They don’t want to hear, because they are already stuck in their ways. (Todd personal communication, June 5, 2010)

Todd said he felt that the preexisting global stereotypes held by his friends from his neighborhood, and others on campus, prevented him from talking to people about his experience abroad. It considerably hindered him from sharing his journey with those who were closest to him and created a feeling of isolation, ultimately causing him to internalize his study abroad experience:

I tried to explain, and they didn’t want to hear.... On campus I am pretty much the only science major that I know. Everybody was like, “You went to Africa, is it great? What did you do?” Then when I started giving them the breakdown, [that] I did research on natural product, they don’t have much interest because they want to hear more about the social aspect. (Todd personal communication, June 5, 2010)

Ayana shared that she was glad to have the opportunity to travel abroad but faced challenges reconnecting to her friends as well: “Most of my friends don’t have international experience. I mean they ask little questions here and there, but I feel that they can’t really relate. If they ask, I tell them, if they don’t ask, it is fine too” (Ayana, personal communication, May 1, 2010).

Lorna found creative ways of connecting to those who could relate to her experience through email and Facebook. Yet she grew distant from her friends who were lacking a strong global perspective:

I would talk to my friends, and I did a lot of writing in Spain in my journal, but I would talk to my girlfriends. I had Black female friends that were studying abroad in Argentina, Cuba, and South Africa, and we all talked to each other via Internet and shared our experiences. Especially my friend in Argentina who had studied abroad in Spain, she knew exactly what I was going through.... It is so difficult to talk to people about your study abroad experience. If they don't have a study abroad experience, it is so difficult. I feel that I have a new set of friends now. First of all, nobody understands why I didn't want to come back to the United States. If I didn't have to come back to New York to finish my classes, if my classes could be offered abroad, I would not have come back to the United States. (Lorna, personal communication, April 10, 2010)

Sierra specifically struggled with sharing her perspective on being abroad with others because of their limited views of diversity and social justice:

When I came back then, which was this last spring, I was exactly the opposite. I was very much in my shell... I don't like to talk about my experience, because I get offended very easily by other people. I had a girl the other day, we were talking about study abroad and she was like:, "There is lot poverty over there?" This was the first question she asked. I said, "Yes." She said, "This is why it was interesting, right?" Like India was interesting because there is a lot of poverty. I said, "No I think there is a lot of poverty in America." She was like, "Okay." (Sierra, personal communication, March 26, 2010)

In contrast to White students who might have access to a larger network of family, friends, and same-race faculty who have traveled abroad, the African American collegians I have spoken with found themselves at a disadvantage when they tried locating people who could relate to their experiences from their cultural perspective. In other words, the students felt that there wasn't anyone immediately available who understood the African American experience abroad.

Our conversations led me to the conclusion that taking time to reflect was an important part of the study abroad experience for African American collegians. In addition, having someone to share reflections of their journey with was also important. Ultimately, reflection transforms students while providing them with greater meaning behind their experiences (Mezirow 1990; Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985). Bandura's

(1977) theory of social learning supports the notion that social interaction through sharing aids in the process of reflection. He argues that student's experiences have a lasting impact on them. They also learn by observing or imitating others. I argue that they also learn from others who see the world through a similar lens. By engaging in rich conversations, allowing them to share their perspectives, students are able to attain greater levels of understanding. Through the process of reflection, socialization and continuous reciprocal interaction, they are able to construct meaning (Bandura, 1977).

Yet several students noted that sharing their stories with others presented a set of challenges they were not prepared to address. One of the immediate concerns that several students alluded to was being able to comfortably share the joys and challenges of being abroad with someone who had never been abroad, without sounding like they were boasting about their global adventures. One student, Damon, said that upon returning home, his relationships with others had a new expectation of "global maturity". He wanted to associate with others who were globally aware and realized communities existed beyond the borders of the United States. When Sierra returned, she only associated with her friends who had studied abroad. Her reentry led to a distaste in the "American lifestyle.." (Sierra, personal communication, March 26, 2010). She felt like she didn't know where she "fit in" and so decided to embark on another study abroad course in India: "So when I came back, it was pretty much stick to the study abroad group. We would constantly share stories, recapture stories, share pictures and a lot dialogue.... I wasn't feeling the American lifestyle... I was ready to go again.." (Sierra, personal communication, March 26, 2010). All of the students

noted upon their return, they were different, and so were the places back home that they had left. They returned to communities that had changed. People had moved on with their lives while they were abroad. And their views of those communities had changed as well. Yet who was around to reintroduce them to the home they had left behind? Although researchers argue that the process of sharing experiences with others in itself can be empowering (Stewart, 1995; Greene, 1988, 2001; Kershaw 1990, 1992), this particular group of students felt that establishing connections to people possessing understanding of the unique travel and reentry experiences of African American collegians was difficult.

Pamela, who studied in Spain, had no one to help her process her experiences when she returned. She shared that having someone who was sensitive to her ethnicity and cultural interests would have been an important addition to her study abroad experience as well as her return:

I think it would be great, just because you're so clueless. I'll admit I'm not super up on African history. Just learning about the influences we do have around the world. It's nice. I had no idea. Spanish history, I learned that Africa had a lot influence on Spain, so it was something great to know because I was clueless about that, and when you learn about this kind of things suddenly you become more interested about things on the trip. I was very motivated to research about that. It makes the history feel a lot more complete, I felt more connected with it. (Pamela, personal communication, May 6, 2010)

Feeling “a lot more complete” and “connected” to what she was experiencing abroad wasn't something Pamela could share with others upon her return. She found a significant cultural connection abroad, which in turn created a sense of completion in her identity. However, she lacked a forum in which to expand upon her thoughts through in-depth discussion. Pamela found the conversations she and I had invaluable in helping deconstruct her study abroad. She noted, “While we are talking, I am

realizing things that I did not think about before.” Her return to the United States left little room for reflection on her study abroad:

It’s crazy, because once I came back, you’re back to the hustle and bustle. I never really did get the chance to sit down and just really reflect and really think about the things that I learned and how exactly it’s changed me. Because I can say abstractly how things are. But sitting down and pinpointing things, I haven’t really had the chance to do. (Pamela, personal communication, May 6, 2010).

Lorna had difficulty connecting with her friends who had not studied abroad as well. They had trouble relating to her experiences abroad:

I just feel I foster [fair] better having those different cultural experiences abroad versus being back in America. So I didn’t want to come home. I wanted to stay, and all my friends who didn’t study abroad were saying, “What is wrong with you? You are an American, why do you want to stay? I don’t get it.” (Lorna, personal communication, April 10, 2010)

Finding people who “get it,” and are able to help deconstruct international experiences through the lens of race is important to African American collegians returning from studying abroad. Kenneth shared “I have talked to friends who ask how my trip has been, and I bring up a brief explanation of what this trip has been”. However, he had not engaged in any in depth discussion about his study abroad.

Having conversations with me about race and study abroad motivated the students to think more about the implications of their journeys while reflecting on their own identities. I noticed that it was difficult for a few of the students to express what they experienced abroad, because they had not had any previous opportunity to deconstruct their race or identity in a global context. Some students simply didn’t have the ability to express their feelings in a concise manner. This barrier wasn’t a negative reflection on their inability to communicate, but rather an indication of their limited access to rich conversations around the topic of race. This point reinforced my belief



that these culturally relevant, guided conversations were invaluable pieces in African American student development and reflection on study abroad. Our culturally relevant discussions provided students with a rare forum in which to be heard, while exploring deeper meaning behind their experiences.

Some students were aware of their initial inability to proficiently discuss race and were clearly frustrated by it. After a short time, with some encouragement, they were able to connect words to their emotions, and conversations flowed. Tyrelle said, “It is kind of frustrating, because I know what it is that I mean, but it is difficult for me to express.” My patience in being there to help the students deconstruct their experiences through conversation helped validate their realities and helped them reflect. By saying things like, “Work it out, because you are telling me that there was a feeling, so tell me what the feeling is” or “I hear what you are saying, I feel that,” I was giving students permission to dig deeper into their own perspectives and revisit feelings that may have been “tucked away” (Martin & Harrell, 2004, p. 311). The conversations opened up a door for African American students to express how they really felt about studying abroad while knowing that their identities mattered.

Tyrelle shared, “This conversation has been absolutely beneficial for me to even think about the things that made me uncomfortable and the conversations that I had..” His previous conversations were limited to showing a few photos to friends.

Damon echoed the same sentiment, sharing that his prior conversations had not touched on race and identity:

There are a very small number of people who know my personal struggle in Ghana. But I haven’t talked about my racial identity in Ghana, because I was mostly talking to White students or my African professor. It has been very

helpful to hear your perspective. This conversation has been great and really has helped me. (Damon, personal communication, April 30, 2010)

Jenetta said, “It really helped me process how I identify myself verses just going to the country. So it helped a lot” (Jenetta, personal communication, June 3, 2010). Jenetta’s comment was important, because it meant that she realized that studying abroad was about more than simply traveling to another country. Traveling abroad had changed her identity and her view of the world. Through our conversations, she was able to gain a better understanding of her own identity as an African American in a global context.

Similarly, Todd was able share that his conversation with me provided closure for his study abroad experience. When asked about how Todd felt about our conversation, he made a statement reflecting his level of inspiration:

This experience was a motivation for me; it has inspired me more to be the change that I want to see in society. If I can’t change the road, at least I can change myself to be better, so I can have a better outcome to my children like my dad did for me. For me go to Africa and see that professors and their motivation, it has inspired me to be in a position to give back. I want to do research that can help my community. (Todd, personal communication, June 5, 2010)

The African American collegians I spoke with were eager to engage in conversations surrounding topics like race or identity during and after their study abroad. Susanna said, “Advisors should require that all students returning from international trips undergo a debriefing session to help them process their experiences.” She emphasized that she wrote in her journal throughout her trip, because “it helps students to live in the moment and reflect on what is happening in their new environment.” Yet she stressed that there was still a strong need for guided reflection and dialogue:

As a student, I feel like roundtable discussion is a part of cultural exchange; some discussions might even take place on a city bus. Anytime an exchange student is presented with the opportunity to share another perspective of his or her culture, especially one that does not perpetuate the negative stereotypes, that student should take advantage of it. So, I do not recommend that students pass up an opportunity to engage in political discussion unless it violates the laws of that country. However, the classroom and the campus should be our intellectual playground, and we shouldn't be discouraged from using it. (Susanna, personal communication, April 3, 2010)

Culturally responsive, guided reflection helps students open doors to emotions and thoughts they may not have previously considered or had time to explore. Such reflection is about more than helping African American collegians feel good about their experiences abroad; it is also about providing an emotional release of buried feelings vis a vis their global adventures. Culturally responsive, guided reflection is a validation of a student's identity and a confirmation of the unique reality reflected through their culture. Although most students engage in some sort of internal dialogue about their study abroad, culturally responsive, guided reflection inspires students' critical thought while also encouraging their voice be included in the discussion.

### **Culturally Responsive Discussion Verses Student Advising**

One might question how culturally responsive, guided reflection is different from general student advising. Bloom and Martin (2002) discuss the strategy of appreciative inquiry (AI) in student advising by adopting the Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny phases. AI is an organizational development tool, focusing on asking students a series of questions to heighten their potential for success. Bloom and Martin note, "These stages can be applied to the process of student reflection" (p. 1). When engaging students in reflection, they suggest strategies such as asking them open-ended, positive questions about their experiences and being there for them as

they readjust and process their experiences abroad. Bloom and Martin list items that are clearly important to include when engaging all students. However, their suggestions do not mention consideration of the unique cultural nuances and identities of students that require culturally competent advisors. I have found that some of the more difficult or negative experiences African American students encounter while abroad are just as important to discuss.

The difference in adopting a strategy that creates a space for culturally responsive, guided reflection is that it allows students to become more attentive to their thinking through the lens of their own cultural or racial identity. This method takes into consideration the individual student and her unique perspective on the world through the lens of race while also positioning her at the center of the discussion. By helping African American collegians to develop a heightened sense of self-awareness, culturally responsive mentors are guiding them towards meta-cognitive maturity. In other words, mentors are giving students a forum in which to think while helping them articulate how they feel about their own learning.

Meta-cognition represents the awareness of the psychological processes involved in student perceptions, memories, thinking, and learning (Bostrom & Lassen, 2006). It is the higher order of thinking that facilitates cognitive activities such as analyzing, assessing, and reflecting on decisions and actions taken throughout a study abroad experience. Meta-cognition also enables more effective learning. Learners who are able to accurately gauge their own understanding of a topic are more likely to make progress in the learning experience. The specific aspect of meta-cognition enhanced through culturally responsive, guided reflection is the development of self-

knowledge. Students are prompted to reflect on their abilities, motivations, and beliefs related to their learning experiences—in this case, study abroad (Pintrich, 2002).

When students are guided to reflect on moments that either supported or hampered their learning, they improve their meta-cognitive capabilities (Rando, 2001). They are able to identify points of resistance and develop techniques to overcome those barriers in the future. Martin and Harrell (2004) define this highly focused process of reflection as “reentry training” which is designed to help students “understand their personal and intellectual growth and changes in their cultural identity, to feel more comfortable in their home environment, and to be able to function effectively in that environment” (p. 321). When students are given opportunities to reflect on their learning process, they can better navigate new information and recognize what learning strategies best facilitate their understanding (Rando, 2001).

The same premise holds true for African American collegians who have studied abroad. Through culturally responsive, guided reflection, they have a more refined perspective on how they processed their learning and relationships, both during and after their time abroad. They develop a heightened sense of self awareness and a greater knowledge of how their identity is influenced by global learning. For example, Lorna revealed that her perspective on how she defined herself as well as how she interacted with others. “The majority of African- Americas when we are in this country we view ourselves as African-Americas. We view ourselves as African-Americas first before being an American that concept got completely changed when you go abroad. When people asked me and I said, “I am an African-American” they

would say, what are you talking about? What is that?" Then I would say I am an American" (Lorna, personal communication, April 10, 2010).

She also realized how her perceptions of American culture had shifted. "The thing was that I always could identify Americans walking in the crowd in Spain. Even if there were only two of them I could identify Americans everywhere blacks, whites, Latinos whatever. There was something that I hadn't realized that we all have in common until I was abroad. I met a lot of interesting people when I was traveling sometimes I would be at the hostel and met others Americans. It is interesting because it would be people that I would probably don't talk to [in the United States]" (April 10, 2010).

Through culturally responsive, guided reflection, African American collegians reached a better understanding of who they used to be and who they had become. Our discussions signified an important crossroads in which the students were engaged in rich conversations around their race and identity while being positioned to learn something deeper about themselves.

Fink (2003) describes this unique exchange as the "human dimension" of "significant learning" (p. 30). Learning improves in circumstances in which teachers and mentors assist college students in shaping their own realities and futures (Baxter, 2001). Boykin (1986) argues that culturally responsive, guided reflection is simply another tool for helping African American collegians effectively navigate the intersection of race and identity upon returning to the United States.

Culturally responsive, guided reflection requires understanding the minds of African American collegians, the complexities of race, and how one negotiates a

position of lesser power. Due to their dual identities, Boykin (1986) notes that being in an oppressed group, African Americans benefit from the deconstruction of codes of power. Having someone available for social and psychological support is valuable in helping students develop essential coping mechanisms (Ward, 2004). These coping mechanisms are tools that potentially become useful in the socially or emotionally stressful situations African American students might encounter in the future.

The physical and emotional stress (Gaw, 2000), cultural fatigue (Guthrie, 1975), cultural adjustment (Paige, 1990), and cultural stress (Bennett, 1989) connected with both study abroad and reentry requires the support of someone who can help make sense of it all. Given that students generally believe that there are significant disconnects between themselves and university faculty (Fink, 2003), there is a need for enhanced learning experiences through heightened levels of engagement.

Culturally responsive, guided discussion enhances African American student engagement while supporting deep learning, or “learning that takes root in our apparatus of understanding, in the embedded meanings that define us and that we use to define the world” (Tagg, 2003, p. 70). Deep learning, or deep-level processing, emerges when students have a personal connection or personal interest in the learning experience (Tagg, 2003; Biggs, 1989, 2003). Thus, they are motivated to engage in critical thinking while acquiring deeper understanding that can be used to solve problems they encounter later in life. My conversation with Kenneth provides a good example of how students are able to gain a deeper understanding of themselves through culturally responsive discussion. When I asked him about other conversations he had engaged in related to study abroad, his response was:

Not nearly in deeper as this conversation has been... This has been beneficial for me because I don't think that I thought about all that we have discussed at any other moment and I have never put all together. Nobody has asked me these kinds of questions before, and they will not ask me again because they don't have the understanding of what you are asking. So it was very beneficial to me (Kenneth, personal communication, June 4, 2010).

Deep learning also includes a student's opportunity to reflect on the relationships connecting various piece of information. Unlike surface-level processing, which tends to focus on memorization, deep-level processing emphasizes the substance and the underlying meaning, both of which are important when reflecting on study abroad experiences. The application of knowledge to real life is positioned at the center of the learning experience. Deep-level processing is valuable when discussing the real-life experiences of African American collegians who have studied abroad, because their real-life knowledge and identities are frequently disconnected from their formal learning experiences.

Empowerment through conversation is another important part of the process of student growth and development. Students engaged in discussions with someone who "gets it," whether a guide, mentor or teacher, can lead to a better understanding of self, while helping them to make meaning of their journey in a safe space. Conversations about identity are essential points of reflection for African American collegians who have studied abroad. Without those important moments of culturally responsive, guided engagement, students are left to make sense of their journeys on their own.



## **Chapter 5: CONCLUSION**

### **Seeing is Believing**

More than a decade ago, I hosted a group of 12 African American and Latino collegians on a 10-day trip to Mexico City. I realized then that something special occurred when culturally responsive guides were accessible to African American collegians during their study abroad. Under my guidance, the group spent time reflecting on their own identities, career paths, and place in the world as people of color. They wrote reflective essays in journals and participated in a variety of culturally responsive conversations as a group as well as individually. There was something significant about the relationships they established with one another as well as with the culturally responsive chaperones who accompanied them. Together we created an environment in which the individual racial identities of the students mattered. By not being oblivious to race or to the students' identities, it was easier to position their perspectives in the center of the discussion.

Similar thoughts of inclusion passed through my mind when I recently spent 10 days accompanying a diverse group of 33 graduate students on a service learning study abroad in the Caribbean. Being present as the only African American administrator and facilitator reinforced many of the conclusions that I reached through my research. Six African American students participated in the trip. Although we had no relationships prior to the trip, I was easily able to connect with them, providing an important sounding board for their cultural, personal, intellectual, and professional growth. The topic of race and identity emerged naturally in our conversations both during and after our time abroad. The African American students freely disclosed facts

about their personal lives. They were comfortable sharing the unique social and academic challenges that impacted their success. They also shared their personal concerns about the conduct and perspectives of some of their White classmates.

The African American collegian experiences abroad were different from the rest of the group. There was a familiarity that emerged from the fact that the people the African American students encountered looked just like them. As a result, they engaged the people from the local community, quickly establishing moments of finding home abroad. For example, while volunteering with her classmates in a rural village, an African American student was approached by a young local boy of the same complexion. The boy, although much younger and speaking another language, challenged the African American student to a dance battle. I view hip-hop dance battles as a demonstration of the African American urban experience in its purest form. They represent a demonstration of creativity, courage, and the familiarity of fun times with friends and family. The young boy didn't challenge any of the White students to a dance battle. He chose the person who potentially resembled his older sister or cousin, someone who the boy assumed knew the significance of the challenge. And his African American opponent gladly obliged.

The two danced and laughed together for several minutes while the surrounding crowd cheered. The African American student had found home abroad. There was a sense of connection based on familiar cultural sounds, gestures, and traditions. The African American students' discovery of a new community of which they felt a part opened up a window of query, reflection on their own existence, and the privileges and challenges associated with the hue of their skin on a global scale.

We spent a significant amount of time discussing the meaning behind their studies abroad and how it had changed them as African Americans.

### **Summary of the Study**

This study was created to gain a better knowledge of the unique experiences of African American collegians studying abroad. I was able to accomplish that by discussing with students how issues surrounding race and identity impacted both their international travels and return home. Through a series of rich, qualitative interviews, students freely shared their views on identity and cultural inclusion within the context of study abroad. Whether they had taken part in a short- or long-term study abroad, stayed with a family or bunked in a hostel, their responses revealed several common themes about the African American international collegiate experience. Students expressed the desire to find home abroad; the consistent appreciation of culturally responsive guides or mentors; and the need for culturally responsive guided reflection.

Regardless of whether they were traveling to (Appendix E); Spain, Italy, China, Ireland, the Dominican Republic, Tanzania, Japan, Germany, France, Jordan, Uruguay, Ghana, India, Mexico, the United Kingdom, or South Africa, each African American collegian experience abroad shared a variety of common feelings and experiences worthy of discussion and reflection. When given the freedom to unpack their hopes, fears, and joys with no repercussions, they could quickly celebrate their identities while deconstructing their realities in a global context.

### **Limited Access to Culturally Responsive Mentors and Guides**

African American collegians who studied abroad had limited access to mentors, guides, and faculty with whom they could directly identify. Students shared an overall concern with the limited cultural competencies of faculty, which became a central issue that emerged from the data.

Moments when culturally responsive mentors or guides were available made significantly positive impacts on African American collegians who studied abroad. As a result, students felt valued, engaged, and more personally connected to their learning experiences. Connecting with culturally responsive guides provided students with important opportunities for student engagement, culturally guided reflection, and identity development. However, without culturally competent guides, some students became culturally and socially isolated both during and after their study abroad experiences. Students responded to the inadequate support by seeking alternative methods of cultural and social engagement, methods I classified as “finding home abroad.”

### **Finding Home Abroad Provides Validation**

African American collegians who studied abroad were consistently “finding home abroad” through cultural, social, and academic interaction either with others of African ancestry or with African diasporic subject matter. Finding home abroad was an important coping tool for social adjustment as well as a method for processing new and unfamiliar experiences while abroad. Whether students were making daily connections with roommates of the same race or finding communities of African

ancestry, these moments provided a foundation of validation, personal growth, identity development, and stress management.

Finding home abroad created moments of cultural continuity between international and domestic lifestyles, which positively influenced the social and academic experiences of African American collegians. The African American students' choice to focus on their own identities did not reflect an ethnocentric perspective on their study abroad. It did, however, lean towards an ethno-relative perspective, one in which they questioned how their identity connected to the larger world (Bennett & Bennett, 2003). Through their own initiative, they were able to gather a sense of community and family while abroad.

### **Closure is Missing from Reentry**

In-depth discussions around race and identity represented important moments for growth and personal development for African American collegians. However, the reentry of African American collegians did not provide an adequate opportunity for deep personal reflection, especially through the lens of race and identity. Many shared that they had yet not had an opportunity to think about their study abroad and/or process their experience in a manner that deconstructed race and identity.

Developing relationships with others possessing a global maturity was also important to African American collegians. Students noted that their return to the United States created a noticeable social distance between themselves and their friends and family members who had not traveled internationally or studied abroad. Missing groups of peers to share global experiences with, African American collegians struggled to initiate deep conversations about their studies abroad with others. Having

someone available with whom to share their experiences is essential to the personal and academic development of African American collegians who have studied abroad.

### **Freedom to Reflect**

Learning what students have to say about their experiences abroad means, giving them a safe space and opportunity to process their thoughts without judgment. Our culturally responsive dialogue provided African American students with the freedom to reflect on and imagine the possibilities the future had to offer. Just as I responded to their cultural identities, students responded to my identity as an African American. Our discussions gave the students room to grow while making sense of their adventures abroad. As Greene (1988b) shares in *Dialect of Freedom*, “The world should be filled with the meaning of students’ existential experience and not of their teachers. Our role as teachers, and teacher educators is to encourage and provoke students to speak in their own voice in a world where other voices define the mainstream” (p. 190).

The process of assisting students in finding their own voice was also a method of empowering students. It provided them with an important sense of closure and reassurance. It was rewarding for me both personally and as a researcher to be able to help students make sense of some topics that many had thought about but never had an opportunity to discuss. They were all very eager to share their stories and were completely uninhibited in their delivery. The permission to speak reflectively, freely, and critically in itself is a freedom often missing in the African American learning experience.

## **Contributions of the Study**

The culture of the American classroom often emits improprieties that inhibit the success of African Americans. Although education has traditionally been viewed as the path to opportunity, schools are also a place in which social imbalances are reinforced. They are the primary location for developing a sense of racial identity but make up the place where racial priorities, sorting, and ranking are firmly situated (Pang, 1990; Steele, 1992; Olsen, 1997). American classrooms manifest “cultures of power” that mirror the ideologies of a dominant, Caucasian paradigm and that fail to take into consideration the unique cultural perspectives of ethnic minorities (Delpit, 1994). Discussions of race in the classroom are suppressed, or “color muted” (Pollock, 2004). In the context of teaching and learning, Pollock (2004) argues that the dynamics of race are “always intertwined with the dynamics of power” (p. 13). This study contributes to the field of study abroad research the voices of African American collegians that are often overshadowed by a culture of power. It provides study abroad coordinators a more pronounced understanding of what African American collegians are thinking about their studies abroad. My analysis of candid same-race conversations pulls back the symbolic curtain, giving others a rare opportunity to identify the unique needs, challenges, and coping tools of African American collegians abroad.

By going beyond raw numbers of participants, my research shows how African American collegians viewed their journeys abroad through the unique lens of their race and cultural identity. They realized that finding spaces for their voices and identities while abroad represented highly prized moments, ones in which they could celebrate themselves and make sense of the Black experience abroad. They were eager

to find those moments and, out of necessity, willingly created them in innovative ways. Long after they returned home, they were still enthusiastic about discussing the unique sanctuaries and empowering relationships they had established while abroad. For African American collegians, those moments reflected the safety and cultural validation of home. They understood that they benefited greatly from those moments when their voices and identities were at the center of the conversation.

Additionally, they were capable of engaging in rich dialogue about their identities, while critically thinking about what their international experience meant to them, their race, their communities, their country, and the world. It cannot be overlooked that these students held a perception that others viewed their African American voices as less significant or less valued than their peers of other races in the learning experience abroad. Inclusive curriculum, culturally responsive pedagogy, and multiple methods for student engagement are all important to consider as more African American collegians consider flying beyond the horizon.

Study abroad environments in which the perspectives of African American collegians are discouraged, marginalized, or positioned beneath other students inhibits learning and personal development. Their simple yet frequent phrase, “They wouldn’t understand,” supports my argument that African American collegians hesitate in sharing both their negative and positive experiences abroad with others. Rather than create waves, they decided it was best to keep their opinions to themselves.

They noted the lack of empathy and limited cultural competency exhibited by faculty, administrators, and classmates who were unable to adequately connect with African American students through the delicate yet highly prized lens of race. In-depth



instruction and exploration of culturally responsive and inclusive strategies by faculty and study abroad facilitators would lead to greater sensitivity and awareness.

### **What They Left Behind**

All of the discussions represented in this study reveal important beginnings for the African American collegians I had the pleasure of meeting. Our conversations initiated a critical dialogue about the significance of being African American abroad that will likely continue throughout their lives. It represented an opportunity for them to consider future travels or new encounters with people throughout the diaspora. Our discussions introduced the topic of finding meaning in how their race positioned them in both the United States and the world.

When we conclude our travels around the globe, we return home, bringing back photos and souvenirs to savor the rich memories of our adventures abroad. But what do we leave behind? In closing, I asked the students to think about what they had left behind. The response to the thought-provoking question was telling of the unique African American experience abroad:

I left fear behind, fear of the unknown, because I had to do a lot stuff that I didn't know and that I was afraid of. I feel that I can do anything right now. I left behind a lot of racial insecurities. I struggled not just in being Black but with this shade of Black that I am. Just the teasing that comes in high school and junior high. To be faced with it in South Africa and to come in terms with myself and to realize by the end of the day that I am still me. I really enjoyed being me and being really comfortable in my skin. It feels really good. Because I left that there, now I can be comfortable. (Anisha, personal communication, July 1, 2010)

What did I leave in France? I think I left a door open. I don't know if it makes sense, but I have a friend that when I was going three years ago, I was just mentioning that I was going to France and she didn't have any interest. But I think that sharing my writings with my friends and family and sending postcards, sharing pictures, I left a door open for people to pique their interest into an adventure abroad. (Krista, personal communication, April 24, 2010)

Probably a lot of fear, I feel that I lost a lot fear there. I didn't know diversity was so strong in my heart in the way that I want to raise my kids, to the way I want to be perceived by other people. (Sierra, personal communication, March 26, 2010)

To the people I interacted with in Spain, I gave them a perspective that perhaps they would not know at first-hand, for instances, my relationship with Kent. I used to talk to him a lot about my experience of being African American. It was cool sharing my background. What I identify with my culture. A lot of times what people know about us, they have learned on TV then they start to think that all we do is to sing, dance, and speak slang, so I enjoyed the opportunity to talk to different people and to show them a different side. (Pamela, personal communication, May 6, 2010)

My research, because I did my best and I know that research is very impactful. I had a plant that never has been studied and probably to this day it would never been studied if it was not for my contribution. I feel that I left a little piece of myself back in Africa, because it was very known that I want to come back. I left experiences... I left relationships. I may even apply to go there again. I left a piece of my history. I went there and feeling so welcomed as opposed to feeling unwelcomed in my own country sometimes. (Todd, personal communication, June 5, 2010)

### **A Note to Educators**

As we listen to students, it is easy to marginalize the identities of those who are different from ourselves. Our own bias and prejudices present unique challenges for the students we engage (Greene, 1995). What we value as educators is based on the lens through which we see the world. Because a limited number of educators understand or share their same views of the world, African American students' perspectives are often pushed to the remote edges of the learning experience. This research provides a glimpse into what African American collegians see.

African American collegians who are able to articulate their experiences abroad through the lens of race and identity become important liaisons to the next group of African Americans students considering such an adventure. They hold the

trust and credibility necessary to influence and potentially reassure the subsequent wave of African American students that studying abroad is a worthwhile endeavor. Because they have the tools necessary to assist others in their travel and return, careful consideration should be given to how African American collegians engage the university upon their return from studying abroad. They also have a wealth of knowledge necessary in creating more inclusive curricula in study abroad programs.

International travel is freedom. For the African American collegians I interviewed, studying abroad embodied the freedom to explore the world and their relationship with it. Students were presented with an opportunity to leave their familiar surroundings and imagine new possibilities for what the world had to offer and the numerous alternative possibilities of their own existence. Sharing that journey was, and will continue to be, very important. Study abroad programs can be created in which the cultural and social capital of ethnic minorities or historically underrepresented students are valued and nurtured. Similarly, culturally responsive study abroad programs can be shaped to assist African American collegians in maintaining their rich cultural identities. As the need for more inclusive curricula become more prevalent, policies and practices addressing the social and cultural needs of all students will be essential.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The African American collegian experience abroad, although not new, has received little attention. Given the interesting topics that emerged from my discussions, duplication of the study is worthwhile. Topics like: changes in African American views on being American as result of studying abroad; the perspectives of

African American women who studied abroad; and the perspectives of biracial collegians who studied abroad could also be valuable topics to study.

### **Being American**

“My nationality on my passport says United States. I have a passport of experience that says the world” –Bill Pinkney

The responsibility of representing the United States, and all of the images accompany the American experience, is a topic worthy of further research. African Americans hold the dual identities associated with being American while embracing the heritage and culture of the African American experience. How ethnic minority collegians view the label of American while abroad is an intriguing subject. Students expressed mixed feelings about returning to the United States. African American identity, consumption patterns, and social norms are all part of a larger love-hate relationship African Americans have with the United States (Sadar, 2002; Robinson, 2004; Harrington, 1993). Several students chose to hide their identities and pass for local people; one even opted to assume the identity of a Canadian instead of someone from the United States. Further research may reveal that ownership of the American experience becomes more pronounced when African Americans are abroad.

### **African American Women in Study Abroad**

African American women have unique study abroad experiences abroad worthy of further research. Their ability to cope with moments of social or racial ambiguity presents an important topic of study unique to the African American women experience abroad. Additional topics include: confronting the international stereotypical hyper-sexualization of African American women; establishing bonds of global African sisterhood; seeking partners with global maturity; and what I would

define as an “international love life” expanding one’s choice of partners through international travel.

### **Biracial Students Abroad**

African American students possessing multiple identities or collegians who also self-identify as biracial have a unique view of the world that could potentially be the focus of a separate study. As they may or may not relate to the African American experience in a domestic context, studying abroad provides them with an opportunity to see the United States and the dynamics of race from the outside. Does the experience of studying abroad help them to process their own identity in a manner that is valuable to them? Does studying abroad help biracial students reconcile their dual identities?

Just as important as the quantity of students studying abroad is the quality of their experiences. To ensure successful learning outcomes for all students, educators must continue to examine the inclusivity of teaching practices in the context of study abroad. The result will inevitably be an increase the number of African American students prepared to share their remarkable adventures beyond the horizon.

“A lot of people spend their time sitting and not going over the horizon. Because they are afraid of what is over there. But that is the excitement of life, going over and seeing.” –Bill Pinkney (*Pinkney was the first African American to sail solo around the world. He sailed 27,000 miles on his sailboat he named Commitment*).

## APPENDIX A:

### Study Abroad Organizations

helpful in identifying African American Collegians who have studied abroad.

Diversity in International Education Network  
1731 Delaware Street, Suite 100  
Berkeley, CA 94703  
<http://www.diversitynetwork.org>

National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE)  
4440 PGA Boulevard, Suite 600  
Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33410  
<http://www.nadohe.org>

The National Association of International Educators (NAFSA)  
1307 New York Avenue, NW, 8th Floor  
Washington, DC 20005-4701  
<http://www.nafsa.org>

The National Center for Global Engagement  
1220 19th Street, NW,  
Suite 610  
Washington, DC 20036  
240.305.5865  
<http://nc4ge.org>

The Council for International Education Exchange (CIEE)  
300 Fore Street  
Portland, ME 04101  
<http://www.ciee.org>

School of International Training (SIT)  
1 Kipling Road, PO Box 676  
Brattleboro, VT 05302-0676  
<http://www.sit.edu>

The Abroad View Foundation  
P.O. Box 745  
Bennington, VT 05201  
United States  
802-442-4827  
<http://www.abroadview.org>

## APPENDIX B: PRELIMINARY QUESTIONNAIRE

I hope that your experience abroad has been rewarding. I appreciate your time as you complete this brief personal profile questionnaire. I would like to find out more details about your study abroad experience. Your comments will help me to better prepare for our discussion. Your information will remain confidential. If there are any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, feel free to leave them blank.

Do you describe yourself as African, African American, Black, Afro-Latino, Biracial, or Multiracial?

How do you describe or identify yourself? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you consider yourself a first generation college student? (First generation is defined as your parents have not attained a college or university degree) Yes No

How would you define your socio-economic status? Circle lower class, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class, lower upper class, upper class.

Other \_\_\_\_\_

How many times have you traveled outside of the United States. \_\_\_\_\_ For vacations \_\_\_\_\_ For study \_\_\_\_\_

What is your major? \_\_\_\_\_

What academic year/s did you study abroad? (Circle more than one if needed)

Freshmen, Sophomore, Junior, Senior.

What courses did you take while studying abroad? \_\_\_\_\_

Were these courses taught by your home campus faculty or by faculty from other schools?

Circle: Home Campus Faculty or Faculty from Elsewhere or Both

Were these courses by taught in English or in another language? \_\_\_\_\_

Was your study abroad experience part of an individual program, group trip, or both? \_\_\_\_\_

If applicable, how many other American students participated in the study abroad experience? \_\_\_\_\_

**PROGRAM COMPONENTS**

Length of stay of your most recent study abroad experience. \_\_\_\_\_

**In what type of housing did you live?**

- Homestay    On-campus    Off-campus    Other

To what degree was the housing adequate for your needs?	<b>Large degree</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<b>Not at all</b>

<b><u>My study abroad experience:</u></b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
changed my world view	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
reinforced my political orientation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
was intellectually challenging	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
enabled me to make new friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helped me gain self-confidence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
improved my ability to relate to others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
was easier than studying at my home campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
helped me to develop a better understanding of my own country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



improved my non-native language skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
increased my cross-cultural awareness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helped me realize the complex nature of globalization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**SOCIAL AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCE**

How much interaction did you have With nationals of the host country?	<b>Great deal</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<b>None</b>
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**How did you get acquainted with the people and culture? (Mark all that apply.)**

- In class     
 Through an internship or work     
 Traveling  
 Host family and their friends     
 Joined local sports teams  
 On-campus/library  
 On-campus housing/dorms     
 Joined University clubs/societies  
 Local hangouts     
 Other:

**Did you experience or observe discrimination based on gender, race or ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, nationality or religion?**

	Experienced	Observed	Both experienced and observed
Gender	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Race or ethnicity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Disability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sexual orientation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nationality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Religion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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**What were the strengths of your study abroad experience?**

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**What were the weaknesses, if any, of your study abroad experience?**

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## **APPENDIX C: Study Abroad Interview Guide**

These questions provide students with a voice and serve as a general guide to discussion.

1. What do you attribute your interest in study abroad to?
2. As an African American, what does your study abroad experience mean to you?
3. Talk about an event or a situation that occurred during your study abroad experience where you or someone else felt uncomfortable or were singled out—a situation where you felt that it was related to you being African American.
4. How did you address that issue?
5. As an African American, what did you learn about yourself from your study abroad experience? How have you changed?
6. During your study abroad experience, was there an opportunity and/or was there a cultural guide, chaperone, advisor, friend, or faculty member who helped you to process/reflect on your experience through the cultural lens of an African American. (Who facilitates the reflective piece of being African American abroad?)
7. Was there an opportunity, after or before your study abroad, to process your experience through the cultural lens of an African American? Do you find that this might be important to you? Why or why not?

**APPENDIX D: Context and Factors Influencing African American Collegians’  
Perspectives on Study Abroad**

<b>Context</b>	<b>Potential Influencers and Frames of Analysis</b>
National	Open Doors report
Professional	Organizations and Professional Associations CIEE, IIE, NAFSA, NMCAA Multicultural Affairs Professionals
Higher Education Preparation Academic Advisors	Study abroad coordinators Study abroad curriculum Course prerequisites and College course requirements Institutional Perspectives on study abroad (marketing, brochures, scholarships, support groups)
Parents/Local Community	Parental perspectives on study abroad Finance, inclusion, role models Community perspectives on study abroad Peer perspectives on study abroad Parental education
Subject Area/Departments	Interviews discussions with faculty, chaperones, country advisors, department chairs Study abroad centers and advisors
Study Abroad Experience Subject x Student	Student surveys Student interviews Student writing samples/journals Class artifacts Observations field notes Taped focus groups Independent Films

(Adapted from —Research in the Teaching of English,|| Vol. 29. No. 3 October 1995.

Athanases, S. *Ethnography in the Study of Teaching and Learning of English*, p. 275)

## APPENDIX E: LOCATIONS

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Country Visited</u>	<u>School Type</u>	<u>Region</u>	<u>Interview d/mm/yy</u>
Constance	f	South Africa	Public	West	11/05/10
Pamela	f	Spain	Public	West	6/05/10
Michelle	f	Uruguay	Pubic	West	8/05/10
Jenetta	f	Japan	Public	West	3/06/10
Adelisha	f	South Africa	Public	West	27/03/10
Seth	m	Germany	Public	South	15/09/10
Kasey	f	Italy	Private Religious	West	10/10/10
Eric	m	Italy	Private HBCU	Midwest	15/04/10
Krista	f	France	Comm. C.	Western	24/04/10
Susana	f	Jordan	Private	Midwest	3/04/10
Kenneth	m	DR	Public	West	4/06/10
Tyrelle	m	DR	Public	West	8/06/10
Keith	m	China	Private HBCU	South	16/04/10
Ayana	f	Ghana	Public	West	1/05/10
Lorna	f	UK & Spain	Private	East	10/04/10
Damon	m	France & Ghana	Private Religious	West	30/04/10
Sierra	f	India and Ghana	Private Religious	West	26/03/10
Anisha	f	South Africa	Private Religious	West	1/07/10
Todd	m	Tanzania	Public	West	5/06/10
Louis	m	Mexico	Public HBCU	South	11/11/10

**APPENDIX F: Audio Release Form**

The signature below indicates my permission for Aaron Bruce to use of digital audio recorded during the interview session conducted for his research on **The Perspectives of African Americans Collegians Who Studied Abroad** in which I served as a participant.

I hereby consent to the recording of my voice and the use of these recordings singularly or in conjunction with other recordings for educational purposes.

My name will not be reported in association with session results nor will my name be included on the audio recording. My actual name will never be mentioned. Any specific reference to me will be made by program country, but not semester, in the following format: Student X, Venezuela. This audio recording may be used for the following purposes:

Analysis of research and reporting of results

Conference presentations

Educational presentations

Informational presentations

I will be consulted about the use of the audio recording for any purpose other than those listed above.

There is no time limit on the validity of this release, nor is there any geographic specification of where these materials may be distributed.

This release applies to audio footage collected as part of the session listed on this document only.

I have been given a blank copy of this release form for my records.

Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: //

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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