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International Travel and Its Impacts on Black/African American Identity Construction

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Abstract

How does going abroad impact Black/African Americans' conceptualization of self? To assess the answer to this question I analyzed and reflected on mine and the international experiences of my participants, conducted thirteen interviews, and had participants answer survey questions. I argue that identity has two parts: your external and internal parts. The external identity I attributed to international experiences. My findings showed there are three impacts international travel has on Black/ African American identity constructions: the reinforcement, creation of something new, and added new dimension. There is little scholarship that studies the impact of international travel as it pertains to the diverse identity constructions within the Black community (Black vs African American). The impact of international travel on Black people's identity construction is great, but especially for African Americans due to their unique identity constructions. I argue there is a divide between the impact of international travel on Black people (those who identify with Caribbean and or African roots) and African Americans (those with ancestors a part of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and with multi-generational history in the US). Black participants had international experiences that reaffirmed their identity constructions, while African Americans experienced identity fatigue, the unsettling challenge of their identity constructions. To better understand the modern Black/African American experience we must analyze the relationship between identity construction and external experiences. To do this we must consider African American's unique identity constructions and its impacts on their modern experiences, international travel being one example.

Keywords

Black/African American, African American travel writing, study abroad, identity construction, identity fatigue

Disciplines

Asian American Studies | Inequality and Stratification | Multicultural Psychology | Tourism

Comments

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Introduction

How does going abroad impact Black/African Americans' conceptualization of self? Black/African Americans, as members of the Black diaspora, are familiar with transnational travel. African Americans' relationship with international travel is connected to a history of displacement. The ancestors of African American's were "captives [who] endured physical shocks to the body and psychological fractures to the mind from being kidnapped and transported away from their homelands across the Atlantic Ocean to New World destinations at which they became sentenced to lifelong servitude as chattel property" (Smith, 1). Therefore, African Americans' earliest connection to international travel starts with slavery, and "its legacy inevitably [are the] foregrounds [of the] African American identity" (Young, 79). Therefore, African Americans already have a rocky foundation for conceptualizing their identity. Being ancestors of slaves, they are neither American nor African. They now exist with what W.E.B. Dubois describes as a double consciousness, "One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two ill reconciled strivings; two waning ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Young, 80). This lack of grounded-ness therefore creates for a more jarring experience when traveling abroad.

Literature on African American travel experiences is limited. In analyzing the international experiences of African Americans, we see "The history of African Americans rests on two archetypes of travel: the forced journey into slavery, signified by the middle passage; and the willed flight to freedom" (Young, 1). Therefore, some of the earliest accounts of African Americans engaging in international travel and its relationship to their identity construction include figures like Frederick Douglas, who traveled to England, "seeking 'a refuge from republican slavery" after publishing his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. While there, he describes his experience with the famous quote, "'the chattel becomes a man'"(Young, 79). England changed how he understood himself in relation to others. In the United States he would never have been, "admitted to public places 'on equal terms with [White] people" (Young). His account was one of the earlier recordings of an African American's conceptualization of self shifting as a result of their international experience. However, I argue there is a

third archetype of travel to consider. Today's construct of globalization introduces a new context from which to conceptualize the African American experience as it pertains to travel.

However, what it means to be a Black/African American is shifting. Today, Black/African American includes people who have other ethnic identifiers, including Caribbean and African. As Black America has become more diverse, "Its members have varied histories in the nation – many are descendants of enslaved people, while others are recently arrived immigrants" (Tamir). Therefore, in this paper, I make a distinction between these two groups using different titles. Black is the global classification for all Black people that are a part of the African diaspora. Including people from the Caribbean, South America, and from across Africa. African American refers to those whose ancestors were a part of the Transatlantic Slave trade, have since had a multigenerational lineage in the US, and therefore have a shared experience. Black/African American is the classification used to describe both groups, their connection being that they both identify as Black or African American as either one or their sole identity. While there is a distinction between the two groups, they are also unified in their self-identification as Black or African American. In this paper, I argue identity is personal, and therefore regardless of someone's ethnic heritage, if they identify as Black or African American, I have chosen to include them in this research and therefore record the impact of their international experiences.

For many African Americans their shared historical experience has created a "hole," a desire to return to the homeland. It is said, "'Africa never leaves the consciousness of former slaves and their descendants,'" for, "'Africa comes to symbolize re-affirmation for the hybridized, American-born African searching for re-identification and definitions of self-reliance'" (Young, 73). Therefore, in traveling abroad, African Americans are looking to find themselves. However, this is not the only reason Black/African Americans travel abroad. Today Black/African Americans travel for leisure, study abroad, and even for personal research. However, the driving force for why Black/African Americans travel abroad is often "socio politically motivated on behalf of the collective for racial uplift rather than for mere individualized, European-type, leisure class entertainment" (Smith, 1). In other words, of those

Black/African Americans who travel, their pursuit is to better understand their collective experience, for it is related to the desire to develop a better and greater understanding of self.

My research is unique because it analyzes my own experience abroad in collaboration with the other experiences, collected from my interviews. The goal of this collaboration is to make sense of my experience as it pertains to me, while also making a greater reflection on what it means for the broader Black/African American community to travel abroad. Often this topic is discussed including Black and African Americans, however there is little discussion as to how the different elements of their identity makeup influence their experiences. Black/African American international travel is an uncommon topic of discussion, often limited to slave memoirs or the more recent onset of Black/African American college students studying abroad. Topics around the modern Black experience need more literature and study. My hope is that this piece will add some dimension to the discussion of topics related to the greater Black/African American community. I hope to reveal the complexity of the Black/African American identity and draw connections to their experiences with international travel. I want to get closer to answering the greater question of "Where do Black/African Americans fit into the greater international community?" African Americans are a displaced people without a country to truly call their own, "How do they fit into an international community so heavily organized by nation states?"

I argue identity is composed of two parts: the external and internal. External refers to other people's perceptions of you. Examples of the external elements of one's identity would be others' perceptions of your race, ethnicity, or nationality. In other words, what do other people think when they see you and how do those perceptions influence their interactions with you? The internal identity is rooted in the individual's own perception of self. How would you self-identify? For example, people may focus on their race, ethnicity (as it pertains to culture), gender, sexuality, and nation or nations of origin (if they have multiple/dual citizenship). I argue both parts influence and shape how one understands themself. The two parts are always informing each other and developing in response to different experiences and stimuli. Therefore, I argue that though it is agreed that international experiences influence people, that

experience is more complicated for Black people and especially for African Americans as it pertains to their unique identity makeup.

Methodology:

In this research project, I hope to determine the effects of going abroad on the conceptualization of Black/African Americans' identities. This verdict will come out of the combined analysis of my personal study abroad experience with those of my participants. This combined reflection will allow me to make a broader conclusion than if I were to just focus on my own experience. The more dynamic the sample the more accurate the conclusions drawn.

I chose to use surveys and interviews as my two main research methods. The surveys consisted of 2 questions. The first question identified one's perception of self before traveling abroad and the second described their perception of self after. I also used open ended interviews with various questions to guide participants through their international experiences as it pertained to their identities. I classified the questions from descriptive (general information), to referring to the external part of identity construction, to the internal part, and finally to asking about the experience's overall impact on their identity construction.

I chose this design to ensure I got the best and most accurate responses and reflections of participants' experiences. The survey questions, as seen in Appendix 1, provide a zoomed-out perspective of the trip's overall effects on participants. The interview questions, as seen in Appendix 2, give me a more detailed and zoomed in perception of their experiences. The written responses were good for getting concise/basic reflections, however the open-ended interviews allowed me to guide participants through their experiences and for them to delve deeper and expand on their written responses. This ensured I got the most accurate and organic responses. Whatever was missed or not covered in the survey responses could be addressed in the open-ended interview. The two methods worked together, supporting the other. This research method ensured the overall responses were therefore more dimensional, complex, and (I argue) accurate.

There are several limitations to this research method. First, the wording of the questions was especially important to ensure the most accurate and relevant information was collected. Some participants, in their survey responses, did not accurately answer the questions. The fault could be found in the wording of the survey questions. Second, this research method is most accurate if each participant both fills out the survey and participates in an interview. Not everyone interviewed provided survey responses and vice versa, so while most participants I interviewed did both some did not. This limits the accuracy of the research method, for some information may have been missed making the cross-examining element of the combined research method weaker. Lastly, if trying to draw broad reflections about the entire Black/African American community, conclusions could be stronger with a greater sample size and more time to conduct research.

Appendix 1: Survey Questions

1. How did you conceptualize yourself in relation to your ethnicity before going abroad?

2. How did it change or was impacted by your experience abroad? (In your response, please specify the country and where this event took place. Example: China, one the subway)

Appendix 2: Interview questions

3. How do you racially identify?

4. How would you self-identify?

5. What is your gender?

6. Age: 59

7. Do you have a lot of international experience?

8. How many countries have you traveled abroad to? (include city, country, continent FOR EXAMPLE: Beijing, China, East Asia)

9. What was the nature of these international excursions?

    (Leisure [vacation, family, etc.], Study abroad, Business, Other)

10. How long was the duration of your stay in said countries?

11. Did you have language proficiency in the countries you visited?

12. External: Did you notice other people's perceptions of you in said country? What were they?

    a. As related to race, ethnicity, nationality (what did people notice more: race or nationality)

    b. Nationality: did your Americanness come up and if so, how? Were there any expectations attached?

    c. Notice any privileges/advantages or disadvantages.

    d. How did other people treat you compared to your peers? (Compared to White peers if applicable)

    e. Notice a difference in how age groups received you?

    f. Feelings of foreignness?

13. Internal: How did these international experiences impact your perception of yourself, how did you to yourself before you went abroad and after?

    g. As related to race, ethnicity, nationality: did your perception of these in ration to you change or shift?

    h. Experience with intersectionality

14. How did these internal experiences reshape how you understood yourself when you returned to America? What changed?

15. How did you feel as a Black person in some of these places? Did you feel your ethnicity had an impact on the kind of experiences you had?

16. Do you have any horror stories? Any especially positive ones?

Participants

My research focused on all Black/African Americans, who identify as Black or African American, are American citizens, and have traveled abroad. My sample was collected through the combination of convenience and snowball sampling. I conveniently chose people I knew and those who went to my college. The rest were recruited through other participants.

My research sample consisted of 14 participants. Six of which were male and the other eight were female. The age range extended from 18- 59 years of age. All the participants identified as Black or African American, were American citizens, and had some affiliation to higher education. Ethnically some were mixed, others were of African or Caribbean descent, and the rest were ethnically African American. Most were born in the United States; however, a few were not. Levels of education included either being in college, being undergraduate graduates, or academic professionals. In terms of demographics, most participants represented the East coast, the rest were from California, including myself.

My Trip

I identify as an African American, Black woman from Oakland, California. I am a US citizen and until last year I had never traveled abroad. At the time, I was 21 years of age. Before my international experience, the furthest I had been from home was college in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

My junior year of college I studied abroad in Kunming, Yunnan, China with School for International Training (SIT). Our program was titled "Community Health and Traditional Chinese Medicine," and therefore focused predominantly on traditional Chinese medicinal practices and its integration with modern forms of medicine. The program lasted 3 months. We visited hospitals, talked to physicians, attended lectures, took Chinese language classes, learned Tai chi, conducted research projects, and traveled across Yunnan province. My program's group consisted of all American, college students from across the country. The demographics included 6 White, 5 Asian, 1 Latino, and 2 African American students (including myself). The two African Americans represented on the trip were both women.

Much of the program we lived together, as a group, in hotels. However, towards the end of the program, we had the freedom of finding our own housing. It was during that stage in the program that we interacted with locals the most. It gave me to the opportunity to connect with Chinese locals and learn about how they saw me, while also forcing me to rethink how I understood myself (considering I was in a new country/setting).

Identity Parts

   I argue identity, or one's conceptualization of self, can be broken up into two parts. The first being the external portion of one's identity, which refers to our understanding of other people's perceptions of us. For example, while studying abroad a lot of Chinese people identified me as a foreigner. I was not one of them and therefore clearly distinct from them. The other part of one's identity is the internal portion. This describes your personal understanding of your identity. In other words, how do you identify and what descriptive characteristics do you highlight? Some of those deciding factors may include one's race, ethnicity, gender, and so on. One of my participants, for example, does not simply identify as African American but also as a Black woman from Bronx, New York. Therefore, she chooses to self-identify using her ethnicity, gender, and place of origin/hometown. I argue both pieces of one's identity work in tandem to define oneself. We are shaped as much by our personal perception of ourselves as we are by the ones imposed on us by others.

   In answering the question of how going abroad impacts Black/African Americans' conceptualization of self, I measure the impact of one's international experience/external identity on one's perception of their internal identity. I am coinciding the international experience with the external identity. I divide the international experience between the external part of one's environment from the individual (their conceptualized understanding of self). These two parts, interacting in provoking ways, impact how one develops/constructs their identity.

   In general, depending on the individual and their experience, matching components to the external vs internal parts of their identity can prove difficult. For myself, in China, an external component of my identity was others' perception of my nationality. However, for others their nationality may not have impacted locals' perceptions of them. Still for another, their gender may have been a major component. The same can be said for the internal part of one's identity, and therefore its effects on one's perception of self. Therefore, I choose not to classify components as either a part of one's external/ internal parts of their identity. I allow participants to define for themselves their perceptions of their identity and self-describe their international experiences. The diversity in how these components could be

matched with the corresponding identity parts illustrates the diversity of the Black/African American experience, and therefore why I left the matching to the discretion of the participant.

However, it is relevant to mention some of the trends/ commonalities I noticed. Though there were few, I find them significant enough to mention. Externally, one's race (skin color) had a big impact on how participants (including myself) were received abroad. That reception was especially strong for participants in countries or regions where Black people are uncommon. In addition, if participants had time to interact with locals, their nationality as Americans played a role. It influenced how travelers were perceived, treated, and what was assumed about them. Again, this was dependent on where in the world one was.

Participant Reflection

I identify three impacts of international experiences/external identities on the identity conceptualization/internal identities of the participants. The impacts include "reinforcement", "creation of something new", and "new dimension". "Reinforcement" refers to how one's international experience reiterates/ further solidifies one's internal identity construction. The "creation of something new" can be exemplified in two ways. The first being the development of a new sense of pride. Another is the creation of a global identity, coupled with a hyper awareness of others' perceptions of you (within a global context). Then the external experience can also add a "new dimension" to one's internal identity. In other words, new layers and complexity are added to how participants previously understood themselves.

REINFORCEMENT

Three participants said their international experience reinforced their previously identified internal identity. For some participants, this reinforcement referred to part of their identity (highlighting some parts over others); another illustrated the relationship between context and their treatment in the host country to their identity construction; and the last one reflected on how their experience reinforced their perceptions of self while also making them more accepting of their overall identity construction. Though all participants described their impact to be "reinforcement" they each had a different interpretation of the term.

Shuri's international experience made her feel more connected to the Malian part of her identity. Shuri self identifies as a Black Malian American woman. Racially she is Black and ethnically she is Malian American. Her Malian American identity refers to the combined identity of culturally growing up Malian but having been born and raised in the United States.

Before studying abroad, Shuri had a lot of international experience, however she chose to focus on her study abroad experience in Senegal due to its notable effects on her identity conceptualization. Shuri studied abroad in the fall of her junior year in college and resided in Senegal for about 2 months. While abroad, Shuri was often perceived as Senegalese, and said, "when I had the opportunity to bring up my ethnicity, everything about me made sense. My appearance, my manners/behavior, my ability to communicate in a common language. After mentioning that I was Malian, I felt my connection with the person grow a little deeper, especially in terms of comfortability." Culturally and physically Shuri had a perceived commonality with Senegalese locals that gave her the opportunity to embrace the Malian part of her identity more. She mentioned that her Malian culture created, "a sudden connection that I did not know would occur. Yes, I am American [but that] part of my identity became second to me also being Malian when I spoke to locals." These experiences strengthened her ties to her Malian identity and therefore reinforced that part of her ethnic identity.

Libby's experience demonstrates the connection between context, treatment, and one's identity construction. Her experience abroad was so congruent with the ones she had in the states that it reinforced the relationship she had to her identity construction. Libby self identifies as a "Black woman due to [her] heritage" and upbringing for she claims it was her experiences, "in the Deep South where my race and gender were heavily surveilled and hyper-scrutinized." This contextual experience in the United States laid the framework for how she constructed and understood her identity as a Black woman.

Libby has had a lot of international experience for she said, "I spent many years living abroad in Germany, Japan, and South Korea beginning with my birth in Landstuhl." However, she chose to reflect on her study abroad experience in Brazil. In Brazil, Libby recalls that, "Brazil reaffirmed the ways in which I felt marginalized and [a] constant 'other' in the United States." In American she said her "race

and gender were heavily surveilled and hyper-scrutinized" and those experiences were replicated for her in Brazil. For example, she said, "I was frequently mistaken for a prostitute or domestic servant. I was followed by the military police when entering middle-class retailers." If one's internal identity is shaped by their external experiences/identities, then it is understandable how Libby's experience in Brazil reinforced the identity construction she made in America. Brazil reproduced a similar context that therefore reinforced her identity perception.

Ramonda's international experience both reinforced her perceptions of herself, while also helping her to accept other parts of her identity. Ramonda identifies as a Black, African American woman. Racially she identifies as Black, however ethnically/culturally she identifies as African American. Ramonda has had quite a bit of international experience but chose to focus on her experiences in India. She studied abroad in India fall of her junior year in college for about four months. Her external experience in India shaped different parts of her internal identity differently, but the overall effect was the reinforcement of her identity construction.

Ramonda's experience in India reinforced her understanding of how Black women are perceived in the United States. She describes an incident she had in Bangalore, "I was standing on the Starbucks steps waiting to meet up with my friend. I remember this man was catcalling me. [So,] I started to walk away but he started to follow me and asking how much, basically assuming I was a prostitute. He wouldn't leave me alone until Julia and I got together and told him to leave us alone." Her example speaks to what she describes as the "hyper sexualization of African women" in India, for she said, "the Indian men there (in Bangalore) assumed that the Black women were prostitutes." This experience reminded Ramonda of her experience in America, for she said while the experience made her uncomfortable, the reality of Black women being sexualized, "Wasn't super [upsetting] because Black women are hyper sexualized in the US" as well. There was a realization that this perception of Black women is not only held in America but around the world. Thus, her experiences as a Black woman in India simply reinforced what she already knew regarding others' perceptions of Black women.

Culturally, her experiences in India forced her to develop a deeper level of reflection about her ethnic/cultural identity, which helped her become more secure in it. In India, Ramonda recalls that she often had to, "prove her Americanness," for Indian people often, "assumed that I [was] coming from Africa." However, this experience gave her the opportunity to engage in deep conversations with locals and, "teach [others] about my culture," explaining, "I am not able to trace my roots back to the country my ancestors came from because they were stolen." In order to have these conversations, Ramonda had to define the African American experience. Her ability to conceptualize this part of her identity illustrates her deepened level of familiarity and comfortability with it. This deeper reflection allowed her to reinforce/ become more secure in her identity conceptualization. She recalls that these experiences, "solidified who I am as a person," for, "I got more comfortable and grounded in my Blackness and in identifying myself as a Black woman." She accepted that though, "I still don't really know where my African lineage comes from," that is a part of her African American identity. Even in India she was reminded of her ethnicity and its relation to her identity construction, but being forced to be so reflective about it helped her to affirm who she is.

SOMETHING NEW

Two participants noted that their international experiences gave them a new sense of pride. Pride, according to Oxford Languages, is a feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one's own achievements or from those with whom one is closely associated. The participants either noted a collective sense of pride with those they were closely associated with or a personal sense of pride that came from satisfaction in their own achievements or characteristics. In other words, though expressed in different ways, the external effects of these international experiences caused participants to have a positive outlook on their identity construction.

1. Pride

M'Baku noted that his experiences abroad gave him pride in being a Black person. M'Baku identifies predominantly as African American. His father is of West Africa roots and his mother is of Caribbean. Therefore, despite having been born and raised in the United States he also identifies with the

heritage of his parents. M'Baku has had a lot of international experience. He chose to focus on his immersion trip to Rwanda due to its effects on his identity conceptualization. It was a 10-day program done through his college, Gettysburg college.

M'Baku had many opportunities to learn and interact with Rwandan locals. He recalls an incident where he said, "I was walking with the group and there were people just talking to me, and I would look at them and be like 'Guys I don't know what you are saying. I am actually American.'" He was often mistaken for a local and that allowed him to make deeper connections with the locals. He said in comparison to his White peers he felt, "Nobody else in the group got that type of energy." Being perceived as a native gave him privileges his peers didn't have. He said, "Even in the club, if I wanted to get a table it would be easier for me to get it or to get us drinks. People were even more likely to dance with me." He was able to form strong connections for he said, "I fell in love with my program manager," continuing, "we became the best of friends in like 10 days … We connected like that." M'Baku didn't feel like a visitor in Rwanda for he noted that "Rwanda really connected with me, I had already been to a West African country before this, the Ivory Coast, and it reminded me of it." This illustrates a level of comfortability with the Rwandan culture and how that relationship bridged with his personal identity.

This close relationship paved the way for the development of his pride as a Black person. M'Baku's close relationship to the local people gave him a deep feeling of satisfaction. He explains how his experience in Rwanda made him feel, "It made me have a little bit more pride in being a person of color. One main reason was because ... I really used to think of Africa [as underdeveloped], but these people are just as civilized (if not more), they are just as tidy, they have fun, and they are nice ... That made me have more pride." M'Baku drew a connection between the successes of Rwandans and himself. His perceived native-ness among Rwandans made him feel like a local/connected to them. They became an extension of himself. Anything they succeeded in made him feel proud, for he felt they reflected him and therefore were relevant to his identity construction.

Kofi Novia's experiences abroad caused her to have more pride in her appearance and therefore identity as a biracial person. Kofi Novia identifies as mixed (Italian, Irish, and Black). Culturally,

however, she identifies as neither Black nor White. Often, one draws a direct relationship between one's appearance and identity construction. Kofi Novia's appearance plays a huge role in how people treat her and therefore her identity construction. She mentions her experiences growing up expressing that, "I was brought up around Asians/Asian Americans who had such high respect and love for me... but would treat other Black people differently." She even experienced this in her own family being labeled as the "light skinned cousin with a White mom." So very early on Kofi Novia struggled with their appearance and its relation to her identity.

Kofi Novia has had quite a bit of international experience as well; however, she chose to focus on her experience in the Philippines and its role in giving her new pride in her appearance. Kofi Novia noted that a huge part of her experience was shaped by how locals perceived her. She describes her experience, "I was evidently different, but I had never felt adored before - parents translating for their children that I looked like a beautiful doll or people stopping to ask me to play in my hair." For many Black women, their hair is a central part of their identity makeup. Correspondingly, people's positive reaction to her hair would have been very significant for Kofi Novia considering her negative relationship with it and its connection to her appearance. Before going to the Philippines Kofi Novia mentioned, "My hair has been regularly blown straight for the last three years, but in the Philippines, humidity wouldn't allow, and I had to truly take care of my Afro for the first time." This meant her natural hair was out and she had to develop a sense of comfortability with it, something she had not experienced before. Her experience in the Philippines totally changed her relationship with her hair, for she said, "Insecurities that I had about my big, thick hair ceased as soon as I stepped outside." After traveling to the Philippines Kofi Novia developed a new relationship with her appearance for she mentions, "I had a great sense of pride in my appearance after visiting the Philippines." Kofi Novia's relationship to her identity had shifted, for her new relationship with her appearance (natural hair) had now become something that she could be proud of.

2. Global Identity

Four participants observed that their international experience resulted in the creation of a global identity. However only one participant's experience resulted in them conceptualizing themselves as a global citizen. I define global identity as a facet one adds to their pre-existing conceptualization of self. Global identity speaks to a new consciousness, one that forces the individual to reconsider their perception of self in a global context. Global identity often coincides with the development of global citizenship, an identity construction that transcends national borders and forces one to understand/align themselves with the global community rather than their nation state. Those who develop a global identity may see themselves as global citizens, members of a greater, more global, or international community.

Deni Maroon's experience abroad resulted in his development of a global identity and conceptualization of himself as a global citizen. Deni Maroon identifies as a Black man from America. He correlates that identity with those who are, "the descendants of the transatlantic slave trade." Deni Maroon chose to focus on his study abroad experience in Indonesia. His international experience in Indonesia forced him to shift his perspective from local issues relevant to his community and reconsider them from a global perspective. He describes his realization, "My entire understanding of my suffering and life in the states changed as I saw my poverty paled in comparison to the Indonesian standard." Suddenly, he had an international perspective of poverty that extended beyond his community in Chester, PA. One can see the development of his global identity when he said, "I see the international struggle between the labor market and its exploitation. It's more than just being Black that we are facing, it's global oligarchs and no one is free until we are all free." Deni Maroon develops a new consciousness, one that now includes the greater global community as it relates to him. This global perspective created the climate for the construction of his identity as a global citizen for he said, "I understand that I am a part of a world of people who need to understand the world to make it better." At that moment, his identity construction aligned itself with the greater "humanity" rather than those with his nation state. Deni Maroon's international experience provided him with a new perspective, expanding the way he understood poverty, and therefore how he understood himself.

2a. Hyperawareness

A part of developing a global identity is becoming hyper aware of others' perception of you in a global context. International experiences not only force individuals to see themselves within different cultural contexts but also through the eyes of locals. People's perception of a black person in the United States may differ from their perception of them in Germany or South Africa. Participants noted how their experiences made them aware of their Blackness in a global context. Elliot, Yoda, and John all had experiences that made them aware of how their Blackness would look different depending on their setting. Their experiences made them aware that their Blackness would be received differently depending on where in the world they were.

Elliot racially identifies as Black and ethnically as African American or Black American. Elliot considers herself to be a seasoned traveler, however she chose to focus on her experiences in Thailand. She and her sister went for vacation there for about 6 days. She describes her experience with the locals. From the moment they landed she said, "I am getting treated like something they have never seen before." She mentioned how people would say things like, "'Oh my gosh, your hair!' because by then I had Senegalese twist with the colors, [but] after that it was nonstop, it felt like." Before this trip Dianna had never experienced anything like this. She mentions how this came as a surprise to her since when she was growing up, "I grew up around a lot of Filipinos … I at least [had an idea] of what people might look like. The only difference [I expected] may have been the language," so she was surprised to find people so surprised to see her. She recalls, "Sometimes I think people would look at us … but it was interesting when we got stopped." She said this happened even in professional settings and the attention made her uncomfortable, "Even when we got massages … it was just weird," because they would say things like, "'Your skin so sexy.'" It wasn't until later that she realized, "Now knowing more terms I could see that it was a fetish." Elliot noticed people were 'hyper' interested in her skin and hair and struggled to understand what about her made her so exotic. She found it strange when people wanted to take photos with her, "I was like, 'alright but it's just me, nobody special in this sense.'" She was surprised at how others received her, especially since she wasn't surprised to see them. Because of her experience growing

up in New York it hadn't occurred to her that people around the world had not seen people different from them, or that seeing a Black person could be so 'unusual". The trip opened her eyes to how others in the world perceived her and therefore how she came to see herself, within a global context.

Yoda identifies as African American. Before traveling to China, Yoda had very little international travel experience. He visited China with his orchestra in 2019 for 2 weeks. While in China, Yoda developed a global understanding of how his Black identity was received in different contexts around the world. He illustrates that realization in an experience he had exploring China's tourist sites, "When we were at the Terracotta Warriors, I walked out of the exhibit and I realized a bunch of people in my orchestra were taking a picture together so I decided to join in, but then I realized that everyone taking a picture was Black and that all the people taking the pictures were the Chinese passerby" he continues that, "some of the kids and adults came over to us and tried to talk to us and one of them grabbed my hair and put it on their head," and began signaling to their friends as if to say, "'Take a picture'. I was like 'What is this? What!'" The entire situation made him uncomfortable for he said, "When I was in China, I very quickly realized that, although to me my ethnicity was something that was just an aspect of my entity (a very important aspect but still just one aspect) in China they [saw] that as your entire identity." In that moment, Yoda became aware of the difference between how he and Chinese locals perceived his Blackness. Suddenly, the contents of his identity were reduced to his race for he recalls feeling that "I was received more as this exotic thing than as an actual person where you have to ask for consent to touch." This experience was jarring for him because, according to him, this perception of him was incomplete. He explains, "I don't see my Blackness as my entire identity. I just now understand that other people do see me that way. And that's a weird thing to realize. It doesn't change how I think of myself internally, but it does change how I perceive others perceiving me." I argue identity is the interaction between one's internal and external identities, one's internal identity construction interacting with their environment to inform the individual of who they are. We, as social creatures, are shaped by our interactions with others and their perceptions of us. Yoda developed a new conceptualization of his identity construction. Due to

his experiences in China, he was forced to reconstruct how he understood himself and develop the ability to perceive himself in different cultural contexts.

John racially identifies as Black/White and or Black American. Both his Black and White racial identities are a part of him and shape how he understands himself. John has had a lot of international travel experience; however, he chose to focus on his experiences in Germany and South Africa. In Germany, John describes an experience that impacted how he came to understand the relationship between others' perceptions of him and his identity construction. He describes the scene, "A White friend and I were talking with White German girls about the same age in Heidelberg Germany in 1975 … [and] Though I was light-skinned … my huge afro was well underway. Most Germans then had little experience with Non-White people. They were responding differently to me than my friend; I wasn't quite sure why, but had some inkling that race had something to do with it." John's experience caused him to be reflective about how his race (color) made people perceive him and therefore interact with him, for he said, "I think that interaction helped crystallize for me that even had I wished to pass as White, it probably wasn't possible." He developed a new consciousness that was hyper aware of how his appearance interacts with his external experience to shape how people perceive him. He provided another example, this time however he was in Cape Town, South Africa. He sets the scene, "I was standing in a long line to get a ticket to a soccer game … When I was about the third person from the cashier, a White South African man, about seven people back, jumped the line and asked if I'd buy two tickets for him. I turned around and saw everyone behind me was Black. Everyone in front of me was Black," at this moment John concludes that, "he quite intentionally picked out me—obviously [I was] the lightest-skinned person there other than him. He probably thought I was Colored (which I was by South African racial schemas.) So, I politely declined." Once again, though in an entirely different part of the world, John realized that his racial appearance had shaped his experience, for he remarks, "It was a lived reinforcement that while I'm not Black in the same way as the other people in line—we differ in so many ways— [but] I'm most definitely not White, and have never wanted to be, in the way that man wanted me to be." In Germany, John was not White enough. In South Africa he could pass for "Colored" and therefore was Whiter than

his Black, South African counterparts. Both instances forced John to realize a new part of his identity conception, the hyper awareness of how others will perceive him relative to his environment.

<u>NEW DIMENSION</u>

Three participants noted that their international experiences added new dimension and or complexity to their formerly conceptualized identities. While "new dimension" does not indicate a drastic change, it does indicate some sort of development. Participants indicated that parts of their identity constructions were expanded. Participants saw dimension added to their identities either through their understanding of language, ethnicity, or in their entire identity conceptualizations. Their external experiences forced them to rethink their identities by either highlighting and or adding new elements to it.

James noted that his international experience caused him to develop a more dimensional identity, especially as it pertains to language. James identifies as African American and has had a lot of international experience however he chose to focus on his experience in Cape Town, South Africa. He describes the country as, "a trippy place to be as a Black American," for he noted, of the places he has visited, his experience there had the greatest impact on his identity construction. He went to South Africa to participate in a Literary Conference. He said, "South Africa has 11 official languages ... and being someone who only speaks English … sitting in these poetry performances and listening to them deliver poems as they are moving from English to Africans to Xhosa … I felt like an outsider ... but at the same time there was something very familiar … It felt very Black southern church … there were things happening in the delivery but at the same time I don't speak ... any of these African languages that are being woven in. The experience of engaging with my own lack of fluency in anything other than English was a major moment for me." His experience listening to the poems made him wrestle with the connection between language and his identity construction. He could not understand the majority of what was spoken; however, the delivery was also familiar. This is what James meant by "trippy." While the experience did not result in a change in his identity perception it did, "added dimension." He explained that "I have thought about this, but I never thought about this from this perspective. So, like for instance, South Africa and the language thing: I have been to places where people were speaking a language I

didn't know … but there is something about being in a room with Black people speaking languages that I didn't know. There is … another layer to this that I hadn't really thought about, particularly for someone who uses language for a living." James developed a new way of understanding his relationship to language. His experience in South Africa made him reconsider how he related to language and therefore reconceptualize/develop his identity construction.

       Okoye's international experience in London caused her to rethink her identity, and desire for it to be more dimensional. Okoye's identity perception is complicated. She identifies as African American but also considers it to be an unsatisfactory way to identify her. She visited Britain in the fall of her junior year in college and noted that her interactions with Black British people (Black Brits) made her rethink her identity construction. She describes her experience saying, "Talking to Black Brits and meeting Black Brits I discovered ... These people have dual citizenship. They were as equally yoked as British as they were with their African and Caribbean identities." She realized that Black Brits have a vastly different identity construction than African Americans for she said, "[being] a Black Brit holds a different weight [than] being Black American … Nobody there is Black because they don't go by Black. They don't go by African Brit either because they have the ability to stand tall in their identity as Africans, as descendants of people who immigrated to the UK. They still have a whole other community outside of [Britain]." This is something Okoye realized she could not relate to, and this impacted how she compartmentalized her own identity. She realized she does not have a dual identity like her peers in Britan, "On paper I am an American and I don't really ... feel comfortable identifying outside of that one identity because [I am a descendant] of slavery." Okoye does not have an identity outside of America, that heritage and "other identity" was taken away from her by the legacy of slavery. This distinction between how she identifies compared to her Black British counterparts created a sense of longing in Okoye, for she said, "It left me with pressing questions and a very heavy heart on who I am. 'What is it for me to be Black, for me to be Black abroad, [and] for me to be Black in America?'" That longing to have a more complex identity became more pronounced in her interactions with Black Brits, Black people that have more secure identities. After being faced with the lack of security in her own identity construction as an African

American and having the opportunity to experience "Blackness" in another context, Okoye began to reflect on her identity construction and developed a more complex viewpoint from which to analyze herself and her relationship to her ancestry.

Luke Skywalker, similarly, wanted his identity construction to include more than just his racial identity. Luke Skywalker identifies as African American. Before visiting China, Luke Skywalker had few other international experiences. His experiences with the local Chinese people made him aware of how others perceived him. He describes his experience by explaining that "There aren't a lot of dark people in China. A lot of people have never seen them before," and therefore Chinese people were, "very curious about me as a Black person." Luke Skywalker noted that this fixation on his racial identity made him, "At first [find] the attention interesting. Big crowds would form around my friends and I when we walked around. It was kinda funny at first, but after a while it made me realize … everywhere I go I will only be seen for my race." This conclusion made him realize that "I, as a person, am way more than just my race." He recalled that, "[Even in America] when people describe me, they say Black [and then insert] descriptor before anything else. For example, they will say "Black college student;" however, his experiences in China were so heightened that he became more aware of how other's perceptions affected his identity construction. Luke Skywalker became reflective about how he actively conceptualized his identity and or saw himself for he said, "When people reduce me to a label that has to do with race it makes me feel confined/ limited to only being described by my race. In my mind, I see myself as way more." He goes on to reflect that, "in China I realized, I have to stop only defining myself only by my race, I can be way more than that and I am way more than that … blackness is still a part of my identity, but I really need to branch out." In other words, his external experiences in China made him see the dimension within himself. Rather than just identifying with his race he became aware of the complexity of his own identity and desired to expand his identity construction to better reflect those parts of himself.

My Reflection

My experience abroad was no more unique than my other participants. While I might take into consideration that factors, such as where I went, my age, and gender all (to varying degrees) influenced

the international experience I had, I would not conclude that my experience was an anomaly. I identify as Black and or African American when introducing myself to other racial groups. However, personally I understand myself as a Black woman from Oakland, California. At that stage in my life, I felt I had developed a strong understanding of self. My study abroad experience made me realize that my identity construction was contextual to my experience in the United States and did not stand well outside its borders. My experience abroad forced me to understand myself in a global context and therefore develop a global identity.

My global identity was hugely impacted by my understanding of how Chinese locals saw me. First, I became aware of Chinese people's perception of my physical blackness. James Baldwin describes a similar experience he had when he visited a small village in Europe. Like him I felt like, "All of the physical characteristics of the Negro which had caused me, in America, a very different and almost forgotten pain were nothing less than miraculous-or infernal-in the eyes of the village people" (Baldwin). This meant a lot of staring, questioning, and photos. Like Nannette Boakye, on her trip in Vietnam, I slowly began to, "[get] uncomfortable .... I just wanted to exist as a tourist without people staring at me or asking for pictures" (Boakye). I began to "see people hide their phones, and sneakily try to take pictures of me which made me feel [even more] uncomfortable" (Boakye). It became like a sixth sense; I could tell by people's body language when they had noticed me and used it to prepare myself for the stares, questions, and sudden reveal of cellphones from pockets and purses. Even if their actions were not malicious, after three months, under the constant gaze of the local population, it took a toll, my patience dwained, and the looks stopped feeling so innocent. The overall experience was very draining, dehumanizing, and unsettling for me. I became aware of Chinese people's perceptions of me and began to compartmentalize myself through their eyes. It was through these "particular interactions and reactions [I] had directly" with Chinese people that, "had the greatest effect on [my] global citizen identity development" (Hendershot and Sperandio, 52). A new part of my identity had taken form, I no longer only understood my physical blackness in an American context but now had a global perspective to add to my identity construction.

My experience also made me rethink the relationship between my African heritage and identity construction. Chinese people often mistook me for African. My first day in China, I took a taxi to meet up with the rest of the students in my program. In my conversation with the driver, he asked me where I was from. I told him America and noticed he seemed pleased. From that moment on I saw myself through Chinese eyes in a way that made me grapple with my African heritage and its relationship, or lack thereof, to my identity construction. While I understood why people would assume I was African this misidentification highlighted a sense of dysphoria I have always had in relation to my African heritage. In the United States I felt that "despite the terrorization which the Negro in America endured and endures sporadically until today ... the battle for [my] identity [had] long ago been won" (Baldwin). At that stage in my life I had, within an American context, defined myself as African American, so when Chinese people identified me as African my identity construction was disrupted. This misidentification uncovered the insecurity that, "any American Negro, wishing to go back so far, will find his journey through time abruptly arrested by the signature on the bill of sale which served as the entrance paper for his ancestor" (Baldwin). In other words, interactions with Chinese locals forced me to come to terms with the fact that I would forever feel distant from the continent of my lineage and the African part of my identity.

Living in China for 3 months brought this internal battle (the insecurity of my identity) to the surface, while also presenting a new framework from which to interpret my identity. I realized that though I personally do not identify as African, because of my appearance, others around the world will associate me with it. This international experience gave me a global perspective from which to analyze my African heritage. The standpoint from which I defined my identity shifted from me to the "international" spectator or local I came across when abroad. In America, I could define for myself who I was. In China and internationally, that capability shifted to the onlooker, even if I did not agree with their classification. I developed a new way from which to perceive my identity and hence witnessed the culmination of my global one.

African American vs Black

     I hypothesize that international travel is a more complicated experience for Black people but especially African Americans due to their unique identity makeup. In other words, there is something that makes international travel especially challenging for African Americans. My pool of participants includes Black people, those with roots in the Caribbean and from across Africa, and African Americans, whose ancestors shared a multigenerational history in the US. Four of my participants were of Caribbean and or African descent, while the rest were African American. I chose to have Black participants with diverse backgrounds to test my hypothesis: Do Black and African Americans experience international travel differently? Are there distinctions in how their external/international experiences interact with their internal identity constructions? I chose to focus on the experiences of both myself and my participants, analyzing only those relevant to the discussion. Therefore, not all my participants' experiences were analyzed.

     I coined the term identity fatigue to define the unsettling feeling one gets when their identity construction is challenged. One's identity consists of both its internal and external parts. The internal identity construction is shaped by one's external/international experience. Identity fatigue refers to the negative impact external stimuli has on one's identity construction, often giving rise to some internal conflict. In the case of African Americans, the experience can force them to come face to face with the unsettling insecurity of their identity construction, being they are descendants of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

     I define the African American identity as a mosaic. A mosaic is an image produced by the arrangement of small pieces of stone or glass. The ancestors of African Americans were dragged to the shores of America and forced to "forget" their African heritage. However, slaves, in their new "home," constructed their new identities from the pieces of their African ones and created something new. The result being an African American "identity mosaic," one dependent on its American social construct. This metaphor speaks to the fluidity and fragility of the African American identity. It, though capable of operating as a fully functional identity construction, creates challenges for African Americans when they

go abroad. Once African Americans leave the United States the framework for their (already) insecure identity becomes vulnerable. Internationally, they are faced with external stimuli that contradicts their identity construction. I define this experience and the feelings that encompass it as identity fatigue.

Overall, Black participants seemed less susceptible to identity fatigue than their African American counterparts. Black participants were more grounded in their identities and therefore their international experiences had less of an unsettling impact on their identity construction. Black participants noted that their experiences abroad allowed them to connect with local Black people and help them develop a closer connection to their ethnic identities and therefore develop a sense of pride.

The connections they formed with locals seemed to come easily to them. For example, M'Baku noted that while abroad in Rwanda, "a lot of people looked like me out there." He mentioned when " I was walking with the group ... there were people just talking to me," because people assumed he was a native. M'Baku felt like "Rwanda really connected with me" because being perceived as a native it gave him privileges. He said, "Even in the club, if I wanted to get a table it would be easier for me to get it or to get us drinks. People were even more likely to dance with me." Shuri had a similar experience in Senegal for she said, "I blended in" and that she had, "a sudden connection that I did not know would occur." Even though she was American that part, "of my identity became second to me being Malian when I spoke to locals." Mrs. Kirkland experienced this in London for she said, "When I was amongst … Black Caribbean people if we went out and there was Caribbean music playing, we would just all be dancing or if we went somewhere and there was Caribbean food or African food ...everybody [was] experiencing the same thing [because] this is … a part of our culture." She said it gave her "the homie feeling." Queen noticed "I didn't stand out because I looked like everyone else" or that people would say things like, "You're Black, okay I trust you." The identity constructs of these participants allowed them to make connections with locals not only physically but culturally. The experiences reaffirmed rather than fatigued their identity constructions.

Black participants' connection to their host countries helped them develop deeper connections to their identity constructions and develop a sense of pride. M'Baku mentions that his experiences gave him,

"a little bit more pride in being a person of color." Shuri said, "they saw me as Malian, so it made me feel more Malian." Mrs. Kirkland noted in her interactions with British Caribbean people that, "These experiences deepened the pride I had in my whole identity." Queen said her experiences made her feel like, "Black people around the world have this kinship. We can relate to each other's experiences" which therefore made her feel better about her identity as a Black person. Their close relationships to those around them reaffirmed who they were and therefore helped them feel prouder of their identity constructs.

Overall, most Black participants connected their identity affirming experiences to the fact that they knew their ethnic heritage before traveling abroad. M'Baku said, "Because of my parents I feel like my identity had more depth, so I knew more about those parts of me" and that understanding acted as foundation for the external cultural experiences he had abroad. That certainty in his identity construction he thinks, "prepared me, [and] gave me more stuff to talk about, more pride in what is in me," for if you don't know what's in you it can be hard to have pride. Shuri mentions something similar for she said, "my parents were very big on making sure I could speak the language" therefore making her familiar with the culture. So, when she went to Senegal, "They saw more of my Malian cultural background when I interacted" with them. Her Malian cultural background helped her internationally develop closer relationships with Senegalese people. Mrs. Kirkland noted that, "Before I went, I was grounded in who I was in terms of race, I never doubted that" for she felt Caribbean culture, "is a prominent part of my identity. It was something I identified with before I went, when I got there, and after." Knowing your roots and having a connection to it prior to one's international experience seemed to help participants have more affirming experiences abroad. They became more secure in their identity structures and experienced less uncertainty in their identity constructions.

African Americans, though grounded in their identified construction before they left, were more prone to experience identity fatigue when abroad. These feelings were triggered by their interactions with the locals of their host countries, whether Black or not. In their interactions with locals of other ethnicities, participants noted that it made them reflect on their African heritage and its relationship to their identity construction. Their interactions with Black locals highlighted how they differed from their

Black counterparts around the world. Lastly, observing the secure identity constructs of their international Black peers made participants reflective about the insecurity of their own identity makeups. These external interactions are all examples of how participants, including myself, experienced identity fatigue.

When interacting with locals of different ethnicities participants became more reflective about their African heritage and its relationship to their identity construction. Ramonda mentions her experience in India explaining to locals, "I have African lineage. I just don't know where to trace it back to," for she remarks, "that was kind of a foreign thing when I got the chance to explain it to people." Overtime, however, these conversations with locals made her realize, "I am not able to trace my lineage back to the country where my African ancestors come from … I wish I knew where my people come from." I felt a similar way. Chinese people often mistook me for African and this forced me to come to terms with the fact that I had no relationship with that part of my identity, a connection taken away from me by slavery. Even though I didn't identify with that part of myself, its connection to me was evident to others. When I was abroad, it was a realization I could not escape, for it was how Chinese people saw me. Both Ramonda and I were faced with the unsettling reality of our fractured relationship to our African heritage. Slavery and our identify constructions, as African Americans, are directly related and therefore can be an unsettling point of discussion.

African American's encounters with Black locals from around the world highlighted their distinction from their international, Black counterparts. This was something noted by John and James when they visited countries in Africa. When John was in Ghana, he noted that, "African American is not the same as African" for despite him sharing, "some history with people on [that] part of the African continent," he recognized, "for the most part I do not have a shared history with them." James noted several times on his trip in South Africa how disconnected he felt from Black South Africans. He describes an instance where he reflects, "I would say that I felt most African-American when it came to issues of language." At the Poetry Festival, "poems were read and performed in languages other than English," and the experience, "made me feel very distanced and made me feel my English-speaking Americanness (and African Americanness) very much." He also noted how disconnected he felt when,

"traveling through the townships and being exposed to the tremendous poverty" for he said, "I felt every bit of my African Americanness, and the relative privilege that comes with my economic security as a middle-class American." Both of their experiences highlighted how their international experiences with other Black people made them realize the distinctiveness of their identity construction, for it created a divide between them and their African Black peers. Despite what they shared they were different.

Observing the secure identity constructions of their international Black peers made my African American participants reflectively insecure about their own identity makeups. Okoye noted that her experiences with Black Brits really impacted how she saw her own identity makeup, for she said she realized, "they have dual citizenship. They were as equally yoked as British as they were with their African and Caribbean identities." Their experiences were not like her own and therefore created different identities for, "They got [there] by immigration. The choice of being [there gave them] some pride in wanting to be a part of a different country … they [had] a part of themselves that I never have." Realizing this distinction, "left me with pressing questions and a very heavy heart on who I am." She asked questions like "'What is it for me to be black, for me to be black abroad, for me to be black in America?'" Okoye witnessed that Black Brits have identity structures that allow them to connect to other parts of their identities, a luxury she does not have. That cultural connection gave them a kind of security and therefore made her realize the insecurity in her identity construction, for she could not make these kinds of connections.

Overall, myself and my African American participants had international experiences that caused us to experience identity fatigue. We became aware of the fact that we have an identity construction that is distinctly insecure. Slavery took something away from us and shaped how we were forced to form our identities. Traveling internationally exposed us to the perceptions of others, which impacted our identity construction, not to mention put us in contact with other Black individuals who don't have the same "insecure" identity constructs. International travel is a unique experience for African Americans. Having a secure identity construction before going abroad does make a difference, and the distinctly unsettling circumstances for the African American one makes for unique challenges when they go abroad.

Conclusion

The impact of international travel on Black people's identity construction is great, but especially for African Americans due to their unique identity construction. My research is a combined analysis of my international experiences and that of my fourteen participants. I argue that identity has two parts: your external part, which is one's understanding of others' perceptions of them, and the internal part, which is your personal identity makeup. I attributed my participants' external identities with their international experiences. In my research, I determine how the external experiences of going abroad impact the identity conceptualization of my participants. My research question therefore was: How does going abroad impact Black/African Americans' conceptualization of self?

To assess the answer to this question I analyzed and reflected on my own international experience and its effect on my identity construction. I also conducted thirteen interviews and had participants answer survey questions regarding their identity construction before and after their international trips. Their responses proved that their time abroad did impact their identity constructions.

I categorized the impacts on the participant's identity construction in three categories. The first being "reinforcement." This describes how one's international experience solidifies their internal identity construction. The other being "something new" which describes the new layers of complexity that are added to how participants understood themselves. This category can be broken up into two other parts: the development of pride and a global identity coupled with a hyper awareness of others' perceptions of them. The last category being "new dimension" which describes the new layers and complexity that are added to one's identity construction.

Personally, my experience resulted in me developing a global identity and a new hyper awareness of others' perceptions of me. I realized my identity construction as an African American was synonymous with my experience in the United States, and when I left that cultural context my identity construction was challenged. Suddenly, I had to see myself through the eyes of those from a different cultural context. I went from having the autonomy to define myself to being at the mercy of those I ran into, being

pressured to satisfy their expectations of who they thought I was, even if I did not agree with their assessment.

I was also constantly reminded, in my encounters with Chinese locals, that I did not have a connection to my African lineage. In being defined as African I was reminded of the severed connection to the African part of my identity. I also became aware that though I did not identify with that part of my identity I was powerless to persuade others otherwise. My experience gave me a global perspective from which to see my identity construction that I did not have before.

Overall, I discovered my identity construction is not meant to be rigid, but to remain subject to change. My international experience forced me to release control of the identity construction I had spent most of my life, up until that point, polishing. We are not the only ones who have a say in who we are. We cannot deny that our experiences, whether international or not, will impact our identity constructions but we do get to decide how. As an African American, I knew this to a degree, but when I went abroad, I felt powerless in a way I had not before. After returning home, I had to regain my autonomy, make my edits, redefine, and categorize my experiences to inform and reconstruct my new identity.

There is little scholarship that studies the impact of international travel as it pertains to the diversity of identity construction within the Black community. I argue, and my research supports, that there is a divide between the impact of international travel on Black people versus African Americans. I argue, while both experiences are important, they are not the same. Therefore, to do both groups justice we must recognize this distinction.

I define Black as the global classification for Black people, a part of the African diaspora. In my paper, that specifically refers to those who can trace back their Caribbean and or African roots and classify that heritage as a part of their identity construction. African American is the group whose ancestors share a multigenerational history in the US, were a part of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and therefore have a shared experience and identity construction unique to the cultural context of the United States.

My Black participants noted that their international experiences helped reaffirm their identity constructions. They were able to form relationships with other Black locals in their host countries which helped them feel more confident about their own identity constructions. My African American participants noted their international experiences caused them to experience identity fatigue. In their interactions with locals, participants became aware of how their heritage with slavery disrupted any relationship they would have with to their African heritage and how that reality set them apart from their other Black counterparts around the world.

The African American experience is an isolating one. It creates an identity construction that other ethnicities around the world struggle to understand. Encounters with other Black people abroad made African American participants hyper aware of the insecurity of their identity, for other Black people around the world know where their lineage comes from. The African American identity construction is one that can only exist within the confines of the United States. There the African American experience is unquestioned, but internationally its validity is debated. Rather than their identity construction creating bridges, like it did for my Black participants, it more often created ravines. Being forced to explain this reality gave African Americans identity fatigue.

This research has many implications for better understanding the Black/African American community. In terms of travel writing, this research could add to the greater collection of Black travel writing and provide a more modern take on African American travel experiences. Black/ African American travel is more, "socio politically motivated on behalf of the collective for racial uplift rather than for mere individualized, European-type, leisure class entertainment…" (Smith, 1). Therefore, studying international travel, as experienced by Black/African Americans, can be crucial in trying to understand their experience and complex identity constructions. This research also expands on conversations already being had about the Black/African American experience but provides a global perspective, while also normalizing the conversation around Black/African American identity constructions. It proves that Black/African American identity is a conversation that can be expanded to many fields of study and is a legitime experience with modern implications.

For Black/African American students, this research provides them insight into what other Black/African Americans, like themselves, experience when abroad. These experiences will prepare students to wrestle with, "identity, intersectionality, and the process of self-understanding" (Outside Looking In). In addition, it will provide them with the tools to deal with their, "fear of the unfamiliar, and anxiety about racism in a foreign country [which] have historically been identified as the primary causes behind why students of Color hesitate to study abroad" (Lu et al., 443). By providing these experiences, college programs may be more equipped to support Black/African American students when they choose to study abroad.

For African Americans, this research is crucial, for it allows them to draw connections between slavery and their modern experiences, such as traveling abroad. Often, to minimize the focus on slavery, African Americans are only discussed in relation to their successes. However, by discussing the African American experience this way their experiences, struggles, and feelings are legitimized.

This project illustrates the powerful relationship between personal identity construction and external experiences, a language African Americans understand well. These experiences continue that 400-year battle to legitimize and help African Americans cope with the legacy of slavery. As James Baldwin said, "People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them" (Baldwin). For African Americans, history is experienced on a continuum. The past and the present are not distinct but happen at the same time, and my participants' experiences abroad attest to this. African Americans live everyday with the reality of what happened to their ancestors, and it not only shapes their identity constructions but how they experience the present.

What can be improved upon?

There is always room for improvement. There are four areas that, if added, could strengthen my paper, and make my analysis more conclusive. My biggest obstacle was time. If I had more of it my analysis would have been more extensive, but lack of it forced me to have to forgo discussing some things.

First, I would consider the impact of factors on the experiences of my participants. Factors are additional components that may also shape one's international experience. No person is the same, no community of people are homogeneous. Even within the Black population there are factors unique to each individual and or their present environment that may shape their international experience. Considering how diverse my sample was, there are an array of factors that must be considered when trying to analyze their international experiences and its impacts on their identity. Some examples of such factors include: the recipient's complexion (light or dark), location or region of the world, gender, age, nature of their trip, solo versus group travel, and how many, if any, other Black people were in the vicinity (either as locals or visitors). These different descriptors of the individual may impact their experience and therefore their identity construction.

Another factor to consider would be the intersection of race and gender. This was something I noticed however did not have the time to fully analyze. Intersectionality illustrates the complexity of one's identity and how it works to one's disadvantage. In my research, I noticed how intersection impacted the experiences of Black/African American women. Internationally being a woman is recognized as a vulnerable position. However, that coupled with being Black may have had added negative consequences. Many of the Black/African American women I interviewed, including myself, mentioned being victims of hyper sexualization. This either made them an oddity, targets of sexual assault, or assumed prostitutes. Internationally, this intersection of internal identity components could be argued to further complicate the experiences of Black/African American women when they travel abroad.

Lastly, conclusions are always stronger the greater the sample. My research only studied 14 people including myself. In the future it may help to include more participants and have an equal ratio of men to women. Also, to better conclude the difference between the experiences of Black individuals from African Americans, it would also help to have a more even ratio (considering mine was four to ten). All these additions could help to improve the conclusions drawn in my paper.

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