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Transforming Perspectives: How Black Students Make Meaning of Multi-Country Study Abroad Experiences

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Los Angeles

Transforming Perspectives:

How Black Students Make Meaning of Multi-Country

Study Abroad Experiences

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Janelle Nicole Rahyns

2018

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Transforming Perspectives:

How Black Students Make Meaning of Multi-Country

Study Abroad Experiences

by

Janelle Nicole Rahyns

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Walter R. Allen, Co-Chair

Robert T. Teranishi, Co-Chair

*Not all those who wander are lost.*

J.R.R. Tolkien (1954)

Black (African American) students experience college uniquely compared to other racial and ethnic groups (Allen, 1992). The study abroad experience offers a different lens to explore Black student development and how Black students make meaning of this opportunity. The primary objective of this study was to gain an understanding of how participants reflected on their multi-country study abroad experiences and how they made sense of these experiences.

I examined the study abroad experience through interpretive phenomenological analysis, utilizing Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (1992) to investigate how Black college students reflected on their experiences. I attempted to address the following research questions; What key experiences facilitate transformative learning in multi-country study abroad contexts for Black college students? In what ways do Black college students make meaning of their international experiences? How, if at all, can student experiences be interpreted through the lens of transformative learning theory? In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of seven Black college graduates who participated in multi-country study abroad experiences as undergraduates.

Study rationale included the need to better support the college student development of Black students. Findings shed light on the unique Black college student experience, offering tools to support development. This dissertation identifies experiences that may contribute to providing educators, researchers, and policymakers insight on the study abroad experience for Black college students. For example, this dissertation identified Black students who participated in multi-country study abroad programs applied a comparative lens to their study abroad experiences. Recommendations include expanding study abroad opportunities for Black students. The opportunity to experience differing countries provides a unique personal growth experience for Black students and these experiences may positively contribute to Black student development on US campuses. For example, Black students described and interpreted a strong sense of racial identity, interglobal competence, and commitment to activism after participating in a multi-country study abroad program. As race is the most salient identity named in their experiences abroad, Black students shared these experiences based on travel to different countries. These participants appeared to have a grounded and mature reflection on their racial identity and how race is viewed in other parts of the world.

This dissertation of Janelle Nicole Rahyns is approved.

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2018

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*When I discover who I am, I'll be free.*

Ralph Ellison (1952)

*Background of the Problem*

Ralph Waldo Ellison wrote and published *Invisible Man* in 1952. The book dealt with many of the issues facing Black Americans at the time, including individuality and personal identity. Ellison was struggling to know himself amid social dissonance, hospitalization and electroshock treatment. While the context in many ways is different today, the struggle to know one's self, and to understand one's place in the world, remains a challenge. Black Americans still experience the realities of the nation's legacy of racism, through institutional mechanisms, media representations and associated stereotypes. Consequently, a Black individual who has grown up in America likely has a different view of himself or herself than individuals that have lived and learned outside of the United States. To experience both provides individuals a layered and more nuanced perception of self and place.

Former first lady Michelle Obama during her first official trip to China remarked about the importance and benefits of living and studying abroad. She wanted to stress the value of students learning from different cultures.

"It's very hard to stay in your comfort zone when you're living in another country," she said. "When you're struggling with a language, new foods, learning directions, being forced to make friends and do things that you wouldn't normally do, that's going to set you up for a lifetime of value. It's going to make you a better parent. It's going to make you a better human being" (iReport CNN, 2014).

In his autobiography, President Obama alluded to his international experiences abroad as a youth and a college student as experiences that helped to shape his racial identity (Obama, 1995). Obama is biracial (Black and white) and lived in Indonesia with his family. He noted his first Nigrescence experience as seeing a picture of a Black man who had been using bleaching products to lighten his skin (Obama, 1995). Although this experience was traumatizing, Obama reflected on the words of his mother: "to be black was to be the beneficiary of a great inheritance, a special destiny, glorious burdens that only we were strong enough to bear" (Obama, 1995). Obama and other future presidents, global leaders, and social change-makers may owe their identity and perspective development to international experiences, and study abroad opportunities can be a catalyst to growth and development, for future leaders, parents, Little League coaches, and news reporters.

Previous research documents the journey of personal development and how years spent in college are formative (Astin 1993, Astin 1999). For example. Astin's (2012) Input-Environment-Output model argues the nature of learning environments of learning may influence students' experiences. An aspect of the college experience gaining attention as critical to learning and future success in the global economy is diverse, multicultural exchange opportunities, and a key to attain these experiences is through study abroad programs (Open Doors, 2016). While universities recognize the benefits of study abroad for all students, Black and brown college students participate in study abroad programs in far fewer numbers than other ethnic groups (Open Doors, 2016). Black college students experience campus life differently than other racial and ethnic groups, and as a result, their unique experiences warrant additional research. This study seeks to unpack and explore the unique experiences of Black college students as they participate in multi-country study abroad programs.

A study abroad experience can be defined as an opportunity for students to attend classes in another country for academic credit. Study abroad as an experience dates back as early as the 11th century. Many monasteries and original sacred texts for religious studies could be found in distance locations (Lee, 2015). Aspiring monks and other clergyman would travel to live for a time "studying abroad" with religious men (Boer, 2011). As centuries passed, study abroad became an elite opportunity for the aristocracy and bourgeois classes to send their sons abroad to learn about the classical greats and become "cultured" (Lee, 2015). Eventually, study abroad began to be influenced by the advancement of transportation technology. One such advancement: universities created opportunities for students to experience study abroad while traveling on a ship. "Floating universities" were created in the 19th century so students could sail to Europe while studying (Lee, 2015). With increased transportation options, more students embarked on global adventures to see the world.

*Statement of the Problem*

This dissertation explored how Black college students make meaning of their study abroad experiences as it relates to race and other intersecting identities. Meaning making is a descriptor within the phenomenological literature that describes the critical practical discourse of communication. Habermas states that the "three rays of meaning intersect and are focused linguistic expressions. What the speaker wants to say with the expression connected with what is literally said in it, as well as with the action that what is said should be understood as" (Habermas, 1992, p. 58). Participants in this study unpacked and made meaning of their experiences through thoughtful and critical reflection. This study sought to address a gap in the research literature concerning Black students in higher education and study abroad.

The research on study abroad has grown significantly in the past 10 years, yet research of Black students who study abroad remains scarce. Existing research examining the experiences of Black students is limited to single, one-country study abroad programs. This study addresses the scarcity of research on the experiences of Black students studying abroad in multi-country destinations, and how Black students make meaning of these experiences.

Study abroad research identified many positive outcomes for students studying abroad. Retention and higher GPAs are benefits students receive when they study abroad (Hoffa, 2010). Research shows students become competitive candidates in the job market, have a greater understanding of other cultures, acquire foreign language skills, enhance leadership skills, become independent and patient, gain a deeper understanding of self, and become world citizens (Dawson, 2000). Students acquire a broader perspective about the human condition in the world and are confronted with a new sense of world history and appreciation of other cultures (Matz, 1997). Carlson and Widaman (1988) found study abroad experiences reduce nationalism and ethnocentrism and students grow in their academic, professional, and personal pursuits (Dolby 2004, Stroud 2010).

Study abroad research posits positive outcomes for participants and offer a counterspace for Black college students in the United States. Counterspace is a term derived from Critical Race Theory (CRT) denoting an alternative positive space for marginalized students in oppressive spaces (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). The tool, study abroad, for Black students offers college in a different context, an international context that may prove to be positive. The climate for Black college students on American campuses has been hostile since racial integration (Allen, 1985). The 1960s Civil Rights movement resulted in efforts to address historical wrongs by increasing Black access to colleges and universities (Allen, 1992). The campus climate for Black college students has been fraught with racial incidents ranging in severity from the distribution of racist literature and microaggressions to violence and macroaggressions (Allen, 1992).

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United States history is rife with racial injustice against Black Americans and our modern society continues to reflect these racial disparities. Previous studies note Black students have negative experiences on American campuses, specifically predominately and historically white campuses, suffer lower achievement compared to other racial and ethnic groups, and have a higher rate of attrition than white students (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991; Nettles, 1988; Smith, Mustaffa, Jones, Curry, & Allen, 2016). As Black students encounter these experiences on college campuses, often exposed to a climate of prejudice and discrimination in the classroom, the result is higher attrition rates and withdrawal behavior (Cabrera et al., 1999).

In the article, "You Make Me Wanna Holler and Throw Up Both My Hands", W. A. Smith, J. B Mustaffa, C. M. Jones, T. J. Curry, & W. R. Allen (2016), identify the psychosocial stress responses of racial battle fatigue for Black men on White campuses. These students experience frustration, sadness, shock, anger, defensiveness, apathy, academic disidentification, hypersensitivity, hypervigilance, anxiety, irritability, depression, and feelings, of helplessness or hopelessness when encountering racial misandric ideologies (Smith et al, 2016). Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) argue understanding and analyzing the collegiate racial climate is important in examining college access, persistence, graduation, and transfer to and through graduate and professional school for students.

These experiences of Black college students may become obstacles for success for these students and may have implications for equity and access for Black students in higher education. If these issues are not addressed, Black students continue to be vulnerable to ongoing institutional racism throughout their college careers. Harper and Quaye (2007) posit that academically successful Black college men persist because of healthy racial identity status experiences into purposefully engagement and student affairs educators and faculty are to address would be beneficial to college students (Harper, S. & Quaye, S. J.).

*African American* refers to people of African descent and is used interchangeably with the term Black

*Black* refers to people of African descent and is used interchangeably with the term African

      American (Day-Vines, 1998)

*Critical reflection* is the evaluation of the fundamental premises of one's meaning making schemes

      Mezirow, 1998)

*Critical self-reflection* involves critique of a premise upon which the learner has defined the problem

      (Mezirow, 1998)

*Ethnic identity* is a construct that refers to attitudes individuals maintain about their membership in an

      ethnic group. This term is related to the racial identity constructs (Day-Vines, 1998)

*Meaning making* is how we learn to negotiate and act on our own purpose, values, feelings, and

      meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others (Magolda, 2009)

*Meaning schemes* are sets of immediate specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and judgments

      that shape an interpretation and assign causality (Mezirow, 1996).

*Racial identity* is a sense of group identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common

      racial heritage with a particular racial group (Helms, 1990)

*Racism* is the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to

      dominate (Lorde, 1993)

*Reflection* is the awareness of a thought, feeling, perception, disposition, or habit

*Sojourner* refers to an individual traveling abroad for a finite period with the intent of returning to

their home country (Day-Vines, 1998)

*Transformative learning* is a process of transforming a frame of reference to make it more reliable in

      our adult life by holding opinions and generating interpretations that can be justified

      (Mezirow, 2000)

*Purpose of the Research*

The purpose of this research project was to explore how Black college students make meaning of their study abroad experience. I investigated the journey of study abroad as it unfolded for Black undergraduate students and the meaning participants attached to this experience. The focus was on participants' perceptions of their study abroad experience prior to departure, meanings of events while abroad, and participants' reflections returning from studying abroad. Current research acknowledges the outcomes of study abroad for students on a macro level, yet I sought to unpack the study abroad experience on a micro level. The essential processes in this study include the narrative analysis of participants' semi-structured in-depth interviews that cultivated their reflections upon returning from their study abroad experience.

The rationale for this dissertation stemmed from the need to more robustly support the development process of Black college students. This dissertation seeks to identify experiences that provide educators, researchers, and policymakers resources to understand, implement, and improve outcomes for Black college students during study abroad opportunities. Tatum emphasizes the absence of insight surrounding racial identity in the learning process can limit personal aspirations and hinder achievement of African American students (Cheppel, 2012; Tatum, 1992). The motivation for this dissertation developed through the researcher's personal and professional interest in the study abroad experience for African American college students. As a seasoned student affairs professional and social scientist, I was inspired to pursue this topic to address and support the potential outcomes of international education experienced by students of color.

America's history is marked by systemic and institutional racism. As students select to study abroad, research suggests the experience offers an opportunity for personal enlightenment and transformation outside the confines of ongoing marginalization at home. For these reasons, we ask the following research questions.

*Research Questions*

This dissertation examined the experiences and transformative phenomena of study abroad by Black college students through these guiding research questions:

- What key experiences facilitate transformative learning in multi-country study abroad contexts for Black college students?

- In what ways do Black college students make meaning of their international experiences?

- How, if at all, can student experiences be interpreted through the lens of transformative learning theory?

*Theoretical Frameworks*

The qualitative theoretical framework guiding this dissertation study is transformative learning theory (TLT). "Transformative learning is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 58). The basic premise of TLT is students learn through transformative experiences. Transformative learning is defined as a process of transforming a frame of reference to make it more reliable in our adult life by holding opinions and generating interpretations that can be justified (Mezirow, 2000).

In the case of the present study, the learning of Black college students is examined is examined within the context of being a Black college student who has internalized American racial hierarchies and possibly for the first-time experiences an altered sense of self and perception of Blackness outside of that hierarchy. The aim of this investigation was to explore the social and cultural learning Black students while studying abroad, making meaning of these experiences.

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Racial Identity Development

Cross developed the Psychological Nigrescence model also known as the Black identity model in 1971 (Cross, 1971). The model was later revised 20 years later, and holds that Black students experience their racial development in stages through adolescence and into adulthood. Vandiver (2001) deconstructed the Nigrescence theory as follows: The first stage Pre-Encounter, is broken down into two categories, Pre-Encounter Anti-Black identity and Pre-Encounter Assimilation identity. Pre-Encounter Anti-Black identity describes Black students who identify with the dominant white culture, and feel that being Black or acting Black is wrong. Pre-Encounter Assimilation identity describes Black students who try to assimilate into white culture as a way to be accepted by white culture as "right".

A second stage is Encounter – Black students have experiences that juxtapose them to the dominant culture, making clear they not white. This can be a specific and memorable experience or a series of small microaggressions (Solórzano, 2000). The third stage is Immersion-Emersion, where students look for positive examples of Blackness and avoid future assimilation into the dominant white culture (Vandiver, 2001). A fourth stage is Internalization, or Black acceptance, when students actively seek out and explore their Black history. This stage has three identities: Black Nationalist, Biculturist, and Multiculturist. The difference between these identities rests in the number of salient multiple identities beyond Black that the student encounters.

In Internalization, students accept the positive reflection of being Black and build relationships with white groups and other marginalized groups in society (Vandiver, 2001). Within the context of study abroad experience, students interpret their study abroad experiences as having positive outcomes for identity development.

Table 1 Cross' Revised Nigrescence Model

| Model | Stage | Identity |
|-------|-------|----------|
| 1991 revised model | Pre-encounter | Anti-Black |
| | | Assimilation |
| | Encounter | |
| | Immersion-Emersion | Anti-White |
| | | Intense Black Involvement |
| | Internalization | Black Nationalist |
| | | Biculturist |
| | | Multiculturist |

*Note. (Vandiver, 2001)*

Racial identity development is not linear, but circular (Cross, 1991). As Black students move through the different stages, during new life experiences, they may revisit stages depending on circumstances and outcomes (Cross, 1991). Cross argues, "racial identity development should be viewed as a process during which a single dimension of a person's complex, layered identity is first isolated, for purposes of revitalization and transformation, and then at Internalization, reintegrated into the person's total identity matrix" (Tatum, 2007, p. 88).

The significance of study abroad experiences as they relates to Cross' Black student development theory is that through Internalization, students have an opportunity to experience positive Black identity as a result of positive study abroad experiences. This experience is exceptional because Black students are not in the unique environment of American racism. Ongoing racism in the United States has negative psychological effects on Black people in multiple ways (Allen, 1992). While Black Americans should be commended for their resilience and perseverance to remain vital to American society.

I have observed most students do not reach the Internalization level of Cross' model. I argue this point based on negative outcomes for many Black college students, such as low retention and graduation rates. The barriers to reaching the Internalization stage is likely related to continued negative influences of American culture, such as stereotypical media representations, differential law enforcement and school discipline, and differential incarceration rates, leaving many Black students psychologically unable to proceed to the Internalization stage. Study abroad opportunities provide Black students with a context dissimilar to the one they have internalized living in the U.S. While racism and ethnic hierarchies exist outside of the U.S., they are likely not as virulent elsewhere as the experiences Black students have encountered in their home country.

Black students have only recently availed themselves of study abroad opportunities, the positive outcomes of these activities and the resulting adoption of the later stages of the Cross model is only beginning. Neville and Cross Jr.'s 2017 article, *Racial Awakenings, Epiphanies and Encounters in Black Racial Identity,* offers an international perspective on Black consciousness and racial identity development in multiple countries. Their study analyzed the racial life narratives of Black adults living in Australia, Bermuda, South Africa, and the United States. Neville and Cross acknowledge that Black Americans experience epiphanies when seeing race in an international context for the first time. "Seeing one's racial-cultural predicament in a new light and forging a new and different understanding of "what is possible" is central to the current study of racial- cultural awareness (Neville & Cross, Jr., 2017, pg. 103). Neville and Cross (2017) note that "conceptualizations of Black racial identity stress the importance of awareness and consciousness of what it means to be Black psychologically, politically, and socially which is triggered by an encounter" (Neville & Cross, 2017, pg. 103).

Student Development Theory

Higher education research asserts the experiences of college student development support students on campus. Rodgers (1990) defines student development as "the ways that a student grows, progresses, or increases his or her student developmental capabilities as a result of enrollment in an institution of higher education" (Rodgers, 1990, pg. 27). Chickering and Reisser (1993) theorize a series of seven developmental stages college students experience throughout their academic career. These stages include: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Students' progress through these stages can be assessed over time to provide an overall picture of the impact that their college experience has on their development. One weakness of this model is it does not account for racial or ethnic identities and associated experiences. Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory does not address racial and ethnic identities (Evans, et al, 2010), and may not fully capture how Black students specifically develop in college.

Student development theory has evolved over the last one hundred years and now to include social identity theories to acknowledge the diversity of the student body in the United States. Evans, Forney, Guido, Patten, and Renn (2010) note that "racial identity theories [in student development] are predicated on the belief that race is not based in biology but rather in social construction influenced by cultural norms and understandings about the relative merits of individuals from different heritages" (Evans, et al, 2010, pg. 15).

Further research is needed to document the positive outcomes of study abroad experiences on Black student identity. Racial identity development theory and Student development theory are theoretical frameworks of the study to offer to context and explanation to the experiences of Black college students as they study abroad and supports the research and theory of this study.

Transformative Learning Theory

One of the advantages of immersive experiences like study abroad is the potential for these experiences to be transformative in nature (Kiely, 2005). Mezirow defines transformative learning as experiences that change individuals' frames of reference, or ways of looking at and interpreting the world (Jones et al., 2013; Mezirow, 1998). These frames of reference or lenses through which we perceive the world provide the context for making meaning (Jones et al., 2013; Mezirow, 2000). To transform frames of reference, an individual must have experiences that does not make sense using current frames (Jones et al., 2013).

Transformative learning is "a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions" (Kitchenham, 2008, p 104). Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory is informed by Kuhn (1996), Freire (1970; 2000), and Habermas (1971) and their concepts of disorienting dilemma, meaning schemes, meaning perspectives, perspective transformation, frame of reference, levels of learning processes, habits of mind, critical self-reflection, and transforming points of view (Kitchenham, 2008). "It is the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove true or justified to guide action" (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 7–8).

The foundation of Transformative Learning asserts "personal transformation" after an experience. Two major elements of Transformative Learning are critical reflection and critical self-reflection (Mezirow, 1998). Transformative learning involves a frame of reference that comprises habits of mind and meaning perspective, which lead to a perspective transformation (Kitchenham, 2008), and I framed this study on how Black college students make meaning of the transforming experience of study abroad.

Critical reflection is key to transformative learning. Critical reflection not only involves the nature and consequence of one's actions but also includes the related circumstances of their origin (Kitchenham, 2008). Critical self-reflection also is key to transformative learning. Participants have the opportunity to look inward and examine meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. Students can transform an individual meaning scheme by examining previous actions and where those actions originated. I posit when they examine their actions and origins through an international lens, the reflection is much deeper, more complex, and results in transforming their meaning schemes (Kitchenham, 2008). Meaning making is how we learn to negotiate and act on our own purpose, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others (Magolda, 2009).

Mezirow argues experience must be paired with critical reflection for transformative learning to occur. A critical reflection, potentially developed while studying abroad, enables students to become aware of their own internalized frames of reference (Jones et al., 2012; Mezirow, 1996). Critical self-reflection offers the opportunity to transform perspectives and thoughts that may lead to a revision of previous assumptions, resulting in changes in choices and thoughts and the rationale students rely on to justify them (Mezirow, 1998).

Transformative learning leans on Freire's theory of critical consciousness (Mezirow, 1992) . Freire defines conscientization as "learning to perceive, social, political, and economic traditions – developing a critical awareness – so that individuals can take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1970, p. 17). Freire's theory influenced Mezirow in his ideas of disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, critical self-reflection, and critical discourse (Mezirow, 1985). Mezirow also relied on Habermas (1971) and his three domains of learning: (a) the technical, (b) the practical, and (c) the emancipatory.

Mezirow restated these domains as (a) instrumental, (b) dialogic, and (c) self-reflective (Mezirow, 1985). The study abroad experience offers a space for instrumental learning, dialogic learning, and self-reflective learning. Self-reflective learning ties to the development of students in that as students reflect on their experiences, they are able to move through learning and influence their perspective transformation.

Mezirow describes perspective transformation as the emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see our relationships and ourselves. The outcome is a reconstitution that permits a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon new understandings, creating a new meaning perspective (Mezirow, 1998). "A meaning perspective refers to the structure of cultural and psychological assumptions within which our experience assimilates and transforms new experience" (Mezirow, 1985, p. 21). Mezirow refers to this altered meaning perspective as a meaning scheme: "the constellation of a concept, belief, judgment, and feeling which shapes a particular interpretation" (Mezirow, 1994, p. 223).

Table 2 The Influences on Mezirow's Early Transformative Learning Theory and Its Related Facets

| Influence | Transformative Learning Facet |
| --- | --- |
| Kuhn's (1962) paradigm | ~ Perspective transformation<br>~ Frame of reference<br>~ Meaning perspective<br>~ Habit of mind |
| Freire's (190) conscientization | ~ Disorienting dilemma<br>~ Critical self-reflection<br>~ Habit of mind |
| Habermas' (1971, 1984) domains of living | ~ Learning process<br>~ Perspective transformation<br>~ Meaning perspective |

*Note. (Kitchenham, 2008)*

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Meaning schemes are sets of immediate specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and judgments that shape an interpretation and assign causality (Mezirow, 1996). Study abroad may provide an experience for Black college students to experience new challenges rather than reinforcing internally held thoughts and perceptual frames of reference conditioned as a result of ongoing racism within their U.S. experience. Central to perspective transformation is the transformation of meaning perspectives and meaning schemes.

*Significance of the Study*

This study supplies an opportunity for educators to explore, develop, and improve the experiences of Black college through the promotion of study abroad opportunities, and support while students are engaged in study abroad. Current research on Black college students abroad is limited and the research on Black college students who study abroad in multi-country programs is virtually non-existent. This study offers an opportunity to describe and interpret how Black students make meaning of their study abroad experiences in a comparative context. With this research, educators, policy makers, and study abroad administrators can develop and implement programs that encourage increased participation in study abroad programs by Black students while supporting them and presenting potentially positive outcomes from these experiences.

Study abroad options have been offered at colleges and universities to students for many years, yet study abroad research is scarce. Research on students of color who study abroad is even more rare. The numbers of students of color participating in study abroad programs has been consistently low, and has severely delimited samples for research. To date, most study abroad participants identify as white students (Open Doors, 2016).

However, in recent years, study abroad programs have seen an increase in students of color. In the past decade, articles such as, *Researching the Study Abroad Experience* (McLeod, 2009) and

*Encountering an American Self: Study Abroad and National Identity,* (Dolby, 2004) have highlighted the experiences of students of color participating in study abroad programs. Both of these articles address the positive outcomes of study abroad, and how students gain cultural awareness and independence, develop a broader view of the world, and develop deeper critical thinking skills as a result of their experiences. Further, a review of Shavit's *History in Black: African Americans in search of an Ancient* Past (2001), and Cross's *Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American Identity* (1991), can add insight and knowledge to the general identity of African American college student participants and outcomes in studying in other countries as they relate to earlier experiences in their home country.

Historically, wealthy male students were primarily the benefactors of study abroad opportunities. As more women were admitted to U.S. colleges and universities, they also took advantage of study abroad opportunities, and now represent a larger segment of the study abroad population than do males (Open Doors, 2016). Some research on this gender gap argues that study abroad is a feminine activity, given a perceived focus of developing and instilling an appreciation for art, culture, fashion, and language acquisition  (Salisbury, et al, 2010).

*Summary*

Ralph Ellison in his seminal novel, *Invisible Man*, wrestled with the concepts of Black American individuality and identity against a backdrop of extreme racism and white supremacy. The book portrayed for generations of Black Americans an enduring racist reality that rationalized why they felt and continued to be treated like second-class citizens. While in many ways, the struggle for equality has made strides, new and often more sophisticated challenges still arise. Education and particularly education abroad has provided a way for Black students to understand and challenge ongoing racist practices. Barak Obama, as America's first Black president, recalled how his living outside of the U.S. helped him to make meaning of race and shape his more inclusive worldview.

This dissertation continues this dialogue about race and identity, and ways that Black students can view themselves outside of traditional U.S. racial hierarchies.

The study also sought to broaden the toolkit of educators working with Black students to increase opportunities and rationale for Black students to avail themselves of international study experiences. These fresh perspectives may facilitate skills development and knowledge for curriculum development that aids in the retention of Black students.

The purpose of this study was to explore how Black college students make meaning of their study abroad experience. I investigated the study abroad experiences of seven Black undergraduate students and the meanings participants attached to their experiences. Current research acknowledges the positive outcomes of study abroad for students on a macro level, but little is known about Black student perceptions on study abroad experiences. This study used a Transformative Learning model and the Nigrescence Theory to frame an investigation of ways Black college students studying abroad made meaning of their experiences. This is important work, especially in light of the absence of previous research within this area.

The study also draws on Racial Identity and Student Development theories to situate the meaning making by Black students participating in study abroad programs. Meaning making is a common concept in qualitative research and particularly in phenomenological studies, where participants engage in interpreting how experiences or encounters with events shape or alter pre-existing beliefs and ways of knowing.

Transformative Learning Theory offers a framework to acknowledge the meaning Black students make of their study abroad experience (Kuh 2008; Lyon, 2002) through the experiences of engaging an unknown environment, challenging preconceived thoughts, and providing a new space for growth and development. Transformative learning draws on Freire's theory of critical consciousness, and informed Mezirow's ideas of the disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, critical

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self-reflection, and critical discourse. TLT is further girded by Habermas' domains of technical, practical and emancipatory learning. Mezirow restated these domains as instrumental, dialogic and self-reflective.

Study abroad provides opportunities for what Mezirow calls perspective transformation, and this reconstitution of experiences creates a new meaning perspective that changes the structure of an individual's cultural and psychological assumptions, which in turn, alters the meaning perspective into a meaning scheme. This results in a new constellation of beliefs, judgments, and feelings about a particular interpretation of an experience.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

*For African Americans, travel and its textual representation combine to create a space in which identity can be affirmed, discovered, and renegotiated.*

Tim Youngs (2010)

*Introduction*

The college years provide many opportunities for students to get involved and to expand their knowledge and to experience growth in a number of ways. One opportunity for growth is to study abroad – to travel to another country and to gain insight about the country's language, culture, and customs. In recent years, the opportunities and resources to study abroad has increased for American college students. As a result, there are more research journals on study abroad and student affairs practitioners who provide knowledge and information for students to participate in study abroad programs.

Unfortunately, Black students are the lowest racial and ethnic population of participants in study abroad (Open Doors, 2016). Historically, travel and the Black experience have been linked to the enslavement of Africans and the movement from Africa to North America. Historically, Black Americans usually did not travel for leisure. Recently, we note an increase in Black travel and study abroad. Collen J McElroy, an African American travel writer, ethnographer, and novelist notes that her experiences in travel abroad was not only a challenge to geographical confinement, but to racial and social classifications as well (Youngs, 2010, p. 71).

Although the research on Black students who study abroad has increased, t Research on Black students participating in multi-country study abroad programs is scarce. This literature review explores the breadth and depth of research of study abroad, multi-country study abroad opportunities, Black students in higher education, Black student development, and Black students who study abroad.

*The Study Abroad Experience*

Study abroad experiences vary widely. Students study abroad for a week, a summer, a semester, or an academic year; in cities, the countryside, and on different continents. Both undergraduate and graduate programs exist, yet study abroad offices on campus are more likely to recruit and encourage undergraduate rather than graduate students to study abroad (Dirkx, 2010). Many outside and extenuating influences affect the motivations for students to study abroad. Research shows the positive encouragement of parents, family, friends, professors, and peers, all contribute to the decision to study abroad (Hoffa, 2010). Student of color in general, and Black students specifically, typically lack many of these influences, contributing to rates of low-participation by Black students in study abroad programs (Tolliver, 2000).

Where students study abroad and how they study abroad may influence their study abroad experience. In traditional programs, students are individually immersed in their country of study. They may choose a summer, semester, or academic-year program, live in an international residence hall or home-stay with a host family. They take courses at a university, and generally have significant autonomy in their day-to-day activities, experiences, and excursions. Faculty-led study abroad programs are usually shorter in length, from one-week to one-month, and students are grouped into a cohort, attend seminars and visit tourist attractions while living together in hotel rooms with other American students.

The length of study abroad programs and destinations are as diverse as the anticipated curricular outcomes and other purposes of these programs. Some research argues the increase in study abroad participation may be due to the increase in shorter-term options, allowing more students to participate in study abroad (Sell, 1983).

Study Abroad Destinations

Study abroad destinations are as diverse as the many type of study abroad programs offered to students. Historically, study abroad destinations for American students have been to the European continent (Hoffa, 2010). With globalization and travel technology, students have the opportunity to study on all of the seven continents. Motivation, goals, and resources are factors on how students select their study abroad destination. Participants in this study traveled to African, Asia, Europe, North America, and South America. No participants studied abroad in Antarctica or Australia.

Traditional study abroad programs are usually designated to one country of study (Lee, 2015). Students generally take advantage of proximity to neighboring countries and may travel there during weekends and semester breaks. While students may travel to multiple countries during their study abroad, they usually have a single host country (Open Doors, 2016). When selecting a country of study, students may choose a location that is related to their academic pursuits. For example, if a student has an interest in language fluency, they may choose a country where that language is spoken. If their interests lie in politics or particular legal systems, they will likely choose the country most suited to their interests as their destination. Students have expressed that the cost of the program and cost of living while in-country may also contribute to the selection process. Studying in Europe has traditionally been a costly experience for students. Alternatively, South America and Central America have been less expensive options.

The Asian continent has seen growth as a study abroad destination recently (Open Doors, 2016). Specifically, China has created study abroad opportunities for students at low cost. As a result, more and more students are choosing to study in China (Open Doors, 2016).

Multi-country Study Abroad

In my dissertation, I sought to explore how Black students reflect on this experience, make meaning of their study abroad experience, and interpret the outcomes of these experiences through exposure to multiple countries. The majority of study abroad programs are single-destination experiences. Yet there is minimal research on the experiences of students who participate in multi-country study abroad programs in general, and none exist for Black students who participate in multi-country study abroad programs specifically. An examination of the current literature in study abroad identified the gaps in the research of Black students in comparative study abroad programs and denotes how this specific study can contribute to the body of research for this field of study.

As a result, students consult with friends and family and deliberate on the positive and negative outcomes of a study abroad destination. If students have traveled abroad previously, they are equipped with more knowledge to decide a destination. If students have not traveled abroad, they may look to peers, study abroad advisors, and media to inform their decision. There is much to consider when choosing to participate in a multi-country study abroad program versus a single-country study abroad program. Tyler (2016) suggests students consider packing light if participating in multi-country destinations due to the costs of traveling with luggage and the convenience of mobility with fewer items. For example, Stimac (2011) cites the benefits of a multi-country study abroad program as: (1) you'll make even more friends around the world, (2) you'll gain a greater diversity of experience, (3) you'll collect extra passport stamps, (4) you'll challenge yourself to continuously adapt, and (5) you'll become more mentally flexible. Obstacles of multi-country study abroad programs compared to single-country study abroad destinations may be visa requirements. Harris et. al. (2011) notes the obstacles of obtaining visas for multi-country study abroad destinations based on the length of time in each country and itinerary of the overall study abroad program.

Benefits of Study Abroad

The research on study abroad programs shows a number of positive outcomes for participating students. Retention and higher GPA are benefits students enjoy when they study abroad (Hoffa, 2010). Another benefit is students are more competitive candidates in the job market, have a greater understanding of other cultures, acquire foreign language skills, enhance leadership skills, become more independent and patient, gain a deeper understanding of self, and become world citizens (Dawson, 2000). Dwyer and Peters (2004) also report benefits include enhanced academic study and studying abroad influences students' subsequent educational experiences and goals.

Students can acquire a deeper perspective of the human condition and are often confronted with a new and different understanding of world history, as well as a deeper appreciation of other cultures (Matz, 1997). Carlson and Widaman (1998) found study abroad experiences can reduce nationalism and ethnocentrism and students grow in their academic, professional, and personal pursuits (Dolby 2004, Stroud 2010).

A key benefit from study abroad is personal growth. Personal growth represents students' beliefs about whether they have grown or changed (Angulo, 2008). Frankl (1969) placed the discovery of meaning at the center of his theory of personal growth (Dukes et al, 1994). Whether college students participate in study abroad or remain at their home institutions, the college experience offers an opportunity for such growth, but studying abroad offers a unique opportunity as students experience an increase in disorienting dilemmas that are layered with obstacles of language, understanding, communication, race, and culture (Hoffa, 2010). Although it may not be generalizable, my personal experience reflects that Black students who have participated in multi-country study abroad programs show evidence of extensive personal growth.

Consequences of Study Abroad

There also are potential negative outcomes of the study abroad experience. Nash (1976) asserts some students who study abroad experience a longer time to degree, suffer from culture shock, may be incarcerated for lack of knowledge of local laws, or may be exposed to theft, physical and emotional abuse. Communication barriers make students vulnerable to theft, physical assault, and other negative experiences (Nash, 1976). If students study abroad and are not prepared or equipped to embrace another country and culture, they may suffer from emotional distress and not have a positive study abroad experience (Nash, 1976).

Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001) confirm some students experience culture shock while studying abroad. Culture shock is a response to being immersed in an unfamiliar culture (Adler, 1975; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Although students opt in to study abroad opportunities, they may struggle with the transition to living in another country. At the beginning of a study abroad experience, students may enjoy the local cuisine and unique ways of travel and communication in their host country. Over time, students transition from this *honeymoon* phase and look for familiar experiences that remind them of home (Adler, 1975). Students may begin to eat at American fast foods restaurants and to disengage from the local culture for a time. Study abroad faculty and staff need to be aware of this potential disengagement and look for ways to assist students to participate fully in their host country to maximize their cross-cultural experience.

If students encounter negative experiences abroad, prior negative and derogatory stereotypes of particular cultures may be entrenched in the student's worldview. For example, if students have negative experiences while studying in Mexico, they may associate those experiences with problematic and derogatory perceptions of Chicana/o men and women in the United States. Likewise, negative experiences in Latinx countries may cause the study abroad student to carry and transfer ill feelings about those experiences onto similar ethnic groups at home (Wielkiewicz, 2010).

Black College Students and Higher Education

The campus climate for Black college students on U.S. campuses has been typically hostile since racial integration. The 1960s Civil Rights movement resulted in efforts to address the wrongs imposed on Black Americans in the United States by increasing Black access to colleges and universities (Allen, 1992), yet campus climate for Black college students, specifically at predominately white institutions (PWI), has remained fraught with racial incidents ranging in severity from the distribution of racist literature, microaggressions, and violence (Allen, 1992). U.S. history is marked by racial injustice and today's current climate reflects ongoing inequality in school and work access, differential law enforcement, school discipline and incarceration rates (Alexander 2010, Davis 1997, , Wheelock 2006). Previous studies note many Black students have negative experiences on campus, suffer lower achievement compared to other racial/ethnic groups, and have a higher attrition that white students (Allen, Epps, & Haniff, 1991, Nettles, 1988, (Smith 2007).

As Black college students encounter unique experiences on campus, often exposed to a climate of prejudice and discrimination in the classroom, the unfortunate result is higher dropout rates and withdrawal behavior (Cabrera, et al., 1999). Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso (2000) posit understanding and analyzing the collegiate racial climate is an important part of examining college access, persistence, graduation, and transfer to and through graduate and professional school for Black students.

If perceptions of prejudice and discrimination are unique to communities of color, specifically Black college students, and persistence decisions among communities of color are shaped primarily by a climate of discrimination, the unique experience of study abroad and how Black students make meaning of this experience can offer a counterspace (Solórzano, 2000) for the development of Black students.

Black Student College Development

Higher education research identifies experiences of college student development for on campus students. Chickering & Reisser (1993) theorize a series of seven developmental stages college students experience throughout their career. These stages are: developing competence; managing emotions; moving through autonomy to interdependence; developing mature interpersonal relationships; establishing identity; developing purpose; and developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Students' progress along this continuum can be assessed over time to provide a picture of the impact the college experience has had on their development. Chickering's theory of psychosocial development is useful for understanding the underlying themes of college student development and its major influences, including both academic and nonacademic factors (Evans, et al., 1998).

A critique of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory, as pointed out earlier, is it does not address racial and ethnic identities (Evans, et al 2010), and may not fully capture how Black students develop in college. Black student development is a link of social identity development for Black college students. Evans et al (2010) note that the underlying interpretations of social identity are linked to privilege and oppression. "Individual' social identities influence how they [students] see themselves, how they interact with others, the decisions they make, and how they live their lives" (Evans, et al, 2010, pg. 229).

Many scholars have created models of Black Identity development. For example, Helms in 1990, Jackson in 2001, Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous in 1998 (Evans at el, 2010) have all contributed to Black Identity development. Faculty and student affairs practitioners utilize Cross and Fhagen-Smith's (2001) model of Black Identity Development theory to support Black students in college.

Scarcity of Black Student Involvement in Study Abroad

With globalization, and the increase of study abroad opportunities, the incorporation of study abroad education into the college curriculum is both timely and essential to Black college student development and Black student culture. Culture is an important component of Black student college going, as it is for students of other ethnicities. Culture is defined as the experiences one encounters as a Black person living in American society, with people who have a shared experience in music, food, language, tradition, religion, family, history, and similar experiences with institutional racism and oppression. Like other students, Black students are not merely Black, but possess other intersecting identities, such as gender, class, age, religion, and sexual orientation that contribute to student development. Additionally, Black students face low retention and graduation rates in higher education that differ significantly from other groups. The culture and climate associated with Black student experiences on campus have significant influence on the development of Black college students (Chavous, Bernat et al. 2003, Cuyjet 2006, Rankin 2005, Teranishi 2008). These experiences alter the meaning-making of Black students. The study abroad experience offers a new context in which to view Blackness in the U.S.

Research on Black students who study abroad is scarce, and few documents acknowledge the positive experiences and outcomes of Black students who study abroad (Tolliver, 2000). Moreover, a review of literature yields few studies that consider the international experiences of Black Americans in general, or specific education experiences (Acquaye & Crewe, 2012; Dawson, 2000; Day-Vines, Penn & Tanner, 2008; White et al., 2011). In Table 3 (see below), the data notes the percentages of racial/ethnic participation across races in study abroad. Although students of color in general and Black students specifically have increased in participation in study abroad, the majority of participants are white students.

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Table 3 Open Doors Data: Profile of the United States Study Abroad Students, 2014-2015

| Race/Ethnicity | Percent |
|---|---|
| White | 72.9 |
| Hispanic or Latino(a) | 8.8 |
| Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander | 8.1 |
| Black or African-American | 5.6 |
| Multiracial | 4.1 |
| American Indian or Alaska Native | 0.5 |

*Note. (Black or African-American participation remained constant for 2013-2014 and 2014-2015)*

In recent years, study abroad programs have seen an increase in participants of color from all levels of socioeconomic status. Factors students consider when studying abroad include previous travel, course of study, socioeconomic background, and the degree of encouragement they receive from faculty, family and peers (Penn & Tanner, 2009). As more students study abroad, there is more evidence of increased unexpected and stressful encounters, successful encounters that lead to an increase in self-confidence and self-perception, as well as a new appreciation of their host country and the world in general (McLeod & Wainwright, 2009).

Students gain cultural awareness and independence; tend to have a broader and more tolerant view of the world; and return to the U.S. with more deeply developed critical thinking skills as a result of their study abroad experience. Students of color who study abroad, specifically Black American students, seem to have an easier transition into a foreign country than their white counterparts, exhibiting greater culture awareness and openness to new experiences (Tolliver, 2000). When Black college students studied abroad in Ghana, they articulated the hostility, animosity, and tension they experienced as a "minority" in the U.S. while contrasting that experience with living in a black majority environment (Tolliver, 2000).

Evan M. Ryan, Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs in the United States, has said, "International education is crucial to building relationships between people and communities in the United States and around the world. We also need to expand access to international education for students from more diverse backgrounds. Only by engaging multiple perspectives within our societies can we all reap the numerous benefits of international education – increased global competence, self-awareness and resiliency, and the ability to compete in the 21st century economy" (Open Doors, 2014). Allan E. Goodman, president of The Institute of International Education, argues the "international experience is one of the most important components of a 21st century education, and study abroad should be viewed as an essential element of a college degree" (Open Doors, 2014). These scholars and many others note the benefits of having a diverse student body participate in study abroad, since research has clearly shown the benefits of diversity in college classrooms and on campuses (Denson 2009, Gurin 2004, Herzog 2010).

If more Black students study abroad, our overall society may reap significant benefits. Craig (1998), in his book, *Transitions Abroad,* argues the top five reasons why Blacks students should go abroad: they learn to think critically; develop a global perspective; gain multicultural competence; forge international relationships, and increase their income potential.

Another positive outcome for Black students who study abroad is their involvement and integration in university life as they return from their international experience. Research shows student involvement during college, whether academic or co-curricular, increases the likelihood students will persist to graduation (Astin, 1984). Astin's theory of student involvement asserts students who are more involved are usually more successful and perform better in school and are better prepared to enter the work world (Astin, 1999).

The Institute of International Education (IIE) Open Doors 2015 Report shows 304,467 students studied abroad during the 2013-2014 academic year, a 5% increase over the previous year (Open Doors, 2015). Traditionally, most study abroad participants are white women in their junior year (Hoffa, 2010). Black students comprise only 5.6% of the study abroad populations (Open Doors, 2015). Despite this low percentage, scholars are beginning to document the benefits of study abroad for this population.

Research specific to Black college students studying abroad finds Black women gain knowledge and connection to other Black women and more fully grasp oppressive world systems as they pertain to gender and race (Morgan, Mwegelo, & Turner, 2002). Study abroad can offer two essential experiences for Black college students: academic integration, as a result of greater interaction with foreign faculty and staff, and social integration, through greater opportunities to participate extracurricular activities (Barclay, 2011). Study abroad may have added benefits for Black student engagement by combining academic and social interaction in ways they may not experience at home.

Further, research shows SES may play a role in the lack of participation in study abroad for Black students (Dessoff, 2008). Traditionally, Black students who attend college may also have the intersecting identity of first-generation college students and may be loan recipients instead of scholarship and grant recipients. With the high costs of college, the cost of opportunities to study abroad may be too great for Black students to attain. (Salisbury et al, 2010, Lincoln, 2005).

Lack of family support also is a deterrent (Jackson, 2005; Cole, 1991; Salisbury et al., 2009), as is a lack of mentors and previous travel experience (Hembroff & Rusz, 1993). Other deterrents may be fear of not meeting curriculum requirements, delaying graduation, and the potentiality of racism abroad (Cole, 1991; Jackson, 2006; Simon, 2007). Historically, minorities were excluded from international study programs (Jackson, 2006). The lack of diverse study abroad advisors may also

contribute to Black student ambivalence for study abroad (Cole, 1991; Carter & Goodwin, 1994; Jackson, 2006).

Finally, Tatum (1997) discusses the general experiences of Black college students on campus, and whether it is the loneliness and isolation of being routinely overlooked as a lab partner, the irritation of being asked by curious classmates about Black hairstyles, the discomfort of being singled out by a professor to give the "Black perspective", the internalized pain of racist graffiti scrawled on dormitory doors, or the insult of racial jokes circulated through campus e-mail, that may also deter students from stepping away from the known into the unknown of studying abroad.

*Summary*

This literature review focused on the study abroad experience and how diverse these experiences can be for students. The length of the program, the destination and course selection, and motivations of students all contribute to their study abroad experience. As more flexibility in options increase for selection, more students have more options to select for their study abroad experience. The benefits of study abroad are better academic performance, higher GPA, and more campus life participation upon their return from study abroad. Students are more likely to attend graduate school and higher education. They may acquire foreign language skills, culture competence, an appreciation for difference, and desire to travel abroad again. Employers may also see the study abroad experience as a positive experience for future employees.

The opportunities of study abroad destinations is as varied and diverse as the options of study abroad for students. All seven continents are study abroad destinations varying from the least expensive in South America to the most expensive in Antarctica. The most popular study abroad destination is Europe and the least popular destination is Africa. China is a recent an up and coming study abroad destination for students. The motivations and goals of students influence their study

abroad destination choice and the cost of the overall program also influences students study abroad selection. The majority of study abroad programs are single-country destinations.

Black students experience college student development uniquely to their racial/ethnic counterparts due to historic and institutional racism prevalent in the United States. As Black students transgress through Cross' theory of Nigrescence, they experience and negotiate Black identity development. Black students who study abroad express that these international experiences positively influence their racial identity.

While the literature points to positive changes in the adoption and integration of study abroad into the college experiences of Black college students, more research is needed, and that work can only be done with the increased interest of Black college students in study abroad opportunities. I'll now turn the theoretical underpinnings of my research and the conceptual framework that scaffolds this investigation.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL ORIENTATION AND FRAMEWORK

*To make meaning means to make sense of an experience; we make an interpretation of it.*

Jack Mezirow (1990)

*Introduction*

Limited research has explored how Black students make meaning of their study abroad experiences. Study abroad research denotes positive outcomes for participants who study abroad, yet Black college students have lower participation rates compared to other racial and ethnic groups (Open Doors, 2016). One of the advantages of immersive experiences like study abroad is the potential for these experiences to be transformative (Kiely, 2005). This study explored how Black college students make meaning of their study abroad experiences through the framework of Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991) and how through the interpretation of study abroad experiences participants were able to engage in perspective transformation.

The basic premise of transformative learning is students learn through a series of transformative experiences (see Table 4). Transformative Learning Theory offers a framework to acknowledge the meaning Black college students make of their study abroad experience (Kuh & Schneider, 2008; Lyon, 2002), and through those experiences of engaging an unknown environment, challenge their preconceived thoughts, which provides a space for growth and development. Critical reflection is key to transformative learning and participants engaged in reflective dialogue with the researcher to unpack their study abroad experiences. Black college students' experiences studying abroad were examined within the context of the uniquely transformative experience of being a person of African descent in the American context while studying abroad in multiple countries.

*Transformative Learning Theory (TLT)*

Mezirow defined transformative learning as experiences that change individuals' frames of reference, and ways of looking at and interpreting the world (Jones et al., 2012; Mezirow, 1997). Transformative learning leans on Freire's theory of critical consciousness. He defined conscientization as "learning to perceive social, political, and economic traditions – while developing a critical awareness – so individuals can take action against oppressive elements of reality (Freire, 1970). Freire's theory influenced Mezirow in regard to his notion of the disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, critical self-reflection on assumptions, and critical discourse (Mezirow, 1985). Mezirow also drew on the work of Habermas (1971) and his three domains of learning, reinterpreting them as instrumental, dialogic, and self-reflective (Mezirow, 1985). These frames of reference assist individuals to make meaning of the world (Jones et al., 2012; Mezirow, 2000). To transform frames of reference, an individual must experience something that does not make sense using their existing frames of interpretation (Jones et al., 2012).

"The Western rational tradition constitutes an objectivist paradigm of learning. Transformative theory of adult learning is based upon an emancipatory paradigm, and constitutes a dialectic synthesis of objectivist and interpretivist paradigms" (Merizow, 1996). Instrumental learning allows an individual to control and manipulate the environment or other people (1996), while dialogic learning proposes an opportunity to engage in critical thinking with others. Self-reflective learning is the outcome of critical thinking to examine previously held assumptions and reflect on them through internal dialogue. Participants reflect on assumptions and critical discourse where the individual validates their best judgment (Mezirow, 2006) or the process an individual evokes to monitor the problems and value of alternative solutions (Kitchenham, 2008, P.M. King & Kitchener, 1994). This process results in a process of perspective transformation.

Mezirow (2006) describes perspective transformation as the emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, and reconstituting that structure to permit more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience (Mezirow, 2006). Central to perspective transformation are types of learning, changes in meaning perspective, and the development of new meaning schemes. "A meaning perspective refers to the structure of cultural and psychological assumptions within which our experience assimilates and transforms new experience" (Mezirow, 1985). "A meaning scheme is the constellation of a concept, belief, judgment, or feeling which shapes a particular interpretation" (Mezirow, 1994).

Transformative Learning Theory allows individuals to learn through meaning transformation. Individuals encounter problems or anomalies that cannot be resolved by current meaning schemes (Mezirow, 1995). Transformation occurs by critical self-reflection of assumptions that were supported by a meaning scheme or perspective previously in use (Kitchenham, 2008). The result is perspective transformation.  Table 4 delineates the 11 phases of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, leading to perspective transformation.

Meaning schemes are sets of specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and judgments that shape an interpretation and assign causality (Mezirow, 2000). Study abroad provides an experience for Black college students offering new challenges rather than reinforcing internal thoughts or previous perceptual frames of reference (Kotval et al., 2012). Mezirow contends there are three types of meaning perspectives: epistemic (what you believe you know and what you know), sociolinguistic (the specific language in use in educational technology settings), and psychological (what you perceive about your ways of learning) (Kitchenham, 2008). Through critical reflection, participants can reflect on these three types of meaning perspectives that enable them to make meaning of their study abroad experience.

Table 4 Mezirow's Eleven Phases of Transformative Learning

| Phases | Stages |
| --- | --- |
| Phase 1 | A disorienting dilemma |
| Phase 2 | A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame |
| Phase 3 | A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions |
| Phase 4 | Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated similar change |
| Phase 5 | Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions |
| Phase 6 | Planning a course of action |
| Phase 7 | Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans |
| Phase 8 | Provisional trying of new roles |
| Phase 9 | Renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships |
| Phase 10 | Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships |
| Phase 11 | A reintegration into one's life based on conditions dictated by one's perspective |

*Note. Mezirow (1991)*

It is not necessary that a person experience all 11 phases of TLT, or in a sequential order to experience a perspective transformation (Kitchenham, 2008). Transformative learning can be either an epochal moment or an accretion or both. Mezirow (1997) notes that disorienting dilemmas can one single event or multiple events over time, "an accretion of transformation in points of view" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 7). Life experiences that challenge students to reconsider the fundamental reasoning behind their most basic notions of the way the world works can precipitate a change in perspective. These experiences can be transformative and equate to new ways of seeing, resulting in a transformative learning process (Tacey, 2011).

Critical reflection is key to this transformation. Critical reflection not only involves the nature and consequence of one's actions but also includes the related circumstances that caused them (Kitchenham, 2008; Tacey, 2011). As Black students experience study abroad they can transform a meaning scheme by examining previous actions in a different context and as they reflect

through a potentially new and disorienting lens, the result can be a "transformation" in meaning (Kitchenham, 2008; Tacey, 2011). Critical reflection enables students studying abroad to develop and become aware of their own frames of reference outside of established social, racial and national ones long established in the U.S. (Jones et al., 2012; Mezirow, 2000). Critical self-reflection also offers the opportunity to transform perspectives and thoughts that may lead to a revision of an assumption potentially manifests in choice changes and thoughts students make and the rationale behind them (Mezirow, 1998). Through critical reflection, a resulting reassessment of values and assumptions, and subsequently meaning schemes may take place. (Tacey, 2011). Transformative Learning Theory as a theoretical orientation allows for the description and interpretation of participants' perceived transformation after studying abroad.

Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory is informed by Kuhn's concept of paradigms (1962; 1996), Freire's theory of conscientization (1970; 2000), and Habermas (1971;1984). significant concepts of disorienting dilemma, meaning schemes, meaning perspectives, perspective transformation, frame of reference, levels of learning processes, habits of mind, critical self-reflection, and transforming points of view (Kitchenham, 2008). "A key proposition of transformative learning theory recognizes the validity of Habermas' (1984) fundamental distinction between instrumental and communicative learning" (Mezirow, 2003, pg. 59).

The relevance and limits of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory and Cross' Theory of Nigrescence can be unpacked in Beverly Tatum's 1997 book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* Tatum delves into the experiences of Black adolescents and Black adults as they experience racial identity development in the United States. She utilizes the school cafeteria as a metaphoric counterspace – a place of community for Black Americans that may offer a mixed bag of challenge and support. When reviewing the development of Black students in early life, racial constructs are a universal constant and many Black kids will intermix with various racial groups in

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spaces like the cafeteria, which offers a space to explore interactions both within and without these racial constructs. As students mature and experience Cross' Nigrescence stages, they transition from Pre-Encounter to Encounter, a series of actions, typically negative, that may lead to "all the Black kids sitting together." Tatum acknowledges Black students may seek out Black peers after having an "Encounter" experience, and may look for acknowledgement, support, and understanding of societal racism. Tatum shares her personal experience of her Immersion-Emersion stage of Cross' Nigrescence theory when she attended college. This space offered her the opportunity to "immerse" herself in African American culture and history, becoming more involved in the Black movement and Black Nationalism. With a racially positive environment and a heightened racial self-confidence, Tatum was equipped to ascend to the fourth and final stage of Cross' theory, Internalization.

> Since Black Nationalist philosophy posits that white people as a group have a vested interest in continuing a system of white supremacy, it typically sees little use for black integration or assimilation into a system predicated on black subjugation. Black nationalist approaches also support a black moral superiority over whites because of black suffering. (Collins, 1994, p. 10)

Tatum has been a keynote speaker for conferences such as "Diversity Abroad", where she has shared her vision and implementation of collaborative university efforts to increase the number of Black students who study abroad while seeking to create opportunities of academic and financial support to do so. I highlight her work to make note of the role study abroad may have in assisting Black college students to progress to Cross' Internalization stage.

Tatum's book also can be linked to the transformative experiences of Black adolescents and adults as they progress through Mezirow's 11 phases of transformative learning. For example,

Mezirow's phases begin with a "disorienting dilemma". This experience can be likened to Cross' "Encounter" stage, where Black students have an encounter that does not fit their expectations or make sense to them. They cannot resolve this "dilemma" without changing their worldview. In the next phase students self-reflect and often have feelings of guilt or shame, common emotions for Black Americans experiencing racism. In phase 3 of the Mezirow scale, students critically assess their worldview to make meaning of their disorienting dilemma by and through an interrogation through epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions.

Table 5 Cross' Nigrescence Theory and Transformative Learning Theory

_____

| Nigrescence | Transformative Learning Theory |
|---|---|
| | |
| Pre-encounter | Experiences in the United States |
| Encounter | A disorienting dilemma |
| | A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame |
| | A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic Assumptions |
| | |
| Immersion-Emersion | Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated similar change |
| | Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions |
| | Planning a course of action |
| | Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans |
| | |
| Internalization | Provisional trying of new roles |
| | Renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships |
| | Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships |
| | A reintegration into one's life based on conditions dictated by one's perspective |

_____

*Note. (Vandiver, 2001, Mezirow (1991)*

In phases 3 and 4, students opt to "sit together" to gain recognition of their discontent and learn others have experienced similar challenges. Tatum argues this begins around junior high school. Phase 5 offers tools to cope with a new worldview and explore options for new roles, relationships, and actions. In phases 6, 7, and 8, students begin to create a new plan of action, seeking out knowledge and skills, and implementing plans that result in the emergence of Immersion-Emersion. Students renegotiate current relationships and establish new relationships in phase 9. With newly acquired skills and understanding, students have more self-confidence and competencies to move successfully into new roles. They are anchored in a positive sense of racial identity and are prepared to perceive and transcend the confines of racial constructs. Table 5 shows the intersections of the Cross and Mezirow theories.

*Perspective Transformation*

Black students described and interpreted a transformative experience while participating in study abroad. They experienced personal growth in how they viewed racial identity, interglobal competence, and activism. Through the experiences of study abroad in a multi-country context, these students were able to engage in critical reflection, interpret their experiences through a comparative lens, and find meaning in their study abroad experience. These participants have continued to express activism in their own way by continuing to support other Black students who may aspire to study abroad. Ultimately, the value of study abroad is perspective transformation. The college experience is an opportunity for perspective transformation and study abroad can be an experience that supports and/or propels personal growth for its participants. In Table 6 below, I note the links of Transformative Learning Theory and how it relates to how students made meaning of their study abroad experiences.

Table 6 Perspective Transformation During Study Abroad

| Phase | Experience |
|-------|-----------|
| A disorienting dilemma | Study abroad |
| A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame | Race identity |
| A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or challenging psychic assumptions | American socialization |
| Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation is shared and that others have negotiated similar change | Critical reflection |
| Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions | Race Identity |
| Planning a course of action experiences | Activism |
| Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans | |
| Provisional trying of new roles | Activism |
| Renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships | Increase in international peer group |
| Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships | Race Identity |
| A reintegration into one's life based on conditions dictated by one's perspective | Perspective transformation |

*Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)*

The qualitative theoretical framework guiding this study is Transformative Learning Theory through the methods of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Interpretative phenomenological analysis is a specific hermeneutic approach committed to exploring how people make sense of experiences in their lives (Smith, et al., 2009). IPA relates to TLT as a methodological tool to analyze the stages of Transformative Learning Theory. The basic premise of transformative learning is students learn through transformative experiences.

In the case of the present study, the learning of Black college students is examined within the context of the unique experiences of being a person of African descent in the American context while studying abroad. The aim of this investigation was to explore the social, cognitive, and cultural learning of Black college students studying abroad, and their meaning making of these experiences. This study is intended to assist educators to facilitate institutional practices that recognize the benefits of the study abroad experience for Black college students that, in turn, may facilitate deeper skills and knowledge development by students, and result in increased Black student retention through graduation.

The qualitative theoretical framework guiding this dissertation study is phenomenology. The definition of phenomena is the appearance of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the way we experience things, and the meanings we derive from the things we experience (Creswell, 2013). The phenomenological approach is designed to focus on discovering and expressing essential characteristics of a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). A phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experiences (student involvement, perceptions, and experiences in study abroad programs) of several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis is a specific hermeneutic approach committed to exploring how people make sense of experiences in their lives (Smith, et al., 2009). IPA is concerned with trying to understand lived experience and with how participants themselves make sense of their experiences. IPA has some similarities to the work of Foucault, as it explores how people may construct their worldview (Eatough et al, 2008). IPA is concerned with the meanings that experiences (in this case, study abroad) hold for participants. IPA is phenomenological in that it seeks to explore an individual's personal perceptions or accounts of an event rather than seek an objective telling of the event. It is subjective in nature. I anchored my interview protocol in the tenets of IPA, which also guided my data analysis, and my role as researcher. As researcher, I am never fully able to gain access to others' experiences due to my own experiences, but I did rely on my own conceptions and experiences studying abroad to examine, evaluate and interpret the study participants' worldview through my own process of interpretation.

An important component of IPA is the ability to separate the strands of what is participant experience from that which is researcher experience, and then present a description of the experience as accurately as possible with minimal filtering (Larkin et al, 2006). In this dissertation, I sought to understand the participants' reflections of their lived experiences studying abroad and how they made sense of them (Smith et al., 2009). I worked to understand the experience of the participant, listening to their stories and how they interpreted them (Smith, 2004). I approached my research with an epistemological position, a position grounded in subjectivism and interpretivism Smith, 2004). My position is completely subjective and knowledge is internally constructed, holistic in nature, and depends on context (Smith, 2004).

The three concepts of IPA are the phenomenological component that seeks the participants' understanding, the interpretative component that considers cultural and physical environments as participants attempt to make sense of their experience, and the insight gained into the phenomena

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by the researcher (Larkin et al, 2006). A researcher using IPA must keep two aims in mind. First, to gain understanding of the participant's world; and second, to describe what that world is like. (Larkin et al, 2006). The objective of IPA, then, is to obtain a description that gets as "close to the participant's view as is possible" (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006, p. 104) while recognizing the process is inevitably and interpretative (Larkin et al, 2006). The second aim is to create an interpretative account expressing how the participant made sense of the experience and what it means to them (Larkin et al, 2006).

IPA is influenced by symbolic interactionism (Goffman, 2005; Smith, 1996). Smith (1996) posits symbolic interactionism supports the meanings participants attribute to their experiences and the researcher captures meaning of participant experiences through the process of interpretation. IPA is an inductive process (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). "Induction is context dependent, guided by prior knowledge activated in particular situations that confront the system as it seeks to achieve its goals" (Holland, Holyoak, Nisbett, & Thargard, 1989, pg. 5)

This allows researchers to approach research with flexibility and allow for unique themes to emerge during analysis. (Larkin et al, 2006). Researchers do not attempt to verify or negate hypotheses but rather to document and interpret participant answers to purposely broad and open-ended research questions. (Larkin et. al., 2006) IPA has its foundation in the research literature and then moves to an interpretive level (Larkin et al, 2006).

*Summary*

Limited research has examined Black student meaning making in the context of study abroad experiences. While Blacks have lower rates of participation in study abroad programs, associate research and this researcher's study hypotheses posit there are significant benefits to student identity development and retention to graduation. The study used Mezirow's Transformative Learning

Theory, coupled with Cross' Theory of Nigrescence to examine the transformative nature of study abroad experiences for Black students who have lived in the U.S. under the spectre of ongoing racism. Study abroad experiences can provide transformative learning experiences for Black students, which they internalize and carry home, enabling them to experience racism and the U.S. racial hierarchy in new ways. While there are limitations, or explanatory gaps within the framework of these two theories, other literature, such as Tatum's 1997 seminal book, bridge the theories by positing study abroad activities can act as a counterspace where Black students are both challenged to see the world differently and supported in their blackness and identity development. Tatum's work also links to the transformative nature of Mezirow's work by explaining how and why Black students often congregate together in the metaphoric cafeteria to validate and understand their experiences in white supremacist settings such as their home country.

The chapter also discusses the connection between Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Situating this study within these theories allows for the opportunity to describe and interpret how participants make meaning of their study abroad experiences. These experiences are likely transformative in nature and Mezirow's 11 phases of transformation depict the journey and "transformation" study participants may have experienced. Through IPA, I analyzed the meanings participants placed on these transformative experiences, and through my own experiences and positionality interpreted transformative revelations. IPA offers the space for critical reflection of participants' study abroad experiences and what meanings they attach to these experiences.

As Black students participate in study abroad experiences, they make meaning of their experiences and transformative learning can take place. TLT offers a method to unpack the personal development of Black students as they encounter and experience study abroad, and these encounters and experiences are magnified when study abroad occurs in multi-country destinations. These

experiences are analyzed through an interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA) that is designed to focus on discovery and explaining the essence of the phenomena being experienced. IPA focuses on understanding lived experience and how participants make sense of their experience. This approach has antecedents in the work of Foucault as it explores how individuals construct worldviews. Further, an important component of IPA is the researcher's role. An interpretive phenomenological approach seeks to separate strands of what is participant experience and which is research experience and the subsequent interpretation by the researcher based on their own experience. There are three components to IPA: participant understanding and meaning making, an interpretive component that considers cultural and physical environments, and the insight into the phenomena gained by the researcher. Further, IPA is influenced by symbolic interactionism and is an inductive process. This provides a good deal of flexibility for researcher reflection and interpretation. In the next chapter, I outline the methodological underpinnings of the research, and how data was collected and interpreted.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY AND DATA

*The phenomenological world is not bringing to explicit expression of a pre-existing being,*
*but the laying down of being.*

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1996)

*Introduction*

The qualitative theoretical framework guiding this study is Transformative Learning Theory examined through interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The basic premise of transformative learning is students learn through transformative experiences. In the case of the present study, Black college student learning is looked at within the context of the unique experiences of being a person of African descent in the American context while studying abroad. The aim of this investigation was to explore the social, cognitive, and cultural learning of Black college students studying abroad, and the meaning they made of their experiences. This study is intended to assist educators to facilitate institutional practices that recognize the benefits of the study abroad experience for Black college students that, in turn, may facilitate deeper skills and knowledge development by students, and result in increased Black student retention through graduation.

*Guiding Research Questions*

- What key experiences facilitate transformative learning in multi-country study abroad contexts for Black college students?

- In what ways do Black college students make meaning of their international experiences?

- How, if at all, can student experiences be interpreted through the lens of transformative learning theory?

*Data Collection Procedures*

Research Participants

The criteria for selection and inclusion in the study were Black (African American) students who participated in study abroad programs while in college. Both men and women were invited to participate. The sample held for study included five women and two men. I aimed to have a balanced representation of both women and men, but my participant pool was consistent with trends of U.S. study abroad, wherein more women than men participate (Open Doors, 2016). All students who participated in a study abroad program while attending a four-year university were eligible to participate. I selected participants that had not traveled outside of the U.S. prior to their study abroad experience. To protect the participant identities, pseudonyms were assigned (Esterberg, 2002). Applicants who self-selected as African American or Black on the demographic questionnaire, and successfully completed a study abroad program during their undergraduate education, were selected.

I recruited participants through emails released by universities and colleges in the Western part of the United States. I contacted study abroad program offices at 25 universities to locate and identify potential research participants. Once participants were identified, I submitted a proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to gain permission to engage in research with human subjects. I recruited participants through a snowball sample (Babbie 2007, Creswell 2003). During our initial contact, I built rapport with participants in an unobtrusive way. I shared general objectives of the research but did not divulge the purpose of the research.

In Table 6, I portray the demographic characteristics of the research participants. The participants are self-identified Black Americans who participated in a multi-country study abroad program. There are five women and two men in the study.

Table 7 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

_____

| Description | N = 7 |
|---|---|
| Gender | |
|   Female | 5 |
|   Male | 2 |
| Age of Study Abroad | |
|   20 | 3 |
|   21 | 2 |
|   22 | 1 |
|   28 | 1 |
| Age of In-depth Interview | |
|   21 | 1 |
|   23 | 1 |
|   26 | 1 |
|   27 | 2 |
|   29 | 1 |
|   30 | 1 |
| Study Abroad Semester | |
|   Spring Semester | 4 |
|   Summer Semester | 3 |
| Classification While Studying Abroad | |
|   Rising Third Year Student | 2 |
|   Third Year Student | 2 |
|   Rising Fourth Year Student | 1 |
|   Fourth Year Student | 1 |
|   Fifth Year Student | 1 |

_____

*Note. Data collected from anonymous demographic questionnaire.*

The data listed above notes the age of participants during their study abroad experience and the age of participants at the time of interviews. The participants have had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences while traveling abroad and to describe how they have made meaning of these experiences.

*Data Source*

Semi-structured Interviews

The IPA qualitative study explored how Black college students make meaning of their study abroad experience utilizing an array of data collection methods. The research data was derived from individual interviews and a demographic questionnaire. I conducted an extensive in-depth semi-structured interview with each participant. The interviews were semi-structure in design and created a space for participants to generate and reflect on their experiences to rationalize their worldview (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The interview questions were designed to prompt participants' reflections of their study abroad practices, experiences, and behaviors as well as the interpretation of subjective meanings attached to these practices (O'Reilly, 2005). The first part of the interview focused on participants' pre-departures experiences. The second part of the interview explored how students make meaning of their experiences using John Mezirow's transformative learning theory (Kitchenham, 2008).

Additional Data Sources

Participants were invited to bring and share any additional items that may explore and explain their study abroad experience. For example, participants may have written journals, blogs, or vlogs to document their study abroad experience or may have collected souvenirs and taken photographs of their journeys.  These items were not required to participate in the study and since each participant may include a unique item, the researcher would code the items in the context of the interview responses and utilized these additional resources to aid in the interpretation of participants' study abroad experiences. Due to the public nature of the items, if participants chose to disclose items that may identify them, they had the opportunity to opt-out of anonymity in the study.

*Data Analysis*

Data analysis was completed utilizing common themes that surfaced from the semi-structured interviews. I recorded interviews and selected a transcription service to transcribe them. I conducted an open coding procedure without the use of a codebook to identify emic codes that emerged through the theoretical framework of Transformative Learning Theory. "A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data (Saldaña, 2012, pg. 3). Open coding is a qualitative practice where the researcher derives first impressions from the data (Saldaña, 2012). Emic codes are codes that express the participants' perspective and point of view (Fetterman, 2008). Etic codes are codes that the researcher creates to try to make sense of the participants' point of view (Fetterman, 2008).

After establishing a codebook, I triple-coded all transcripts using the codebook. Triple-coding allowed the researcher to list the data under several different code labels (Malterud, (2012). I read each transcript multiple times and coded the data into specific categories and themes that were derived by the creative process of iterative process of making meaning of the codes. I began with open coding, the initial interpretations of the data. Then I utilized focused coding, to identify common categories in the data, and then I identified patterns in the data and used these patterns to create themes (Wolcott, 1994). I established trustworthiness in different ways. First, I conducted member checks by giving participants an opportunity to review the interview transcripts for accuracy and clarity. Member checking is a common practice in qualitative research and it involves the method of returning an interview to a participant for respondent validation (Birt, et al, 2016). After each interview, I wrote write analytic memos reviewing them to construct and deconstruct emerging themes (Maxwell, 2013). Each participant had a distinct pseudonym and each response received a specific code to organize and catalog participant responses. Data was electronically preserved using a

backup hard drive and was stored in a secure location, protecting the anonymity of the participants, as is required in qualitative research (Corti, 2012).

After completing data collection, I began to analyze the data. Data was analyzed chronologically, beginning with pre-travel expectations, and then examining student experiences while traveling and studying abroad. Data was organized into patterns and themes. This process was iterative, and I utilized IPA to interpret how participants reflected on prior experiences through their current lens of identity. I identified biases, self-identifying racial identities and experiences as a Black college student studying abroad. I upheld research ethics throughout the duration of the research project, ensuring that all participants and practices were protected from harm (Corti, 2012). Table 8 below shows participants and the duration of their stays abroad.

Table 8 Length of Study Abroad

| Duration | Participants |
|---|---|
| One-month | David |
| Summer Semester | Adriana, Lessie |
| Semester | Carter, Diddy, DH, Niki, |

*Note: David's one month abroad was during the summer.*

*Researcher's Positionality*

Throughout my preparations to conduct this research, my positionality as a Black woman studying Black participants' reflections of their study abroad experiences remained in the forefront of my mind. I examined the research process in the context of being a Black, heterosexual,

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cisgender, female, that lived in the southern part of the United States up to and during my undergraduate study. Post-graduation, I had the opportunity to travel extensively in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and both North and South America. My experiences working with undergraduate students during their study abroad experiences in 2010 led to my interest in conducting qualitative research to learn more about Black students and their study abroad experiences.

Realizing the necessity of global literacy and tolerance, more and more higher education institutions encourage students to study abroad. Although I did not have the opportunity to study abroad as an undergraduate student, I had the opportunity to visit Canada and Chile, and participate in multi-country travel abroad programs as a practitioner, which set the foundation and created my passion to pursue research and participate in study abroad education. My goal is to contribute to research on international education, and critically analyze study abroad education programs and experiences from a comparative theoretical framework.

Although I already had the travel bug, visiting 25 states in the USA by the age of 25, my only international experience at that point was travel to Toronto, Canada. In my head, I always thought I would live abroad, learning and embracing a different culture and language and I later visited Mexico and Australia on whims with friends. Although I loved to travel, I never considered study abroad during my undergraduate education. I was intimidated by costs and was heavily involved in co-curricular activities at school and in my community and was unwillingly to separate from these experiences.

As a professional, a work colleague encouraged me to apply to a multi-country study abroad program as a practitioner, continuing the work I had started at my home institution, but with an international twist. I applied to a "floating university" program and in 2010 began a 5-month sailing

trip with 600 undergraduate students that circumnavigate the globe, visiting four continents and eleven countries.

I had powerful revelations from my study abroad experience and I realized too many students were not taking advantage of these opportunities. I felt it was time to pursue my passions and through excellent mentorship, I was led to pursue my PhD in International & Comparative education.

*Summary*

In this chapter, I outlined the methodology used to examine the transformative experiences of 7 American university students who spent time in multi-country study abroad programs. I outlined the process of identifying and selecting my sample using a snowball method, and the instruments I used to gather data. I selected participants who identified as African American (Black) and participated in a multi-country study abroad program during their undergraduate career, and who had not traveled internationally before their study abroad experience. Selected participants reported study abroad experiences on five continents: Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America. I utilized in-depth semi-structured interviews to capture their reflections and experiences, both pre- and post- study abroad, and described how I used interpretative phenomenology analysis (IPA) to investigate how participants made meaning of their perceptions and experiences after returning to the U.S.

I provided tables and introductory descriptions from participants to demonstrate how different study abroad locations had implications for student perceptions and experiences. I documented how participants spontaneously reported more positive experiences visiting African and South America countries than those that studied in Asia and Europe, presaging the findings I report in the next chapter. I also outlined positionality as a Black American woman who has extensively

traveled and participated in multi-country study abroad programs, the experiences from which have

guided my approach to this study. In the following chapter, I will report on the findings and

interpretations this methodology and my positionality yielded during my data analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

*Human beings are more alike than unalike, and what is true anywhere is true everywhere, yet I encourage travel to as many destinations as possible for the sake of education as well as pleasure.*

Dr. Maya Angelou (1994)

*Introduction*

The purpose of this study was to examine how Black college students make meaning of, describe, and interpret their study abroad experiences utilizing the lens of Transformative Learning Theory. The responses of seven Black students who participated in multi-country study abroad programs addressed this question in semi-structured interviews and answers they gave in a demographic questionnaire. The analysis of the interviews sought to unpack the comparative experiences of these students as they traveled in Africa, Asia, Europe and South America.

In this chapter, the researcher discusses how the participants made meaning of these experiences through critical reflection. I offer interpretations of these findings utilizing interpretative phenomenological analysis to discuss how these experiences were transformative for the participants. Each participant experienced study abroad in multi-country and multi-continent destinations, an experience that offered an opportunity to engage in comparative education in an international context. These exchanges led to participants to make meaning of their racial identity while abroad and to gain an interglobal competency that provided the tools to engage in forms of social activism upon their return to the U.S.

This guiding research questions for this study were; What key experiences facilitate transformative learning in multi-country study abroad contexts for Black college students? In what ways do Black college students make meaning of their international experiences? How, if at all, can student experiences be interpreted through the lens of transformative learning theory?

Continental Reflections

Selected participants had studied abroad in a variety of countries that offered varied and comparable study abroad experiences. What is unique about this study is the comparative nature of the participants' study abroad experiences. All students in the study participated in a multi-country study abroad program. The participants in this study traveled to the African, Asian, European, and South American continents. Most not only traveled to multi-country locations, but to multi-continent locations. These diverse destinations let to an opportunity to have participants reflect and compare each country's experiences abroad. Study abroad research of multi-country destinations is scarce, so more research is needed to unpack this phenomenon.

When students considered study abroad opportunities, one of the first questions they asked themselves was where they should travel. They asked peers, family members and mentors for suggestions. As already acknowledged, study abroad opportunities are available on all seven continents, but some destinations are more common than others.

Most students who study abroad do so for academic credit. They are pursuing a college degree and participation in a study abroad program can supplement additional college courses, fulfill a language requirement, and or be an opportunity to go into the field to collect data. These motivations help students select destinations that are beneficial to their academic goals.

There are other motivations that may also impact students' destination selection. Students may be influenced by peer groups and social circles to study abroad in certain locations (Nyaupane et al, 2010). Study abroad participants may gain social status and social capital by choosing to study abroad. Depending on students' social groups and expectations (Yosso, 2005), they may opt in or out of certain destinations.

Table 9 Open Doors: Top 13 Destinations of U.S. Study Abroad Students 2014-2015

| Rank | Destination | 2014-2015 | % of Study Abroad Participants |
|------|-------------|-----------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | United Kingdom | 38,189 | 12.2 |
| 2 | Italy | 33,768 | 10.8 |
| 3 | Spain | 28,325 | 9.0 |
| 4 | France | 18,198 | 5.8 |
| 5 | China | 12,790 | 4.1 |
| 6 | Germany | 11,010 | 3.5 |
| 7 | Ireland | 10,230 | 3.3 |
| 8 | Costa Rica | 9,305 | 3.0 |
| 9 | Australia | 8,810 | 2.8 |
| 10 | Japan | 6.053 | 1.9 |
| 11 | South Africa | 5,249 | 1.7 |
| 12 | Mexico | 4,712 | 1.5 |
| 13 | India | 4,438 | 1.4 |

*Note: Open Doors 2014-2015*

Another motivating factor for destination selection for students may be site availability. Due to safety uncertainty (political upheaval), limited technology, and resources at the study abroad destination, or a study abroad advisor does not mention or share with students that a destination is an option (Onyenekwu, 2017), may also play a role in students' choice of their study abroad country.

If academic motivations align, and peer group and social acceptance align, students should consider the cost of their study abroad experiences. Although the costs of tuition and fees may be streamlined at a university, the cost of living in some countries may be considerably more expensive than others. The cost of a program can be motivating factor of students when selecting the destination to study abroad. As of 2017, all seven continents are options for study abroad destinations, ranging from the least expensive programs in South and Central America to the most expensive programs in Antarctica.

As students consider the plethora of options of destinations to study abroad, other factors may play a part in the decision-making process. As mentioned earlier, students consider the financial cost of studying abroad, but there are other factors to consider. For example, students may consider the national or official language of a study abroad destination. Whether a student has selected a study abroad destination for language acquisition or other academic pursuits, students may want to feel confident that they can communicate effectively with locals, professors, and classmates. Students may also consider the majority religion practiced in a particular country. For example, students who may identify strongly with a religion uncommon in that country or no religion at all, may be hesitant to study abroad in a country where a different religion is a common thread of culture and is infused in everyday life such as the types of food and drinks available and expected cultural norms around dress and appearance, gender roles, and political values.

*Study Abroad in Africa*

Study abroad on the African continent is the least popular destination for students (Open Doors, 2016). Although the sheer size of the continent dwarfs other destinations, American universities are less likely to create or encourage travel to Africa (Onyenekwu, 2017). There are some exceptions. The Institute for International Education's Annual Open Doors Report (2014) indicates less than 5% of study abroad students travel to sub-Saharan Africa, with South Africa the only African country the top destination for U.S. students, and it attracts only 1.8% of all collegians (Onyenekwu et al, 2017, p. 68). Many STEM programs provide study abroad destinations in Africa and the countries of South Africa, Ghana, and Kenya have the most popular study abroad programs.

Participants in this study had the opportunity to study in Mauritius, South Africa, Ghana, and Benin. They indicated they were excited to have the African continent as an option. The researcher studied abroad on the African continent choosing to study abroad in South Africa.

Participants shared a collective view of both excitement and hesitancy when choosing to study abroad in Africa. The African continent is not painted with a positive brush in mainstream media.

Usually, if the Continent is mentioned, it relates to desolate malnourished children in need of sponsorship for fresh water, adequate shelter, and balanced meals. The alternative may be war-torn villages run by tyrants and inhumane military. This jaded and inaccurate lens of countries in Africa may discourage all students to study abroad, yet the participants in this study expressed a sense of excitement to visit the "homeland" and connect with their African heritage roots. They had expectations of meeting long-lost cousins and finding kindred spirits. These students addressed issues of racial isolation in the U.S. in day-to-day interactions with other Americans, and the transition from racial minority in most spaces in the U.S. to the racial majority while traveling in African countries. The following excerpts below describe how participants reflected on their experiences in Africa:

> I went on a trip to visit the slave households. I think that was really
> impactful for me. A lot of the locals were by the bus, "Welcome
> Home." A lot of times you hear that African countries are not
> welcoming, are not warm to people of color that are coming from
> America or from other countries. I've experienced the opposite of
> that.
>
> *DH (studying in Ghana)*

> In Benin, I had a very deep conversation with a man about the
> Diaspora, and what it means to be part of a home or be a part of a
> group of people. I felt accepted in Benin more than anywhere, but

the way that they perceived me was just in general. They looked at me

like I was an American first, then my latter identities as Black and

male, they knew what to expect.

*Carter (studying in Benin)*

These participants reflected on their experiences in the African countries of Ghana and Benin, noting that these were positive experiences compared to their expectations prior to visiting the African continent. It is significant to note the comments above were made in the context of participants experiencing the African continent after traveling to the Asian continent. As the researcher, I was able to interpret how these participants made sense of their comparative experience.

*Study Abroad in Asia*

Study abroad destinations on the Asian continent have increased in the past 10 years. Specifically, China has created partnerships with American universities to offer programs at significant discounted rates, making it an economically wise destination. Students who study abroad in Asia usually do so for language acquisition. (Lee, 2014). Although, in most major cities in Asia, English communication options are available, since English often is the language of global commerce (Clark, 2012). The responses from participants as they studied in Asia usually centered around race. Students expressed their racial identity was salient as they interacted and traveled on the Asian continent.

My perception, let's say my experience, skin tone has a lot to do with

it. I have brown skin, light skin I guess. Generally, I didn't get as

many stares as my colleagues who were darker skinned. That's one

thing, because of the influx of African people who are there, traders

and merchants and things like that doing other jobs, have a negative

connotation, have a negative viewpoint in a lot of places in Asia,

especially Japan, Vietnam, and China. I wasn't taken for an African."

*Carter (studying in Japan)*


As an African American, I met a Vietnamese waitress, I was having a drink

at just a café one day and the woman says to me, "I know you're not bad. I

know you're not like the other Blacks." I engaged in this conversation, digging

deeper because it was warranted.

*Carter (studying in Vietnam)*


As I interpreted the reflections of participants' experiences in Asia, those experiences were

dependent on which country in Asia students studied in. For example, when Carter visited a rural

area in China with another Black student who was 6 feet tall, many of the local people, especially

children, began to call his colleague Michael Jordan. This student was not Michael Jordan, yet it

seemed to him that many of the local Chinese people with limited exposure to Black Americans, and

in part as a result of media representations, that any Black person traveling in China must be a

famous person. Another observation of the experiences of Black students in Asia was the concept of

colorism. "Colorism, or skin color stratification, is a process that privileges light-skinned people of

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color over dark in areas of income, education, housing, and the marriage market" (Hunter, M. (2007, pg. 237). Black students interpreted the difference of treatment they received from many Asian locals due to the pigment of their skin. If you were of a lighter shade of Black, you received more positive treatment from Asians.

> There are people who are one or two shades darker than me that are
>
> kind of feeling ostracized and having to think about their color on a
>
> constant basis. They're feeling like an animal in the zoo.
>
> *Diddy (studying in China)*

*Study Abroad in Europe*

Europe is the most popular destination for study abroad (Open Doors, 2016). The United Kingdom is ranked #1 and was the location of choice for 12% of the study abroad population in 2014-2015 (see Table 6). Many reasons can be interpreted why Britain is a top destination. American history in primary and secondary U.S. schools is peppered with accounts of British influence in Colonial America. Although America's population is diverse and has people from all over the world, the British beginnings of America remain salient in American education.

Students also may choose the United Kingdom because it is an English-speaking country, reducing communication difficulty. Although language acquisition is a popular motivation to study abroad, if language acquisition is not a goal for students, they may select the UK to experience study abroad and successfully communicate with locals.

Race was a salient issue when traveling throughout Europe and Scandinavia. Lessie traveled with a majority white group throughout her travels and reported she "received looks" from locals.

However, she said the looks weren't uncomfortable. David also commented on "looks" that he interpreted as, "Where are you guys from?" He mentioned restaurants were hesitant to serve him:

> It was a little hesitant, some of them was a little hesitant to serve. It was a little you know the attitudes wasn't as pleasant, as welcoming. The interaction was a little distant.
>
> *David (studying in Belgium)*

> How would I explain it? Not that I was like outwardly discriminated against but I just feel like people, still even in Europe hold those beliefs about African Americans.
>
> *Niki (studying in Spain)*

In their travels, participants noted they did not necessarily experience overt discrimination or macroaggressions, outside of the descriptions above. But they felt there were subtle hints of racism. Most participants traveled with dominant white groups and noted differences of treatment between Black and white Americans. David, a political science major, when comparing his experiences of studying in England and France, he noted his overall experience in England was better because he could communicate and build relationships with locals more easily than in France, due to the language barrier. It is noteworthy to mention these participants traveled to Europe before the Brexit event. My assumption, as the researcher, is participants may have encountered nationalistic views from interaction with locals and an underlying anti-African resentment. It is important to note that there has been significant immigration from African countries to Eastern and Western Europe that may contribute to an underlying anti-Africa resentment.

Below, Table 7 depicts the countries where participants engaged in study abroad programs.

Table 10 Countries of Study Abroad Participation

| Country | N | Participants |
|---|---|---|
| Amsterdam | 1 | David |
| Benin | 1 | Carter |
| Belgium | 1 | David |
| Brazil | 3 | Carter, Diddy, DH |
| China | 3 | Carter, Diddy, DH |
| France | 1 | David |
| Ghana | 3 | Carter, Diddy, DH |
| Hong Kong | 3 | Carter, Diddy, DH |
| India | 3 | Carter, Diddy, DH |
| Italy | 1 | Niki |
| Japan | 3 | Carter, Diddy, DH |
| Mauritius | 3 | Carter, Diddy, DH |
| Poland | 2 | Adriana, Lessie |
| Portugal | 2 | Adriana, Lessie |
| Russia | 2 | Adriana, Lessie |
| Scandinavia | 2 | Adriana, Lessie |
| South Africa | 3 | Carter, Diddy, DH |
| Spain | 3 | Adriana, Lessie, Niki |
| United Kingdom | 3 | Adriana. Lessie, David |
| Vietnam | 3 | Carter, Diddy, DH |

*Note: Data retrieved from the demographic questionnaire and interview*

In the table above, the data notes that the seven participants in the study traveled to 20 countries on four continents. The participants are all American and grew up on the North American continent. None of the participants traveled to the Antarctic continent during their study abroad experience. Brazil was the only country in South America that was noted in the study and three participants traveled there. Benin, Ghana, Mauritius, and South Africa were the four countries on the African continent that were listed in the study. China, Japan, Vietnam, and India were the four countries on the Asian continent that were listed in the study. The remaining 11 countries in the

study were on the European continent, a statistic that is consistent with study abroad research in that most study abroad destinations are on the European continent (Open Doors, 2014).

*Study Abroad in South America*

Participants DH, Lessie, and Carter studied abroad in Brazil. None of the participants had traveled to South America or Brazil prior to engaging their study abroad program. South America was the last destination for their multi-country program and they did not expect to see such a large Afro-Brazilian community in the city of Salvador. The South American continent is not a popular study abroad destination among all college students who study abroad and for all ethnic and racial groups of students. It is the only continent (except for Antarctica) that does not have a country in the top 13 study abroad destinations (see Table 6).

It is important to note Brazil saw an uptick in study abroad interest during the summers of the Soccer World Cup 2014 and Summer Olympics 2016 (Open Doors, 2016). Study abroad students who aspire to gain fluency in Spanish usually study abroad in Costa Rica or Mexico due to the low cost of the study abroad experience. Overall, participants commented that they had a positive experience in South America.

> My Black identity was questioned, because they were like, "Are you
>
> Brazilian?" Then when I was an American they're like, 'Oh wow, what brings
>
> you to Brazil? This is cool. Learn about our music, learn about our culture."
>
> There were very wide open in terms of extending their hospitality.
>
> *Carter (studying in Brazil*

<u>Critical Reflections</u>

The researcher asked a series of semi-structured, open-ended questions to seven participants, five women and two men, who completed multi-country study abroad programs during their undergraduate collegiate career. The participants traveled to countries on the Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America continents. Participants traveled to a minimum of two countries during their study abroad and a maximum of ten countries. The length of the programs varied from one month to one semester. Motivations for participation varied by reasons, location, cost, and length of study. These participants engaged in study abroad and experienced a *disorienting dilemma*, which the researcher interpreted to determine how participants made meaning, described, and interpreted their perspective transformations.

The following participant reflections illuminate participant self-reflection and the learning they perceived while studying abroad. Students reported engaging in transformative learning experiences and discussed their meaning making and their interpretation of these experiences using the 11 phases of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory. Transformative Learning Theory is not linear and participants engaged in aspects of transformative experiences throughout their study abroad, and not necessarily in any particular order, or in all phases of Mezirow's theory.

As participants reflected on their experiences through semi-structured interviews, the researcher engaged in interpretative phenomenological analysis, not only to interpret participant meanings and reflections but also to note moments of transformative learning. Although participants encountered "disorienting dilemmas", upon critical reflection, they viewed these moments as "perspective transformation". The next section of the dissertation unpacks the seven participants' reflections on their transformative experiences while traveling abroad.

*Adriana*

Adriana had the opportunity to share her background with the researcher. Adriana grew up in the United States and identified as Black and female. Adriana was an Intercultural Communication major and studied abroad during the summer of her junior year. She participated in a study abroad program that traveled to 10 countries in the United Kingdom and Scandinavia.  She visited Spain, Portugal, Russia, Poland, England, Norway, Sweden, and Finland. Adriana's study abroad program was not racially diverse and the countries she visited were not racially diverse. When asked what her motivations were for studying abroad, Adriana said:

> I wanted to travel, to see what's out there. I had never been to these
>
> places and I wanted to go and see what's it like, you know, to learn
>
> about European cultures and history. It was during the summer so I
>
> could make it work.

Adriana was 20 years old when she studied abroad and celebrated her birthday while traveling. She seemed confident and excited to interview with me about her study abroad experience and expressed an overall positive experience. Adriana noted her racial and sexual orientation may have influenced her experience while traveling. She identifies as bisexual and described this identity as another salient identity beyond race. She shared what she considered was an amazing coincidence while studying abroad. As she visited each country, it happened to be Pride week, and she was able to attend a number of international Pride festivals and events with other study abroad participants. She had this to say about the Pride parade in Sweden:

It was amazing! The whole city like shut down. There was *(sic)* people

everywhere. It was a lot of people. The flag was everywhere: On the buses, in

the stores, everywhere. There was music and dancing and food and

everything. I don't think this could happen in the U.S.


Adriana described and interpreted her study abroad experience as transformative. Adriana's

experience demonstrates how study abroad can allow a space for Adriana to learn in an alternative

context to that of the United States. As mentioned earlier, she traveled to racially homogenous

countries. As Adriana critically reflected on her experiences, she expressed feeling racial difference

while abroad, but found similarity with another identity (sexual orientation) between both her study

abroad cohort and host country locals. Through her self-reflection, Adriana described this

experience while abroad and how she made meaning of it. As the researcher, I interpret Adriana's

experience as transformative.

Adriana's identifies as a Black bisexual woman and attended a historically white university.

These two identities are minority populations on her home campus. As Adriana engaged in study

abroad, she experienced phase 1 of transformative learning by and through what I interpret as her

disorienting dilemma. Although Adrianna expressed that her racial and sexual identities are minority

identities in her study abroad program, Adriana expressed positive experiences about these identities

compared to her experiences in the United States. Adriana's experiences assist her to transcend

phase 2 of TLT by accepting her identity without feelings of guilt, shame or regret. She is excited

and grateful for the opportunities she had while attending various Pride events, but she does feel a

sense of regret that she isn't as bold or brave to have higher expectations of LGBTQ in the United

States. She moved through to phase 3 to critically assess her sociocultural assumptions.

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Adriana reflected on her discontent with current LGBT acceptance in the United States and she explored new roles and options through her process of transformation (phases 5 and 6). In the beginning of her study abroad program, Adriana was not "out" to many of her cohort peers. Throughout the semester, Adriana became more confident and attended more Pride parades and events. She then began to move from spectator of LGBT events in her study abroad program to becoming an active participant and leader within her cohort. Adriana built a mentor/mentee relationship with one of her professors shared her sexual identity to her students. She tried new roles (phase 8) of leadership and renegotiated relationships with her peers (phase 9). Through experience and extending her perspective, Adriana transformed and developed new competence and confidence about her sexual orientation (phase 10 and 11). Since returning from studying abroad, Adriana said she hopes to travel again and plans to encourage others, specifically other African American students, to study abroad as well.

*Carter*

Carter's major was International Affairs and he also studied abroad during his third year in college. He said he's always had an interest in international experiences and was excited to participate in a multi-country study abroad program. Carter is one of two men who participated in the study. African American/Black students have the lowest participation rates in study abroad and more women study abroad than men (Open Doors, 2016). There were not many men of color who studied abroad in Carter's program. Carter participated in a program that traveled to 10 countries. He traveled to Mexico, Japan, China, Hong Kong, Vietnam, India, Mauritius, South Africa, Ghana, Benin, and Brazil. Carter related his motivations for participating in a multi-country study abroad program:

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I was originally going to do a semester long China, but I felt that there were

better opportunities to have the chance to see more of the world. I felt that

having the opportunity to participate in that particular program in spring

2010 was the best value and probably gave the largest breadth of experiences,

so I felt that that was the best opportunity.

Carter had the opportunity to visit Asia, Africa, and South America, and he said his experience in Ghana compared to his experience in Benin was disheartening. He had expectations while traveling to Ghana to be considered a "cousin", but he felt the locals attempted to take advantage of his heartstrings, having traveled to Africa for the first time, and only wanted to engage him as a tourist. Carter said his travels to Benin met more of his expectations of being accepted as Black.

As Carter critically reflected on his study abroad experience, he was able to capture a comparative lens of his experiences in Ghana and Benin. Carter identifies as a Black male and on his study abroad program, he had the opportunity to visit the African continent for the first time. Prior to his travel, Carter expressed he was excited to visit the "motherland" and had expectations of what the experience would be like. Unfortunately, his experience did not coincide with his expectations. The researcher interprets Carter's reflection and revelation as transformative.

Carter's disorienting dilemma was his interaction with Ghanaian locals. He traveled abroad to Ghana and encountered taxi cab drivers and other locals that did not engage him as a long-lost cousin. Carter interpreted these encounters as financial opportunities for the locals to take advantage of a "rich American" and not to connect with a "distant" family member. Upon reflection, Carter moved through TLT phases 2-6 by examining his feelings, assessing his assumptions, recognizing discontent, and then exploring new roles and actions.

Carter had the opportunity for independent travel to Benin and compared his differing experiences. Carter's Benin experiences aligned with Carter's expectations of visiting an African country. He felt accepted and grateful for the relationships he was able to build with locals. After his experience in Ghana, he planned a different course of action while engaging with locals in Benin. He was more shrewd and wary of locals that offered help and was more observant of others' motivations to engage with him. He negotiated and renegotiated relationships and built more competence and self-confidence in his travels abroad.

Carter's experience abroad was transformative. He shared that after returning to the United States, he began to blog about his international travels. He also began to pursue international employment positions abroad. He currently is living abroad and working for a U.S. embassy and continues to have fond memories of his travel experiences.

*David*

David was a Sociology major and also studied abroad during his third year in college. David participated in a multi-country study abroad program that primarily focused on Political Science themes in Western Europe. He traveled to England, Amsterdam, Belgium, and France. David reported he was one of four Black students out of 70 that participated in his program. David expressed his college in the United States did not have a large Black population and is another participant who identified with intersecting racial and sexual identities. David identified as a Black, bisexual male and noted these identities influenced his experiences abroad. David traveled to Europe during the time when the same-sex marriage policy legislation passed in Europe. He commented his experiences in liberal countries like Belgium and Amsterdam as a bisexual man were more positive than his experiences in other European countries and the U.S. While abroad, many U.S. states still had not passed marriage equality policies.

David commented his best overall experience was England because he didn't encounter a language barrier. David struggled in the other three countries and mentioned his racial identity was salient in all of his multi-country experiences. As David reflected on his experiences and tried to make meaning of them, he mentioned one particular interaction related to his racial identity. He commented on this interaction in Belgium:

> I remember me and Crystal, my African American friend from East Berkeley, we were at an ice cream shop, and this one guy on the bike rode by us and honked the horn and flicked us off. I thought that was really odd, out of nowhere. Then a couple of people in the same ice cream line tried to cut in front of us. I don't know if there was a feeling of superiority, or maybe just impatience, or didn't see us in line, but I thought that was a little odd, as well.

During his interview, David expressed his frustration with the interactions above. As the researcher, I argue David experienced microaggressions. Racial microaggressions are conscious or unconscious negative thoughts and/or statements or actions to or against a racial group other than your own (Smith 2011, Sue 2007).

David's experience abroad was transformative. He was a transfer student who grew up in the U.S. foster care system and never imagined traveling abroad. Since his study abroad experience, David has traveled internationally and mentioned he has the "international bug." When he returned to his home campus, he spoke to Black clubs and organizations to encourage more Black students to study abroad.

During his interview, David disclosed he grew up in multiple foster homes along the West Coast of the U.S. He shared coming from a low-income background, and that he was grateful he

had the opportunity to attend college. He was all the more grateful he received financial support through scholarships and grants to participant in study abroad. As a non-traditional student with unique circumstances, he never thought he would own a passport and travel to Europe. David plans to attend graduate school and participate in another study abroad program during his course of study.

*Diddy*

Diddy was an English major with a minor in Psychology. Diddy completed her coursework before studying abroad and traveled abroad during the last semester of her senior year. I was intrigued to know how Diddy would make meaning of her study abroad experience since she had completed her undergraduate studies but had yet to graduate. After her study abroad semester, Diddy returned home to graduate. She did not return to her college campus after experience abroad. As I evaluated Diddy's movement through Mezirow's phases, I recognized her learning was unique compared to other participants in the study. She was one of the oldest participants in both her study abroad program and this study. She expressed having many significant experiences throughout her college career but reflected that her study abroad experience was set apart.

Diddy participated in a multi-country program, traveling to 10 countries: Mexico, Japan, China, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Mauritius, India, South Africa, Ghana, and Brazil. Traveling abroad had always been one of her aspirations and she had a fledging French language competency and desired to engage with other French communities while visiting abroad. Prior to studying abroad, Diddy only viewed racial identity in the U.S. context and she noted her identities as Black and female were salient to her interactions abroad. She reflected on a transformative experience when she was in Mauritius while interacting with a taxi cab driver:

I don't know if I was being profiled as a woman or if it was because I was a foreigner. I can't really specifically say for sure, but I definitely remember getting into an altercation with a cab driver. It became an issue. He didn't want to take us where we wanted to go. I don't know if I wasn't being assertive enough or if he wasn't listening because I was…you know, a woman or because I wasn't from there. Even though, I do speak French. I was fluent enough to have a conversation with him. I definitely felt like something was kind of off with that.

Diddy described and interpreted her international experience as transformative. It is noteworthy that Diddy's experience may have been nationalistic, so it is important to acknowledge that the participants intersecting identities contribute to their transformative experiences. Although Diddy was studying on the African continent, the Mauritian population is sprinkled with African, Indian, and other identities. Mauritius is not necessarily a popular study abroad destination but is known for its beautiful beaches and cultures and is a popular tourist destination.

Diddy contrasted her experiences in Asia and South America and found it was refreshing to visit Brazil where most locals looked like her. She commented while in Asia, many of her interactions were negative and the local citizens would not engage with her. But during her travels to Brazil, she mentioned people apparently thought she was local and presumed she spoke Portuguese. When she shared with them that she spoke English, they would switch their responses to English. I found this experience particularly significant. Diddy experienced phase 5 of TLT, exploring new roles, relationships, and actions, and I interpreted this interaction as a key experience of meaning making, since Diddy's racial identity while visiting Salvador, Brazil was met with positive interactions and as a result she enthusiastically embraced the culture of the local community. Even after learning

she was an "outsider", she continued to feel embraced by locals as a fellow member of the African Diaspora and continued to have positive experiences.

Salvador, Brazil is a frequent study abroad destination for many Black Americans. The port of Salvador was a last destination along the Middle Passage before enslaved Africans reached the British colonies in North America. Brazil and the United States share a history of racial injustices against members of the African Diaspora.

Upon returning home, Diddy noted she was much more adventurous and willing to try new things. I interpret Diddy's courage as transformative outcome of the last phases of TLT (phase 8, 9, 10, and 11). After her travel abroad experience, she has traveled other parts of the globe and routinely encourages friends and family to travel as well. She feels prepared to engage in conversations on global topics and more likely to travel in general. She grew up in New York and after a trip to the West Coast to visit friends in California, she moved there. She currently lives in San Francisco.

*DH*

DH was an Anthropology major and studied abroad during her senior year. DH traveled to Mexico, Japan, China, Hong Kong, Vietnam, India, Mauritius, South Africa, Ghana, and Brazil. DH was one of the most enthusiastic participants in the study and expressed much gratitude for having the opportunity to travel abroad. DH also appears to have one of the most significant transforming experiences among study participants, according to this researcher. DH was so transformed by her travels abroad that she chose a career in international management. She now experiences regular transformative opportunities due to travel in her professional career.

DH enjoyed her experiences in each country and noted her racial identity was salient in most interactions and experiences. DH attended a historically white institution and had prior knowledge

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of racial identity development and was more self-aware about her own identity and racial education politics compared with other study participants. DH's reflections on study abroad include how she made meaning of romantic encounters while traveling and how her racial identity linked to how she engaged with men from the local communities she visited:

> So, we started off in Asia, you know, Japan, China, Vietnam, India and I would go out to clubs to have a good time and it was alright, but when we got to Africa. I loved it! We were in Ghana and we met these guys and they were like go here to this club and it was popping. They bought us drinks and everything. I wasn't getting that before, you know, in Asia, but after that, Africa treated me good. It was nice to feel like pretty and girly again.

DH was a Communication major prior to studying abroad and changed her major to Anthropology when she returned to her home campus. She mentioned after traveling she wanted to learn more about different countries and cultures. She said she is now enrolled in graduate school for social entrepreneurship and has planned more trips abroad. She has traveled to the Middle East and to Africa and plans to continue international travel.

DH described and interpreted her study abroad experience as transformative. She grew up in Texas. She said her experience changed her perspective and outlook on life. She chose a multi-country study abroad program because she wanted to travel to more countries and see more cultures than a traditional single nation immersion program. She returned to her home campus and spoke to Black clubs and organizations about her study abroad experience, encouraging other Black college students to study abroad. She also plans to participate in a multi-country study abroad program as a staff member.

*Lessie*

Lessie was a Sociology and Health Science major and studied abroad during the summer of fourth year in college. Lessie attended a technical college in New York that was racially diverse. She studied abroad in 10 countries in Western Europe and Scandinavia. She traveled to England, Portugal, Spain, Ireland, Scotland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, and Poland. She commented on the lack of diversity within her study abroad cohort as well as in the countries she visited. On multi-country participation, Lessie commented on the comparative nature of visiting Spain and Portugal in comparison to visiting Scandinavia.

> I went to a nightclub in Sweden with a bunch of my friends, and it was everything, all the furniture, the walls, everything was white. Then all the people were blond-haired and blue-eyed. When I walked in, I was just, "Whoa. This is very different.

Lessie said she was somewhat spoiled with her experiences growing up and attending school in New York. She reported she comes from a family committed to ethnic diversity and feels very comfortable with all different types of people. While participating in her multi-country study abroad program, she was the minority and engaged with very few peers of color in the program and in the countries. When asked how she would interpret the lack of diversity in her multi-country study abroad program, she stated that cost may be a deterrent to participant in study abroad in general and multi-country study abroad programs specifically for students of color. There are few multi-country study abroad opportunities for students and these programs are usually more expensive than other traditional one-country study abroad programs. Very few students, regardless of race, may choose to participate in a multi-country study abroad program.

Lessie was another unique case compared to other study participants. Prior to studying abroad, she did not think her racial identity would be significant in her experiences abroad. She was the only participant that seemed to have a very superficial level of racial identity development, since she seemed to have been sheltered from adverse racial experiences in the United States. I interpreted Lessie's transformative experience as noteworthy, since her racial identity had a seemingly invisible and mitigating component, class. Lessie appeared to have the most social-economic privilege among study participants, and it wasn't until she had traveled out of the country that the reactions of host nationals could provide for a "disorienting dilemma". While traveling, Lessie's racial identity took on new significance and she described her first encounters of being "othered" in Scandinavia.

Using IPA, I unpacked how Lessie interpreted her international experiences, and how race and class identity influenced her perspective transformations. Lessie participated in one of the most expensive study abroad programs offered to undergraduate students. Although Lessie's class background is similar to her white peers in the program, she was usually the only student of color during her multi-country travel abroad experiences. I note that after critically reflecting on her study abroad experiences, Lessie began to negotiate and renegotiate (phase 8) her interactions with others, both abroad and home.

Upon returning from her traveling, she now has a comparative perspective on how she is perceived within the relative comfort of her at-home class privilege in the United States, and the different ways she may be perceived in predominantly white European nations. Prior to studying abroad, Lessie did not think that her racial identity would influence her experiences abroad. Studying abroad was transformative and she encountered a transformed perspective.

*Niki*

Niki was a Psychology and Social Behavior major and studied abroad during her senior year in college. She studied in Spain and Italy for an academic quarter. She chose to participate in a multi-country study abroad program because she really wanted to go to Italy, but the program offered the opportunity to visit Spain as well, as well, so she opted in. She loves Italian food and her motivations to study abroad were to learn about the Italian and Spanish cultures. She was one of three African American women studying abroad among a cohort of 300 students. She had two Hispanic women as roommates and remained close to them during her travels.

Niki attended a predominately Asian American university and had prior experience with feeling marginalized in college. Nikki was another participant in the study that seemed to have strong prior knowledge of racial identity development and racial politics in the United States. She identified her racial identity as salient and an influencer on her experiences while traveling abroad. Niki noted her relationships with her Latina roommates and other Hispanic women were beneficial: her peers where able to communicate in Spanish and intermediate Italian while traveling. Another advantage of her peer group was of a comparative nature: Niki was able to observe how her white peers interacted with the local community abroad, how her Hispanic close friends who were not "authentically" Spanish or Italian interacted with the local community abroad, and how her own African American identity surfaced during her interactions abroad.

Nikki reported she observed her white peers received positive treatment more often than not when interacting with Spanish and Italian locals, yet her Latina peers at first seemed to have positive interactions, but after more interactions, the women were asked more questions like "why they didn't speak Spanish well," and "why didn't they have a better grasp on Hispanic culture." Niki's experience was she was insignificant more often than not in her travels. She commented on her experiences this way:

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I think I knew that regardless of where I am, whether it's America,

Europe, or wherever, that I would be looked at differently, that

people will assume that I'm a criminal or assume that I'm not as good

as them. I just realized that that's probably true and there's really

nothing I could do about it.

The extent of Niki's travel, two countries, was the least of all study participants. She compared her experiences in Spain and Italy and found she enjoyed her time in Italy much more than Spain:

Italy was definitely my favorite. I thought Italy was a little bit easier to

navigate to get around. More people spoke English there from where we

were staying at. Also, I was able to see more people with my skin color there

so that was nice.

Niki described and interpreted her study abroad experience as transformative. She commented on her increase in self-esteem and self-confidence. She reported she felt more mature afterward, and more willing to take chances. She doesn't nearly rely on her mom as much now and is better at balancing her finances. Upon Niki's return, she was able to sit on study abroad panels for her university and share with other African Americans about her study abroad experiences.

*Summary*

Participants reflected on their prior expectations before visiting countries in Africa and their actual encounters with locals. "Carter", one of the participants, expected to be welcomed as a long-lost cousin or brother, but when traveling to Ghana, he felt like he was treated as an ATM machine because of his American identity. "DH", another participant, compared her experiences on the African continent to the Asian continent. She felt that she received more attention from men in South Africa than in Japan and her self-esteem grew after visiting the African continent.

As I compare and contrast the way that each of the participants experienced their study abroad experience and made meaning of this experience, it is important to note that each experience was different. After evaluating  data and comparing across cases, the following patterns began to emerge: All students experienced that as with travel in the U.S., in most cases their race or skin color was a salient marker of their identity while abroad; Some participants have a variety of emancipatory moments during their study abroad, including acknowledging differing sexual identities, changes in perception around kindred relationships based solely on skin color or race; recognition of previously invisible forms of privilege that due to participants' lack of travel they were unable to discover in the comfort of their home communities.

CHAPTER SIX:  FRAMEWORKS OF MEANING

*The paradox of education is precisely this - that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated.*

James Baldwin (1985)

*Introduction*

The analysis of the in-depth interviews of the seven participants yielded three themes, or frameworks, that were salient in how students made meaning of their study abroad experience. The three frameworks of meaning are racial identity, activism, and interglobal competence. The researcher offers interpretations of these findings utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The participants in the study critically reflected, described, and interpreted their multi-country study abroad experiences. As the researcher, I used IPA to interpret their responses and identify three frameworks of meaning from their responses.

These three themes were gleaned from the in-depth interviews, which involved critical reflection by participants, and my own meaning making as the researcher. One of these themes was the role of racial identity and how racial identity informed participants' meanings about study abroad experiences. Through the in-depth interviews, I interpreted the stages of Nigrescence of each participant. Participants were at different stages in their undergraduate career and as a result were at different stages in their racial identity development. Yet, each participant was able to describe and interpret their experiences abroad as they pertained to race. The participants, by naming specific racial experiences abroad and critically reflecting on these experiences, provided data that supported transformative learning experiences. The second theme was activism. The participants reflected that after their study abroad experience, they expressed some level of commitment to activism in their communities as it related to racial identity and international travel. The third theme was interglobal competence, how participants successfully navigated multiple culture spaces.

Racial Identity

One of the emerging frameworks of meaning from the critical reflections of participants was the role of racial identity related to their study abroad experiences. According to Cross's Nigrescence theory, participants were at different stages of their identity development, yet they were able to describe and interpret their Black identity while abroad. Specifically, while traveling in Africa, participants reported positive perspectives of seeing men and women of African descent in a different cultural context.

> For me, looking and seeing the different African American faces that were out there, or just different Black faces, or those that came from Africa, there is a population that migrated over there (France). There is a heavy African population over there, as well. For me to see them speaking in French, speaking in a different language, enjoying life, I think that was a positive outlook on that, basically reaffirming that culture exists far more outside of the United States, and people look like you and me speaking fluent French, and enjoying life. To me it was a good, inspiring learning experience.
>
> *David (studying in France)*

David also reflected on his experiences of being Black and traveling abroad.

> It's pretty cool because you're able to see faces that look like you and me, my brothers and sisters that live here in America, I don't even know how many miles away, thousands of miles away, and you see people that look like you,

but just enjoying life in a whole different level, in their own world. It's
amazing, it's beautiful."

*David (Racial Identity)*

Although not all participants had the opportunity to study abroad on the African continent, some were able to study abroad in other countries of color. Lessie didn't experience much racial diversity while studying abroad, but she did find people of color and African immigrants in some countries more than others. She compared her experience of studying in Spain and Portugal (countries of color) to Scandinavia:

> Traveling in places where people looked closer to how I look is definitely
> more relaxed, and I guess just more of a comfortable area, whereas traveling
> in other places, like Sweden or Finland, where people might have blond hair,
> blue eyes, and paler. It was just more of a standout type of thing.

*Lessie (studying in Portugal)*

Some participants commented on negative interactions with the local people abroad and described and interpreted these experiences through the lens of their racial identity:

> In China, I had a very similar experience as I had in Japan, where I wasn't
> allowed to go into a particular nightclub because it was just Chinese only. At
> that time, my identity of being American was challenged, not necessarily
> challenged, but it seemed to be a ramification to enjoying the benefit of

going to a club and having a good time, but it also could have been because I
was Black. I was told it was Chinese only.

*Carter (studying in China)*

Carter's perspective change while chatting with a Vietnamese waitress – she has an opinion
of Black American men as the bad guys, the rappers, the villains in the movies – and Carter
responded:

Here I am, sitting in some Chinos, in a Polo shirt in Vietnam, speaking

Vietnamese with [her and] having a pineapple juice that really took an axe to

what she thought I was supposed to be.

*Carter (studying in Vietnam)*

Before I studied abroad I hadn't left the US, I barely left Houston. But I met

so many people from all over. I talked to this person and this person…and it

was like, OMG, there is so much to see out there. In this job I get to go

everywhere and see everything.

*DH (Interglobal Competence)*

As I interpreted these perspective transformations, I offer anecdotal experiences of Black
college students who have described and made meaning of key transformative experiences during
their study abroad experiences. These participants, upon reflection, offer a critical interpretation of
how racial identity influenced their adventures and how interglobal competence and activism are key
results of their multi-country study abroad experiences.

The intersection of race and other identities show that students' experience and how they made meaning of their experiences may be related to identities other than race. The identity of American was prevalent throughout critical reflections and gender and sexual orientation was also significant. David identified as a bisexual male and didn't feel he was negatively impacted by his sexuality. He indicated he did not act flamboyant as typically gay men are in media representations, and as a result didn't face any weird discrimination based on his sexual orientation.

As I link the theme, racial identity, back to the literature on study abroad and Black student development, the finding is consistent with the literature. Study abroad research notes that students more often than not have positive outcomes of the study abroad experiences. The literature notes that Black students who study abroad encounter similar benefits to the study abroad experience as their other racial and ethnic counterparts, and that they also experience more positive racial identity compared to their experiences in the United States.

Activism

Activism is defined as the commitment of action to promote social, political, economic, and/or environmental reform with a desire to make improvements in society. (Sullivan, & Esmail, 2007; Wikipedia, 2018). It is one's own distinct agency (one's own power to make a difference). Agency is defined as the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices (Hewson, 2010). Activism is the second salient framework of meaning in how Black students make meaning and described and interpreted their study abroad experiences. Black activists and political leaders acknowledged their racial identity, and cultural competence due to their study abroad experience.

Activism, in this context, is defined as intentional action aimed at fostering social and/or political change (Szymanski, 2003; 2011). It is action aimed to decrease and/or eradicate racism and

its negative effects, and to improve the everyday lives of African Americans and the African American community (Szymanski, 2011). Although there are traditional and overt forms of activism – protests, sit-ins, boycotts, etc. – there also are informal and non-confrontational forms of activism: mentoring and talking with others about African American issues (Szymanski, 2011).

Upon returning to the United States, these men and women began and/or continued the practice of activism. As noted in the analysis of our participants' critical reflections, many of them have begun to engage in activism in new ways.

> I would say my major outlook is to encourage our up-and-coming African Americans, LBGTQ, and our younger generation to get outside of America, and learn about the histories of all these other countries, because at the end of the day they are all interrelated, one way or another.
>
> *David (Activism)*

> It's very common to have never left the state or to [never] have been on a plane. To think of doing a study abroad program that travels to all these countries, it's not a realistic plan for many people."
>
> *Lessie (Activism)*

Carter reflected on his study abroad experience as meaning making. In Vietnam, he stayed with a host family that lived in the rice patties of Vietnam and relied on their landscape for food and money. He said his experiences there will have a lifelong impact on him.

As I review and reflect on the literature review, activism as an outcome for study abroad participants isn't explicitly linked to students or Black students who participate in study abroad. As a

researcher, I would like to note that all participants have studied abroad in the last ten years and the although these participants have found ways to express and engage in activism on their campuses and in their communities, it may be too early to explore the long-term impact that their study abroad experience may impact their commitment to activism. As a result, as I link the literature and activism to Black students who study abroad, I would support that these participants are in the process to continue to engage in their development and the fruit of their activism is yet to come.

Interglobal Competence

As mentioned earlier, Interglobal Competence is a term coined by the researcher to specifically name the framework of meaning for participants who identify as Black and study abroad. The experiences of these participants are layered when comparatively analyzed. None of the participants attended a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), and all participated in study abroad programs that had minimal racial diversity. These participants navigated the culture of their specific study abroad cohort, as well as the different cultures in each country. Participants reflected on their cultural competence skills and the ability to navigate through multiple spaces (Fanon, 1963). Yet, they augmented or gained new competence after studying abroad. Participants noted a new savvy, confidence, and ability to successfully traverse multiple international spaces. DH, who has traveled the world multiple times since her study abroad program, noted she attended a predominately white institution and had the ability and opportunity to interact with others from different cultures, but having studied abroad, she identified "an uncanny ability" to grasp nuances of different cultures and currently has a professional position that requires international travel.

Study abroad research confirms students develop a stronger cultural competence when they participate in study abroad (Hoffa, 2007). This assertion was affirmed by my data. Participants conveyed a stronger sense of cultural awareness and felt more confident to interact with other

cultures and communities as a direct result of their study abroad experience. For the purposes of this study, I posit an additional descriptor to cultural competence for these participants. As Black students experience cultural competence in an international context, they may transcend the bounds of documented cultural competence, and develop what I choose to "interglobal competence", a cultural competence specific to Black college students who study abroad. Interglobal competence differs cultural competence due to the unique nature of Black students experiencing cultural competence abroad.

Deardorff (2004) asserts the term intercultural competence is interchangeable with multicultural or cross-cultural competence, cultural learning, global competence, cross cultural knowledge, intercultural understanding, cross-cultural adjustment, cross-cultural adaptation, cross-cultural effectiveness, and cultural competence. Ultimately, the different terms are used to describe "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in cross cultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Dalib, Harun, & Yusoff, 2014, p.184).

Although the term interglobal competence is an interpretation based on this researcher's analysis of the critical reflections of study participants, higher education study abroad offer the opportunity to develop global citizenship skills that prepare participants to engage and interact with others on a global level. The development of this competence was evident among all participants in this study, and most have continued to travel abroad since their initial involvement with study abroad programs.

> Being a first-generation student, being a part of foster youth. I'm also part of the foster care system. A lot of people of all three of those (African American) dynamics aren't really able to go out, sometimes, out of their city, out of their state, and so for me it was a blessing to go outside the whole country.

*David*

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As participants reflected on their experiences abroad, they felt inspired to return to their home universities and communities and share their international experiences with local others. Specifically, participants commented on the small number of Black students in their program cohorts and sought to explore ways to inform other Black students about study abroad opportunities. These actions alone do not usually fall into the realm of activism, yet with further critical reflection and interpretation, these motivations were spurred on by the tangible positive outcomes of the other frames of meaning that motivated participants to become active in informing others about study abroad opportunities, particularly African American students.

*Summary*

In conclusion, the purpose of the study was to unpack how Black college students make meaning of their multi-country study abroad experiences. The following guiding research questions helped to explore this phenomenon; What key experiences facilitate transformative learning in multi-country study abroad contexts for Black college students?; In what ways do Black college students make meaning of their international experiences?; and How, if at all, can student experiences be interpreted through the lens of transformative learning theory? Utilizing the responses of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and analyzing the data, three themes were found. Racial identity, activism, and interglobal competence were of note in importance as the participants reflected on their study abroad experiences. These three themes The next chapter will delve into the conclusions and implications of these findings.

CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE

PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

*Perhaps travel cannot prevent bigotry, but by demonstrating that all peoples cry, laugh, eat, worry, and die, it can*

*introduce the idea that if we try and understand each other, we may even become friends.*

Dr. Maya Angelou (1994)

*Summary*

Black college students often experience their campuses differently than peers of other racial and ethnic groups, so this study explored the unique experiences of Black college students as they participated in multi-country study abroad programs. This study explored how Black college students make meaning of their study abroad experiences as it relates to race and other intersecting identities. The study attempted to fill a gap in the research literature of Black students in higher education and study abroad.

Transformative learning occurs when students learn through transformative experiences. Transformative Learning Theory offers a framework to acknowledge the meaning Black college students make of their study abroad experience (Kuh & Schneider, 2008; Lyon, 2002), through engaging previously unknown environment, challenging preconceived thoughts, and providing a space for growth and development outside of racist structures that still obtain in the U.S. today. Critical reflection by individuals is key to their transformative learning experiences. With regard to this study, the learning of Black college students is examined within the context of the transformative experience of being a person of African descent in the American context while studying abroad in multiple countries. One of the advantages of immersive experiences like study abroad is the potential for these experiences to be transformative in nature (Keily, 2005).

This study was designed to address the issues of African American students and their multi-country study abroad experiences. The sample consisted of seven Black Americans, five women and

two men, who participated in a multi-country study abroad programs during their undergraduate career. The study was designed to give participants an opportunity to reflect on their study abroad experiences and interpret how these students made meaning of these experiences.

This study provided valuable insights into the benefits African American students derive from studying abroad in multi-country programs. Participants moved through Cross' Nigrescence Theory of stages of racial development, acquired new skills in interglobal competence, and gained a sense of commitment to activism after experiencing a multi-country study abroad program. Participants made meaning of their study abroad opportunities by critically reflecting on their experiences and the researcher gained insight into these experiences by viewing them through the 11 phases of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory. The learning experiences culled from the in-depth interviews when participants traveled abroad for the first time, included developing unexpected kindred relationships in some cases and not experiencing the same as expected in others; navigating through a foreign country, and communicating with new people where culture and language were often barriers; and experiencing race differently than previously experienced in the U.S. As the researcher, I interpreted participants' study abroad experiences through the analytical lens of interpretative phenomenological analysis. IPA is a specific hermeneutic approach committed to exploring how people make sense of experiences in their lives (Smith, et al., 2009). The guiding research questions below framed the analysis of the data.

- What key experiences facilitate transformative learning in multi-country study abroad contexts for Black college students?
- In what ways do Black college students make meaning of their international experiences?
- How, if at all, can student experiences be interpreted through the lens of transformative learning theory?

By studying and interpreting the critical reflections of participants, three themes emerged from the data: Racial identity, activism, and interglobal competence were identified as catalysts for perspective transformation of the participants. Although participants reported some negative experiences abroad, when describing and interpreting their overall experience, they made meaning of how they had embodied these frameworks of meaning.

Three frameworks of meaning surfaced from this exploration. The first framework of meaning, racial identity, was explored and interpreted through Cross' Nigrescence theory and how Black students moved along a continuum in their racial identity development. As participants described their study abroad experience, they compared and contrasted how they experienced their racial identity in each country. This observation and analysis led me, as the researcher, to posit an additional attitude to the fourth attitude, Internalization, Global-lens, to the last stage of Nigrescence theory.

The second framework of meaning is activism. After participating in a multi-country study abroad program, participants expressed a commitment to activism. Activism is defined as the commitment of action to promote social, political, economic, and/or environmental reform with a desire to make improvements in society. (Sullivan, & Esmail, 2007; Wikipedia, 2018). They returned to their campuses prepared to engage in causes that intersected with their identities and interests. Students shared their study abroad experience empowered them to find strength in their voices and to take the knowledge and growth they experienced abroad and to bring it to their home communities and campuses.

The third framework of meaning was interglobal competence. Interglobal competence is an extension of intercultural competence that acknowledges inherent competencies of Black college students and allows for skill development in an international context. Black students experience college uniquely compared to their peers (Allen, 1992), and Black students experience study abroad

uniquely as well. Participants described a new confidence in navigating through these multi-country international spaces. After critically reflecting on their study abroad experiences, students grew in their intercultural and interglobal competencies.

In summary, this study shows study abroad can provide support and transformative learning experiences for Black undergraduate students. These Black students not only experienced the positive outcomes of study abroad in general, for example, but also gained broader positive outcomes. Educational institutions and policy makers should therefore encourage and support study abroad opportunities for Black students.

*Future Research*

As the number of study abroad opportunities increase for students, it is vital that universities employ and equip educators to support African American students to study abroad. Educators must overcome obstacles that Black students encounter when attempting to study abroad. For example, participants noted the high costs of college in general and a study abroad semester is viewed as a luxury, given its additional cost. Educators must create programs that are financially accessible to Black students. Many current programs offered are in Europe and after completing a comparative study on Black student experiences on the majority of the continents, study abroad programs should expand beyond Europe to offer other location opportunities for students in general, and locations particularly suited for Black students, in terms of offering opportunities to explore the history of the African diaspora and slavery systems that have uniquely impacted them.

This study is a limited examination of the experiences of Black students who participate in multi-country, study abroad programs. Although we delved into the voices of seven participants traveling abroad, this study represents a small contribution to the limited data available about this amazing experience. Additional research is needed to address the experiences of Black students

studying abroad. This study identified two themes that influenced perspective transformation in the participants, but there may be other themes as well. Each theme would benefit from additional research and further analysis.

With the notable benefits of study abroad participation, and the current research states many positive outcomes for students who choose to study abroad are retention, and higher GPA (Hoffa, 2010), it behooves researchers to increase the focus of study abroad education. The benefits of study abroad are students become more competitive candidates in the job market, have a greater understanding of other cultures, acquire foreign language skills, enhanced leadership skills, become more independent and patient, gain a deeper understanding of self, and become world citizens (Dawson, 2000). Students can acquire a broader perspective about the human condition and are confronted with a new sense of world history and appreciation of other cultures during study abroad experiences (Matz, 1997). Carlson and Widaman (1998) found study abroad experiences can reduce nationalism and ethnocentrism and students grow in their academic, professional, and personal pursuits (Dolby 2004, Posey, 2003; Stroud 2010).

In this specific study, the benefit of perspective transformation for participants was key. Black students expressed a stronger foundation of racial identity and how they viewed their own identity as Black on an international scale. Participants not only conveyed how they interpreted their experiences around racial identity from a comparative lens, but also were able to share comparative experiences of racial identity on a country-by-country level on the same continent. For example, Black students traveled abroad to Africa and had different experiences in South Africa and Ghana. These students expressed while they were on the same continent, their experiences around racial identity differed greatly.

In South Africa, students commented on the legacy of apartheid and how they could still observe the remnants of apartheid through housing and employment opportunities. Many of the

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Black South Africans the participants befriended lived in townships. These communities were on the outskirts of cities and were segregated and poorly maintained. Black South Africans were forced to live in these neighborhoods while white South Africans lived in plush, affluent communities in Cape Town.

Participants also encountered different attitudes and actions associated with colorism. "Colorism, or skin color stratification, is a process that privileges light-skinned people of color over dark in areas of income, education, housing, and the marriage market" (Hunter, M. (2007, pg. 237). The color of the participants in the study differed ranging from the delicious hues of brown, coffee, mocha, peanut, pecan, walnut, caramel, beige, syrup, tawny, and chocolate. As such, participants reported varied treatment by and interaction with locals in South Africa. One participant's complexion, DH, was beige and she could easily pass as biracial in the United States. DH is not biracial but many of her Black South Africans peers identified DH as colored. South Africa has four racial groups: Black, Colored, Indian, White. DH was not familiar with a differing racial identity other than Black and observed how the South African race hierarchy gave privilege to South Africans who were lighter than darker South Africans. Many of the participants compared this experience to the one-drop rule of the United States.

The participants reflected on racial identity, class distinctions, and positions of leadership when they compared their experiences in South Africa to Ghana. Although Ghana is a former British colony, it has been an independent nation for more than 50 years, compared to the recent end of Apartheid in South Africa. The participants visited the University of Ghana in the city of Accra and connect with fellow Ghanaian college students. Although Ghana isn't a wealthy country, there appeared to be an essence of pride and preserved history and culture amongst the Ghanaian people. Businesses and homes proudly displayed their Kente cloth (multi-colored woven fabric). Many men and women were in leadership positions in Ghana and not many white people lived in

Ghana. Comparatively, these two countries, although on the same continent, offered differing experiences of racial identity for participants.

As educators, policy makers, professors, and study abroad advisors consider how they can best support Black students and promote study abroad opportunities, this study contributes to the conversation by illuminating the unique benefits of study abroad for Black students. These participants described and interpreted how they were able to grow while traveling abroad in terms of their racial identity development. These participants not only experienced the universal benefits for participants of study abroad regardless of race or ethnicity, but they were able to engage and grow in their interglobal competence, successfully navigating through international conversations and cultures compared to their non-Black counterparts.

Policy makers and researchers alike should be encouraged to acknowledge study abroad benefits, as well as the particular benefits afforded under-resourced and under-supported Black college students who find the ways and means to participate in study abroad activities. Their participation provides transformative experiences they are able to share with peers, and their communities upon return to the U.S. Niki related the following:

> I'm different now…I mean I used to call my mom all the time, for everything. Now I can do things on my own…yeah I am older, that too, but I was away too and had to figure stuff out on my own.

David added:

> For me to get a passport in itself was just a blessing. I have the international bug, so I'm already planning to go somewhere next summer.

These examples of perspective transformation and personal growth should not be ignored. Personal growth represents students' beliefs about whether they have grown or changed (Angulo, 2008). Frankl (1969) placed the discovery of meaning at the center of his theory of personal growth (Dukes et al, 1994). Whether college students participate in study abroad or remain at their home institutions, the college experience offers an opportunity for varying degrees of personal growth. What is unique about the study abroad experience is these the personal growth opportunities are layered, often situated in disorienting dilemmas, with additional obstacles of language, racial perceptions, culture, and communication styles. I do not posit that personal growth can only be achieved through experiencing study abroad, yet I want to acknowledge that having analyzed the data, Black students who have participated in a multi-country study abroad program, show evidence of and report on what they believe is a transformative degree of personal growth.

As a researcher, I look to future opportunities to explore the experiences of Black students and study abroad. The current study unpacked the meaning making of participants in multi-country study abroad programs. As I delve into future research, I would like study the transformative experiences of Black students who participate in multiple study abroad programs over the span of their college career. I would like to explore and unpack if these opportunities are transformative as well.

There is little research on study abroad as a transformative experience for these specific Black students, yet significant Black American leaders in the United States have documented transformative experiences abroad. For example, the writer, activist, and philosopher W.E.B DuBois, traveled to Germany, and conducted a personal exploration of racism and identity, having experienced American racism (Du Bois, 2013). Du Bois noted after studying abroad he was committed to activism, to "work for the rise of the Negro people, taking for granted that their best

development means the best development of the world." Elijah Anderson, in *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), commented on how Du Bois' transformation abroad:

> In intellectual terms, Du Bois' studies in Germany were a profound influence
> on the course of his life's work. When he returned to the United States in
> 1894, he had been inspired by his academic and social experiences abroad, not
> to mention the work of sociologist Weber. He brought some of this
> inspiration to the study of the black community. (Beck, 1996, p. 13).

Another thoughtful and passionate example of a transformative experience abroad is Maya Angelou's travel to Ghana. She contrasts her experiences in Ghana with her experiences in America:

> We could physically return to Africa, find jobs, learn languages, even marry
> and remain on African soil all our lives, but we were born in the United States
> and it was the United States which had rejected, enslaved, exploited, then
> denied us. It was the United States which held the graves of our grandmothers
> and grandfathers. It was in the United States, under conditions too bizarre to
> detail, that those same ancestors had worked and dreamed of "a better day, by
> and by (Angelou, 1991, p. 127).

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, traveled to India to learn the teachings of Ghandi, and how he could pursue justice against American racism through non-violence (King, 2003). In his essay, "My Trip to the Land of Ghandi", he expressed this transformative perspective on race;

We were looked upon as brothers with the color of our skins as something

of an asset. But the strongest bond of fraternity was the common cause of

minority and colonial peoples in America, Africa and Asia struggling to

throw off racialism and imperialism. (King, 1959).

And the ever controversial, Malcolm X, traveled to Mecca, to encounter a transformative experience that opened his eyes to the international reality of racism and how he viewed the plight of Black men and women in a global context (Sherwood, 2011). Malcolm X commented on his visit to Mecca and meeting non-Black Muslims for the first time:

The color-blindness of the Muslim world's religious society and the color-

blindness of the Muslim world's human society: these two influences had each

day been making a greater impact, and an increasing persuasion against my

previous way of thinking.

(X & Haley, 1992)

I list these significant men and women to acknowledge the travel abroad experience, the opportunity to be a student in a different country and culture, is a developmental experience that may have contributed to these leaders' overall success. These great men and women went on to accomplish amazing feats after having a transformative study abroad experience.

Similar to the aforementioned activists, this study examined how Black students traveled globally and encountered and interpreted an international experience for the first time. These students were able to participate in multi-country study abroad programs, comparing and interpreting their experiences and identities across cultures and continents. This study described and

interpreted their multi-country study abroad experiences. Participants completed in-depth, semi-structured interviews where three themes of meaning emerged from qualitative analysis: racial identity, activism, and interglobal competence. Participants critically reflected on their comparative experiences in different countries and describe and interpret their study abroad experiences as rich and life changing. Study abroad was truly a transformative experience for these Black students.

APPENDIX I. REQUEST FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

As a Doctor of Philosophy candidate in the University of California Los Angeles' Graduate School

of Education & Information Studies, my dissertation explores how Black college graduates make

meaning of their study abroad experience. By interviewing former Black study abroad participants

from institutions across the United States, I hope to gain a better understanding how Black college

graduates make meaning of their study abroad experience. Results of this research could help

institutions attract, assist, and retain Black college students and make study abroad a better

experience for future participants. My goal is to have a diverse array of Black participants so I hope

you will participate.

By participating in this study, you can anticipate answering questions of the ways of understanding

yourself and your study abroad experience, and demographic information (gender, race, education

background, etc.). You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the

study. The identity of participants will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.

Each participant will be asked to complete a short online background questionnaire and to

participate in one face-to-face interview which will take approximately 90 minutes. You will be given

the opportunity to read the final section of the dissertation that relates to your interview to ensure

that the information accurately portrays your perspective. If you have any questions about this study,

you can contact the researcher listed below.

Thank you,

Janelle Nicole Rahyns, M.Ed
Doctoral Candidate, Social Science and Comparative Education
Graduate Researcher, Residential Life
University of California│Los Angeles
jrahyns@g.ucla.edu
Robert Teranishi, Ph.D
Faculty Sponsor

# APPENDIX II : DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Pseudonym      _____      Gender _____

2. Current Age      _____      Age while studying abroad _____

3. Race/Ethnicity_____      Parents' Ethnicity _____

4. Nationality      _____      Birthplace _____

5. Home University while studying abroad _____

6. Host University while studying abroad_____

7. Academic Major_____      Academic Minor_____

8. Student Classification while studying abroad

    ☐ Rising First Year Student          ☐ First Year Student

    ☐ Rising Second Year Student          ☐ Second Year Student

    ☐ Rising Third Year Student          ☐ Third Year Student

    ☐ Rising Fourth Year Student          ☐ Rising Fourth Year Student

    ☐ Rising Fifth Year Student          ☐ Fifth Year Student

    ☐ Not Applicable          ☐ Other _____

9. What was the length of your study abroad program?

    ☐ Summer Semester        ☐ Fall Semester

    ☐ Spring Semester        ☐ Academic Year

    ☐ Not Applicable        ☐ Other _____

10. Did you travel outside the continental United States prior to your study abroad experience?

    ☐ Yes        ☐ No

If you answered Yes, where did you go? _____

What was the length of your visit? _____

11. How did you fund your study abroad experience? _____

APPENDIX III: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

University of California, Los Angeles

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

A Paradigm Shift: A Qualitative Reflection on How Black College Students Make Meaning of Their Study Abroad Experience

Janelle Nicole Rahyns, M.Ed., Principal Investigator, from the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study. "A Paradigm Shift: A Qualitative Reflection on How Black College Students Make Meaning of Their Study Abroad Experience" project seeks to better understand the impact of the study abroad experience on Black Identity development.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you completed the questionnaire portion of this study and agreed to be contacted for a follow-up interview by providing your email address on the questionnaire. In addition to agreeing to be contacted, you were also selected for the following reasons: you graduated from an undergraduate college program, you are 18 years of age or older and comfortable in your ability to answer questions on a questionnaire in English. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and you are free to stop participating at any time without consequence.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in the interview portion of this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Participate in two 90-minute interviews.
- Answer follow-up questions to your responses to items on the questionnaire.
- Answer additional questions about your study abroad experience.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained about this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

You have the right to review, edit or erase the research tapes of your participation in whole or in part. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using pseudonyms on all data. The only persons who will know that you participated in the study will be the research team member:

Janelle Nicole Rahyns, M.Ed.

Are there any risks?

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts, but you may experience psychological discomfort from reflecting on past experiences.

Alternatives to participation

An alternative is not to participate in the study, which you may elect to do at any time.

Are there any potential benefits to participating in this study?

The results of the research may help college campuses more intentionally tailor and support training and development efforts for study abroad experiences. This research can better explain what factors contribute to change and development if studying abroad. Furthermore, understanding identity development in an education abroad context can contribute to student success policies.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?
You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty or loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.  You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study.  If you volunteer to be in this study, you may leave the study at any time without consequences of any kind.  You are not waiving any of your legal rights if you choose to be in this research study. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?
If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to one of the researchers. Please contact:
Janelle Nicole Rahyns, Principal Investigator at 310.420.4254 or jrahyns@g.ucla.edu

If you wish to ask questions about your rights as a research participant or if you wish to voice any problems or concerns you may have about the study to someone other than the researchers, please call the Office of the Human Research Protection Program at (310) 825-7122 or write to Office of the Human Research Protection Program, UCLA, 11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 102, Box 951694, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

I understand the procedures described above.  My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study.  I have been given a copy of this form.

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of Participant | Date |

| | |
|---|---|
| Signature of Participant | Date |

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

In my judgment, the participant is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of Person Obtaining Consent | Date |

| | |
|---|---|
| Signature of Person Obtaining Consent | Date |

APPENDIX IV: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Semi-structured Interview Questions – Pre-experience questions

1. Tell me about your decision to study abroad.

     a.   Why did you want to have that experience?

     b.  How and why did you choose that location/program?

2. Tell me about your prior knowledge/connection to country X?

3. What was the study abroad planning process like for you?

     a.   Please describe any challenges or barriers you faced.

     b.  What/who were your sources of support?

4. What were you hoping to get out of your study abroad experience?

5. Thinking back to when you first arrived to X, what were your experiences of culture shock?

     a.   How did you adapt to your new environment?

     b.  What did you enjoy about that new culture?

6.   What was your experience as a self-identified African American (Black) in X?


Semi-structured Interview Questions – Reflection questions

1. What was it like for you when you returned to the US?

     a.   What did you miss about X?

     b.  In what ways did you feel your relationships and/or home environment changed?

     c.   In what ways do you think you changed?

2.    Can you give any examples of ways that you've maintained a connection to your life in

        X since you've returned to the US?

3.   How has studying abroad affected how you see yourself as an African American?

4. How has studying abroad affected your perception about education?

5. Overall what do your experiences in X mean to you?

6. What would you tell another African American who wants to study abroad, but doubts she can make it happen?

7. What would you tell study abroad staff who work with African American students?

8. Is there anything else you'd like to discuss about your study abroad experience(s)?

9. How did reflecting on and talking about your experiences abroad make you feel?

10. What time frame would have been most beneficial to do this activity (i.e. right after returning from studying abroad, one year later, now, etc.)?

11. Because of studying abroad, in what ways do you look at yourself?

12. What are some firmly held ideas that changed because of studying abroad?

APPENDIX V: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

You are requested to participate in research supervised Janelle Rahyns on college graduates and their study abroad experience. This interview should take about 60 to 90 minutes to complete. The goal of this interview is to understand how students make meaning of their study abroad experience. If you have any questions about the research, please contact Janelle Rahyns at jrahyns@g.ucla.edu. Participation is voluntary.  You have the option not to respond to any of the questions. You may end the interview at any time. Participation or nonparticipation will not impact your relationship with the University of California Los Angeles. If you have questions about the treatment of human participants and the University of California Los Angeles, contact the IRB Administrator.
No identifying information will be collected from you. Everything stored by a computer like an IP address will be deleted as soon as the data is downloaded from the Qualtrics system. Responses will be anonymous. However, whenever one works with online technology there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. If you would like more information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online surveys, please contact the University of California Los Angeles Information and Technology Services Help Desk and ask to speak to the Information Security Manager.

The risks of participating are no more than are experienced in daily life.

There are no direct benefits for participating. Society might benefit by the increased understanding

of resume use in selection decisions.

Submitting the completed survey will indicate your informed consent to participate and indicate your

assurance that you are at least 18 years of age.

Please print a copy of this page for your future reference.

- Yes, I consent to this study AND I am over 18 years of age

- No, I do not consent to this study, AND/OR I am under 18 years of age

UCLA IRBNet ID#

Date of UCLA IRB approval:

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