

Outside Looking In

Case Studies of the Effects of Study Abroad
on Female African American University
Students' Identities



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Declaration

I hereby declare that my dissertation entitled *Outside looking in: Case studies of effects of study abroad on female African American university students' identities*:

- Is the result of my own work and includes nothing that is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text.
- Does not exceed the prescribed word limit of 80,000 words. This dissertation has 77,715 words, excluding these opening pages, reference list, and appendices.

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Summary

In the 2010-2011 academic year, Black university students comprised only 4.8% of all study abroad students in the United States, despite being 14.5% of all university students. In an attempt to better foster the experiences of these students, this thesis seeks to understand the evolution of Black women's self-concept from studying abroad. This qualitative empirical research focuses on the individual experiences of five U.S. Black university women who studied outside of the United States for one term or academic year during 2011-2012. These case studies gathered data through interviews and field texts, including oral history interviews prior to the participants' departure, field texts collected while the students were on their abroad experiences, and a follow-up interview after their repatriation back to the United States.

Too often, academics seek refuge of analysis in conventional theorists to look for new connections and understandings. Using these frameworks with marginalised communities does a disservice to these individuals. We cannot hope to understand the experience of alternative ways of being if we presume that all people fall into mainstream cultural theory. Therefore this study uses African American psychologists (instead of White psychologists) to examine the participants' understanding of their identity. Specifically I utilise intersectionality and Africentric theory to understand how these women regard themselves in relation to their family structure, nationality, and religion. Black feminist thought is also employed to analyse the participants' understanding of their gender with regards to sexualised imaging, physical appearance, and hair. I examine academic achievement (including personal and professional advancement, as well as racial contribution) through a Black psychological lens.

This research found that study abroad does indeed have a powerful impact on Black women's identities. All five women expressed higher self-confidence and shifts in how they understood the various aspects of their identities. Yet the shifts that occurred varied for the individual woman, which I attribute not only to the different destinations where these women studied abroad, but also to the complex and unique identities (and individual understanding of those identities) that each woman carried with her into her study abroad experience. These differences indicate that study abroad practitioners should be attentive in offering custom support to every student to allow him or her to reap the most growth from their time abroad.

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“All my life I had been looking for something. It took me a long time... to achieve a realization everyone else appears to have been born with: that I am nobody but myself.”

– Ralph Ellison

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List of Abbreviations

AY	Academic Year
ASC	African Self-Consciousness
DMIS	Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity
GPA	Grade Point Average
HBCU	Historically Black Colleges and Universities
HEI	Higher Education Institute
IIE	Institute of International Education
LSAT	Law School Admissions Test
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
NSSE	National Survey on Student Engagement
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PWI	Predominantly White Institution
UNCF	United Negro College Fund

PART ONE: BACKGROUND TO RESEARCH

Chapter I. Introduction

The following comes from a U.S. American White female who studied abroad in Nepal in Fall 2001:

“I studied in Nepal because I wanted to go somewhere that would be difficult to go on my own. The culture was fascinating, the language difficult, the alphabet indecipherable, and it lies on the opposite side of the world. By the time I left Nepal, I could find my way around Kathmandu using the bus. I drank more tea than I thought possible. I saw Mt. Everest. I went to sacred Hindu and Buddhist sites. I received blessings in the form of red rice on my forehead. I knew how to sing Nepali songs and dance Nepali dances. I had beaten Nepali trekking guides at cards. I had watched a herd of yaks pass by my window as I tried to bathe in a small room. I went trekking through the Himalayas, visited the jungle, stayed with a family in a village for a week, was stared at to the point I could stop traffic. I was considered higher caste as a vegetarian. I did research in the Everest region on Sherpa women's empowerment in community development.

I met some of the most incredible, inspiring people. Going to Nepal allowed me to experience something I never could have done on my own – the friends, the homestays, the language training. It helped me prove to myself that I can thrive when things aren't easy and that I can find my way around anywhere. It also gave me a perspective on how others in the world live and think that I still draw upon. I made friends that mean a great deal to me and that I am still in touch with today.”

Testimonies such as this illustrate a powerful example of the potency and overwhelming cultural experiences of study abroad. Professionals in the field have established that studying abroad can offer enriching opportunities for individuals who take part; new locations, different people, diverse ideas, and other worlds offer adventure for students willing and able to seek it. Research finds that most participants say their lives were changed by the experience. Anecdotal reports suggest that international opportunities leave deep and lasting impressions.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2011) reported that in 2009 over 3.7 million students studied abroad worldwide, with the majority coming from Asia (China, India, and Korea being the most highly represented), a 6% increase from just the previous year. In the United States, according to the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2012), over a quarter of a million U.S. undergraduates studied abroad in the late 2000s, compared to numbers fewer than 50,000 in the mid-1980s. With this increase and growing demand for study abroad opportunities, researchers have posed questions regarding the impact upon students, particularly in

relation to the effects on people's concept of themselves and their relations to others, and the optimum practices to ensure that students get the most from their experience (Fry, Paige, Jon, Dillow, & Nam, 2009). However, inequalities in the accessibility of study abroad for marginalised communities have received minimal attention. This qualitative educational research examines the experiences of five African American students who studied abroad during their undergraduate degree. Through case studies focused on life histories and African American psychology, I seek to understand how their time abroad affected their understanding of the multiple facets of their self-concept.

1. Statement of Problem

During the 2010-2011 academic year (AY), 273,996 U.S. students studied abroad for academic credit, comprising under 1.4% of the national university student population (IIE, 2012; NCES, 2013). Females made up 64.4% of study abroad students, and White Americans composed 77.8%. In that year, only 4.8% of African Americans and 6.9% of Hispanics studied abroad (despite making up 14.5% and 13% of the undergraduate population that year, respectively), while Asian/Pacific Islanders went abroad at 7.9%, and American Indian/Alaskan Natives at 0.5%. The National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE, 2007) and Picard, Bernardino, and Ehigiator (2009) reported participants are likely to be White, female, attend elite schools, study arts or humanities, and have highly educated parents, showcasing the exclusion of many marginalised groups from study abroad opportunities. The romance of studying abroad remains restricted to a very small percentage of the university student population, which is itself a limited segment of the overall population.

The Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program (2005), subsequently known as the Lincoln Commission, proposed to have one million U.S. American students studying abroad by the 2016-2017 academic year, which would amount to roughly half of all undergraduates who receive degrees annually. The reasons delineated for this goal mirror those written by the U.S. Department of Education (2000), including globalisation and economic competitiveness, national security, U.S. leadership, educational value, and active engagement in the international community. The Commission also pushed for destinations outside Europe, since around 67% of study abroad participants go there (p. 17), though IIE (2012) reported the number at 60.3% for the 2004-2005 AY (and 54.6% in the 2010-2011 AY). One of the main recommendations of the Lincoln Commission was that participation in study abroad reflected the

undergraduate population demographics, which represents one of my key interests in investigating the study abroad experience of an ethnic minority group.

The Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act of 2007 (House Resolution 1469 of the 110th U.S. Congress) sought to establish an executive branch foundation that would distribute \$80 million worth of grants to U.S. undergraduates and higher education institutes (HEIs) to promote study abroad in non-traditional destinations. The goal of the bill was to increase the number of U.S. students studying abroad to 1 million annually within 10 years. The bill passed the House of Representatives, but never came up for a Senate vote, though it may still be reintroduced.

HEIs' focus on international education must also be noted. Wanner (2009) and Che, Spearman, and Manizade (2009) found that the majority of university mission statements support their students' growth as 'global citizens.' The researchers suggested that because of this goal, study abroad plays an important role in the development of students' ability to understand themselves within the global context, as well as the global context itself. In addition, the NSSE (2007) reported that 44% of faculty members believe that studying abroad is an important experience for undergraduates. Mestenhauser (2002) highlighted, "Hundreds of millions of private and public dollars have been spent promoting and developing [international education in colleges and universities]" (p. 165). With the government and HEIs stating the need to increase study abroad numbers, the relevance of this topic is essential for scrutiny; we must understand how study abroad benefits participants.

With the unique place that African Americans hold in U.S. history, as immigrants or slaves in a well-established colony, research has examined how that history has impacted upon the experiences of Black people and their place in U.S. society. The increase in their population and improved civil rights has resulted in some augmented participation in higher education, though these students still struggle to not only obtain university degrees, but also to matriculate into university in the first place. And even though the number of Black students studying abroad has steadily increased over the past decade (IIE, 2012), African Americans are still the most unequally represented minority ethnic group to study abroad. With marginalised populations poorly represented in study abroad, understanding how the few who do participate make sense of their experience in relation to their self-concept can help better inform where study abroad programs needs to go to offer the most support to these groups.

2. Research Aims

In this thesis, I explore some of the psychosocial questions that arise in relation to Black female university students who engage in study abroad. I seek to answer these questions within the framework of African American psychology and its application to identity, instead of traditional theoretical paradigms created from Eurocentric perspectives. I do so with the aim of understanding the influence of study abroad (often an educational and personal pursuit) on students' understanding of their self-concept – a topic upon which study abroad literature surprisingly barely touches. My aims are as follows:

- To expand our understanding of the relationship between study abroad and my research participants' (young Black women) self-conceptions relative to the various components of their identity.
- To use culturally appropriate analysis techniques, in order to comprehend the psychosocial dimensions of study abroad for these young Black women.
- To consider, given the data, how best to foster positive study abroad experiences for young Black women, and possibly other marginalised student populations.

3. Contributions & Significance

As shall be illustrated in my review of current literature, researchers have begun significant work into the study abroad experience. However, that research has often been superficial in its scrutiny. As stated earlier, the U.S. government and HEIs hope to advance international education for students, as well as to increase minority ethnic participation in study abroad. This thesis offers timely insight into a population where research is lacking but which government and organisations hope positively to impact. Through my research, I present new ways of understanding the student experience of study abroad drawing on intersectionality and African American psychology. With these contributions, practitioners can better consider how to support study abroad students, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds, so that this specific demographic gains the most from their time learning overseas.

Through my analysis, I challenge the way in which conventional researchers undertake their analysis of individuals by examining participants through their own cultural lens, instead of mainstream methods. Too often, it could be argued, many researchers feel they must use predictable theorists because others set that status quo. By

looking beyond predictable frameworks, I seek to understand the experience of my participants from new angles in the hopes of gaining innovative insights into identity and the processing of individuals' experiences.

4. A Word about Vocabulary: Definitions of Terminology Usage

To understand the vocabulary used in this thesis it is important to understand the historical context of certain words. In relation to common labels such as 'Black' and 'African American,' even people who identify as either cannot agree on usage. The term 'Black' is seen by some as derogatory and inaccurate and thus they eschew its usage, while others feel 'African American' does not accurately represent them, such as immigrants from the Caribbean or Africa, or those who feel too far removed from African heritage to claim it as part of their identity. Because of disagreement and labeling preferences, and that 'African American' and 'Black' often refer to a similar social identity for people of this descent in the U.S., the two terms will be used interchangeably to indicate U.S. citizens of African descent via the Caribbean or Africa. Additionally, some researchers dismiss the use of the "race" as an identifier (Gilroy, 2004); my research does not seek to take on the sociological or biological debate of this terminology. It is beyond the scope of this research to debate the 'rightness' of any of these terms, and I will use the terminology with which participants self-identify.

The terms 'college' and 'university' have distinct meanings in most parts of the world. The U.S. population uses these words interchangeably to mean all HEIs and the experience of attending them. Thus, 'college' and 'university' will be used interchangeably to mean any degree-granting higher education institution.

5. Overview of Thesis

This thesis is divided into twelve chapters, including this introductory chapter. The first part of this thesis (Chapters 1 to 5) delves into the foundation upon which this thesis is built. In the next chapter I focus on the evolution of higher education globally and in the United States, and how the contexts of a university education have shifted over the past century to a more inclusive but competitive environment. Chapter 3 investigates more deeply the specific educational experiences of African Americans and the struggles this particular group has endured in seeking an education. Following these overviews, I turn my attention to the evolution of study abroad itself, including its history, the researched benefits for those who participate, and the research on minority

ethnic participation and study abroad. In Chapter 5, I examine the theoretical framework I use for my research in regards to identity, intersectionality, and African American psychology; I also pose the thesis's specific research questions.

The second part of this thesis (Chapters 6 to 12) explores the research questions I presented. Chapter 6 considers the methodology I use in my research, including my epistemology and ontology, my positionality, specific data collection methods, the analysis and interpretation I use, and ethical considerations. Given the abundance of data collected, each participant is analysed in her own chapter (Chapters 7 to 11) through the theoretical framework previously outlined. The final chapter discusses the overall findings, including recurring themes, potential applications to study abroad practitioners, limitations of the thesis, and possible future directions.

Chapter II. The Evolution of Higher Education

This chapter seeks to understand the foundations of higher education. The hope is to create a synthesis of the current literature's understanding of how higher education has evolved and how higher education's scope has shifted both internationally and domestically. With the focus of this thesis on African American females attending U.S. universities, this and subsequent chapters examine the literature on the U.S. American experience of higher education, though this itself is varied. However, I also seek to position this account within the context of international experiences of higher education. Understanding these conditions allows for a better understanding of the context of this thesis and the context of the participants' experience.

1. Roots of Higher Education in the United States

The first U.S. higher education institution, Harvard University, was established in 1636, just sixteen years after English settlers first landed at Plymouth Rock in Massachusetts. The early U.S. universities were modeled after their English counterparts, often requiring a religious affiliation. According to Brickman (1972) and Thelin (2011), wealthy White men matriculated at these schools, as they were cost-prohibitive to the majority of the population. The universities sought to educate the new leaders for a young colony, and later a young nation; therefore higher education was not deemed necessary for just anybody.

Archibald (2002) noted that it was not until 1862 and the passage of the Morrill Land Act (and its sister act in 1890) that larger reforms occurred within the U.S. higher education system. While envisioned mostly to establish agricultural colleges around the country, this act expanded the scope of universities' studies beyond the arts and humanities to also include science and technology. Universities in the mid-nineteenth century were led by presidents with White Protestant backgrounds who believed in the strong work ethic. The literature suggests the vision and guiding values of these men advanced the idea that higher education would establish a middle class in U.S. American society (Bledstein, 1976; Thelin, 2011). We note a sudden shift from HEIs merely educating leaders to educating other parts of the population that will further foster the nation's growth, though one still had to possess some affluence to attend.

Attendance at universities continued to expand into the twentieth century, especially with the prosperity following World War I. However the major shift in the

student population of higher education institutions occurred during World War II. The GI Bill of 1944 allowed military servicemen to enrol in colleges with the U.S. government dispensing grants to cover full-time study at these institutions. “All told, during the post-war period, veterans accounted for as many as 49 percent of enrolled students at colleges and universities” (Batten, 2011, p. 17). Suddenly, the face of the student body had shifted from the affluent to the everyday man.

With the advent of financial aid in the mid-twentieth century, a college education became accessible to even more citizens. Universities began expanding their offerings not only in terms of academics, but also in terms of student services. However even as early as 1998, Lazarus found that the costs of attending higher education institutions had also become exceedingly expensive, so much so that the cost of going to college surpasses the economic returns for the majority of attendees. Even more recent research by Baum, Ma, & Payea (2010) indicated that college-educated workers’ earnings might not justify the large amount of borrowing that some of them do to obtain their degree. So while more students are attending HEIs, some may not be reaping the financial benefits HEIs supposedly offer.

1.1 Women in Higher Education

Note that women and Black people were not as proportionately represented during these major changes. Solomon (1985), a leading scholar in U.S. women’s higher education, reported that with the birth of the nation, women’s higher education was of minimal concern, as “their identities derived from their family membership” (p. 2), which determined their employment possibilities. According to Lucas (2006), proper post-secondary colleges were not established for women until the mid-nineteenth century when they evolved beyond finishing schools. The struggle revolved around justifying the equal enrolment of women in any college, which required breaking down the belief that women should not receive a higher education because it would serve them no purpose. Into the First World War, the majority of women who did attend university belonged to upper social circles from families who could afford the expense of higher education. Solomon (1985) stated that during this time, while many of these women would end up in stereotypical roles such as teaching and nursing, they did begin to expand their professional interests beyond jobs expected of them. Because of this shift, more women began to seek a university education.

Between the World Wars, women continued to pursue higher education in greater numbers, with more continuing on to graduate school, and a steady rise in those seeking to enter the work force (Solomon, 1985). While women did not make an equal salary to their male counterparts, many acknowledged that their university education afforded them more economic advantages than if they did not have a degree. World War II brought about an increase in the number of women studying sciences and afforded more opportunities as women were needed to fill the roles left vacant by men fighting. Solomon (1985) reported that the end of the war saw reduced options and expectations. The GI Bill mentioned earlier further lessened women's access to higher education, as returning veterans now had priority over women's matriculation. As the twentieth century progressed, more educated women combined their careers with marriage, something that before had been discouraged. The women's movement in the 1970s saw further expansion of women's rights, including an upsurge in the educational opportunities available to them. Those advancements have continued to the present day, as (according to NCES, 2013) women have surpassed men in undergraduate enrolment rates in the United States, and continue to seek higher education to better their career opportunities. I examine the specific history of Black women's higher education in the next chapter.

From this précis the role that universities have played in their larger societal contexts becomes evident. The literature shows the shift in how society perceived universities' roles from educating the public's leaders to offering a means of socioeconomic advancement to being needed to ensure socioeconomic stability. We also note the changing attitudes toward women in universities throughout the history of the United States. I contend that having these larger societal attitudes transform in a relatively short period affects the experiences of today's students, including my research participants. I now examine the literature into exactly how these adjustments affected students' experience, particularly in the last few decades.

2. Shifting Experiences

Due to the different foci of universities over the centuries from concentrating exclusively on humanities to later including science and technology and real-world applications, students' encounters with higher education varied. This section examines how these experiences have altered both in the global context, as well as the U.S. context.

2.1 Changing Contexts of Higher Education Internationally

Higher education existed for centuries in the Old World and, much like the United States higher education system, evolved over the centuries in response to historical and cultural events. According to Lucas (2006), throughout medieval times and the Enlightenment, universities acted as a reflection of what societies deemed important. These institutions sought to educate the upper echelons of society to prepare them to contribute to larger society as doctors, lawyers, and statesmen.

Universities worldwide have had to navigate the changing landscape (from curriculum to student body) of higher education while trying to honour the spirit of higher education's mission of preparing students as educated thinkers. Altbach and Umakoshi (2004) explained, "The idea that the past influences the present and the future applies especially to universities, where historical tradition plays an important role in influencing contemporary realities" (p. 10). In Europe the past few decades has seen a shift in universities' missions as well as their student demographics. While not as inclusive as some might argue these institutions could be (Archer, Hutchings, & Ross, 2003), universities are no longer just for the wealthy elite. In Asia, according to Altbach and Umakoshi (2004), where Eastern teaching methods were largely discarded in the nineteenth century for Western ones, colonialism had a large impact on current educational structures. With China and India's burgeoning populations and voracious demand for top-quality higher education, foreign universities have discovered a ripe market. Zeleza (2006) found that even Africa, with higher education stretching back to the third-century BC saw colonialism alter the way higher education is delivered to students. The power of Western thought has influenced the structure and philosophy of universities worldwide.

Altbach & Umakoshi (2004) noted that the challenge for most universities, whether in Europe, Asia, or elsewhere, is how to be a part of the globalisation of education, as more and more students seek all or some of their education abroad, while also meeting the specific needs of their national interests. The need to function in the global context, but also be competitive with it, has created a symbiotic relationship among nations' universities. With more students seeking higher education to make themselves marketable in the global economy, universities have had to adapt to these needs. This adaptation includes an international component to their missions, which pertains to this thesis as my research participants all have sought this professional edge by studying abroad at universities in Asia and Europe.

2.2. Changing Contexts of Higher Education in the United States

Prior to World War II, college was a place for the elite; yet with the influx of veterans suddenly the hardworking everyday American citizen could pursue a higher education. “The shift in Americans’ perceptions about who should go to college was perhaps the largest and most obvious consequence of the massive influx of veterans into the educational system” (Batten, 2011, p. 21). People began to associate a college degree with a means for improving their social and financial standing. And while the numbers were not as vast, this shift included more racial and ethnic minority participation. I inspect participation of these groups more closely in the next chapter.

Lazerson (1998) characterised this shift as a focus from higher education for the public good (i.e. educating future leaders) to private benefit. He stated, “Higher education had been converted from a land of opportunity to a necessity for many in order to prevent the loss of status” (p. 65). The issue now has become that in order to even achieve a certain socioeconomic status in the United States, one almost needs a higher education. According to Ehrenberg (2002), for over the past century annually tuition rates have outpaced the rate of inflation by two to three percent. Additionally beginning in the 1980s, the median family income was also being outstripped by tuition fees. Between 2000–01 and 2010–11, prices for undergraduate tuition, room, and board at public institutions rose 42 percent, and prices at private not-for-profit institutions rose 31 percent, after adjustment for inflation (NCES, 2012). College is becoming less and less affordable for most of the U.S. population.

Even with universities’ large endowments and some with generous financial aid packages, these drastic changes in the cost of obtaining a higher education has created issues for those from certain socioeconomic classes from paying for school outright. Seventy-one percent of students took some form of financial aid during the 2011-12 AY (NCES, 2013). Therefore a struggle again exists for the cultural imperative that has been set in the United States which asserts students need a college education to maintain or strive for middle-class status.

As mentioned earlier, the cost-benefit of receiving a university education has come into question over the past few decades as costs have skyrocketed (Lazarus, 1998; Baum et al, 2010). Students look for ways to save money, while also making sure that they are as marketable as possible once they receive that degree. Study abroad has become one of those avenues that allows students to stand out to potential employers,

and thus increase the chances of a higher salary and hopefully obtain a firm standing within the middle class.

3. Summation

The evolution of higher education has been rapid, no more so than in the past century. The literature has shown that universities have shifted in the make-up of their student populations, their academic offerings, and their global outlook. As each university seeks to make itself relevant in today's fast-paced and interconnected society, the cost of higher education has also become a concern to students, as they seek the best way to ensure their futures with adequate education.

Where does this competitiveness leave racial ethnic minority populations, particularly African Americans, the focus of this thesis? This group has struggled constantly to receive equal education since first arriving in the U.S. In the next chapter, I examine the educational experience of African Americans throughout history, including their unique experiences of higher education.

Chapter III. The African American Experience of Education

To understand better the context of this thesis, the reader should have a grounding in how African Americans have experienced academia. This chapter analyses these educational experiences by looking at the history of African American education, including the inequality that has often been prevalent in their education as compared to their European American counterparts. Additionally, I examine the Black experience of higher education, given my thesis focus on university-level African Americans, looking at the evolution of Black Americans attending institutions of higher education.

1. History of African American Education

The literature on African American education is potent and rich. The struggle for African Americans to receive a proper education in the United States stretches back to when they were first brought there in shackles as slaves. Fleming (1981) reported that because they were deemed inferior in every way, including intellectually, an education for Black people was not considered necessary by their owners. To ensure these individuals could not make any gains in their new land, legislation made it illegal for slaves to learn to read and write. However, many Black slaves would learn in secret realising that an essential way of fighting their enslavement was intellectually to better themselves.

When slavery was abolished, Jackson (2007) reported only 21% of newly freed slaves were literate by 1870. States slowly began to provide education to African Americans, even though these accommodations were allowed to be “separate but equal” as upheld in the 1896 Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson*. This doctrine meant that as long as the same education was provided to both Black and White children, that education could be administered in segregated schools. Yet while separate, the education was scarcely equal. A series of Supreme Court decisions during the mid-twentieth century the federal government eventually dismantled segregation in public schooling from the primary to post-secondary school levels, integrating schools for the first time in U.S. history. Yet even now studies show a disadvantage for many Black students in U.S. public schooling (Jackson, 2007).

1.1. *Inequality in Education*

Howard (2007) reported that between 1970 and 2000 Black students increased their attendance and graduation levels at secondary and post-secondary levels, and

parental involvement increased substantially. Indeed, academic circumstances have vastly improved for African Americans from the time of slavery through the civil rights movement to present day. Yet despite these promising advancements, Jackson (2007) insisted, “Inequality, disparate representation, and denied access to opportunity are key challenges that have long plagued African Americans in their pursuit of education in the United States” (p. 1). The inequity of Black students has left many in the community to feel frustrated and powerless against a system that does not seem (from the Black perspective) to care about African Americans.

According to NCES (2003), many African Americans fall far behind other ethnic groups in almost every area of academic achievement. The research has continually indicated that the majority of Black students underachieve academically and struggle to adjust socially in primary and secondary school settings (Shujaa, 1994; Wirt, 2000; Perry, 2004). Additionally, Black Americans are disproportionately represented in special needs and remedial classes at every level (Harry & Anderson, 1999; Ford, Grantham, & Bailey, 1999). Jenks and Phillips (1998) reported that Black students still score 75% lower than White students on standardised tests, as well as significantly lower on tests that supposedly measure intelligence and scholastic aptitude. While gains have been achieved since the mid-twentieth century, Black students still lag substantially behind other U.S. ethnic groups (including Asian, Latino, European, and Native Americans). As a whole the literature suggests that family dynamics, society as a whole, socioeconomic disparities, and/or other factors are failing Black children in their educational pursuits.

1.2 African American Mindset and the Disconnect

Given the startling statistics about the large gap of achievement between Black students and other groups, one might assume that perhaps African American families do not place a strong emphasis on education. Yet Perry (2004) explained how families of some of the seminal Black Americans in history, including Fredrick Douglass and Malcolm X, emphasised the importance of education in order to advance in U.S. society. She wrote that for them, “Education was how you claimed your humanity, struck a blow for freedom, worked for racial uplift, and prepared yourself for leadership” (p. 25). Indeed, many Black families encourage educational excellence as a way to distinguish one’s self and succeed.

Thus a disconnect seems to be occurring between the education that Black families want their children to achieve and the education that those children are actually

receiving. One reason Fordham (1988) posited is that collective Black identity often conflicts with the individualistic nature of educational norms in the United States. Perry (2004) noted, “There are extra social, emotional, cognitive, and political competencies required of African American youth, precisely because they are African American” (p. 4). Oakes (1985), Fordham and Ogbu (1986), Smith (1991), Delpit (1995), Nieto (2000), and Evans-Winters (2011) discussed through historical analyses the stereotyping that African Americans face in primary and secondary schools and how it can hinder their education. Mickelson (1990) conjectured that students hold multilayered conceptualisations of education and, depending on a student’s background (race, socioeconomic status, gender), contradictory abstract and concrete attitudes can manifest. Perry (2004) theorised that African Americans must precariously balance their position with other Americans. She claimed Black children are simultaneously a part of, but outside, the whole, not encouraged by society toward achievement. The Africentric notions of education will be further examined in Chapter 5.

Jairrels (2009) explained the formal education system perpetuates beliefs that Black people are intellectually inferior with African Americans often underperforming in standardised testing. These tests do not take into account the philosophy of education supported by African American culture that differs from the mainstream philosophy of education, and when Black students do exhibit high achieving performance, they have been accused of cheating (Steele, 2003). Harris and Nettles (1991), Steele and Aronson (1995), and Steele (2003) argue that Black students must overcome *stereotype threat*, which is “the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype” (Steele, 2003, p. 111). Ogbu (1997) suggested that the White American ethnocentric structure of schools has disadvantaged Black students and other marginalised populations by providing inferior education and creating a caste-like system. These structures have made it difficult for many African Americans to thrive in the academy. Researchers have found that African Americans face an uphill battle in receiving an education remotely similar to their White peers. While this might also reflect certain class issues, the literature focuses on the collective experience of the Black community and not as closely on the role of class.

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) reported Black students also face the expectation from Black peers of not being too academically focused, as this attribute is seen as ‘acting White.’ Fordham (1988) explained that this contradiction between historical cultural perspectives of excelling academically (from family) and not being concerned with school

(from friends) leads to high-achieving Black students embracing a ‘racelessness’ toward their educational achievement, where they adopt behaviours and attitudes outside their cultural norms in order to succeed. All of these expectations from family, society, peers, and institutions become a battle of contradictions for Black students as they navigate through their educational experience. The participants in this thesis have all steered through such complex contradictions throughout their education.

2. The African American Experience of Higher Education

When examining the Black experience of higher education, I look at the statistics surrounding African Americans in higher education, different types of higher education institutions that African Americans attend, and the actual experience that research has found Black students to have while at university.

2.1 African Americans at University

Many U.S. higher education institutions did not initially allow the matriculation of African Americans when they were first established. Brown (1999) reported: “African American males and their European American counterparts have generally had dissimilar experiences regarding the acquisition of higher education. From slavery through Jim Crow, African Americans were [mostly] categorically excluded from collegiate participation” (p. 124). Since Black Americans knew that a university education was an important component of increasing their social mobility, they began establishing their own institutions in the 1840s and 1850s in the northern United States (Lucas, 2006). These colleges were not established in the South until after the end of Civil War. These historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) became the places where the majority of African American who went to college attended (Freeman, 2005).

While the GI Bill of 1944 allowed Black servicemen to pursue a college education funded by the government, the distribution of funds was left to individual states. As a result, many returning Black soldiers were shunted into institutions that were considered ‘separate but equal’ (as *Plessy v. Ferguson* was still in effect). Additionally many of these institutions did not have the capacity to handle the demand; many were turned away so that only 12% of Black veterans were able to pursue higher education, compared to 28% of White veterans (Turner & Bound, 2003; *JBHE*, 2003; Batten, 2011).

Even after desegregation in 1954, many Black students struggled to attend higher education institutions in the South (Lucas, 2006). Aries (2008) noted, “The emergence of

the civil rights movement in the 1950s brought with it a dawning awareness among leaders of government, business, and education of the importance of reaching out to underrepresented minorities” (p. 2). As African Americans were granted more civil rights, they slowly increased their university matriculation levels across the country. New Strategist (2006) reported the Black population in the United States to be around 39 million in 2004, accounting for 13.4% of the population. In that same year, 27.7% of all U.S. Americans possessed a bachelor’s degree by the age of 25; almost eighteen percent of Black people did, while 31% of non-Hispanic Whites did (New Strategist, 2006; Shapner, 2007), showing a marked difference in higher education attainment between these two groups. See Figure 1.

Yet Black students’ enrollment rates have continued to steadily increase over the past few decades. According to Jackson (2007), from 1990 to 2000 alone, Black undergraduate enrollment increased 38.8%, and 70.3% more African Americans earned bachelor’s degrees in that same timeframe. In the following decade, the U.S. Department of Education (2009) reported the undergraduate enrollment of Black students at HEIs has increased an additional 39% between 2000 and 2009 at 2-year and 4-year institutions.

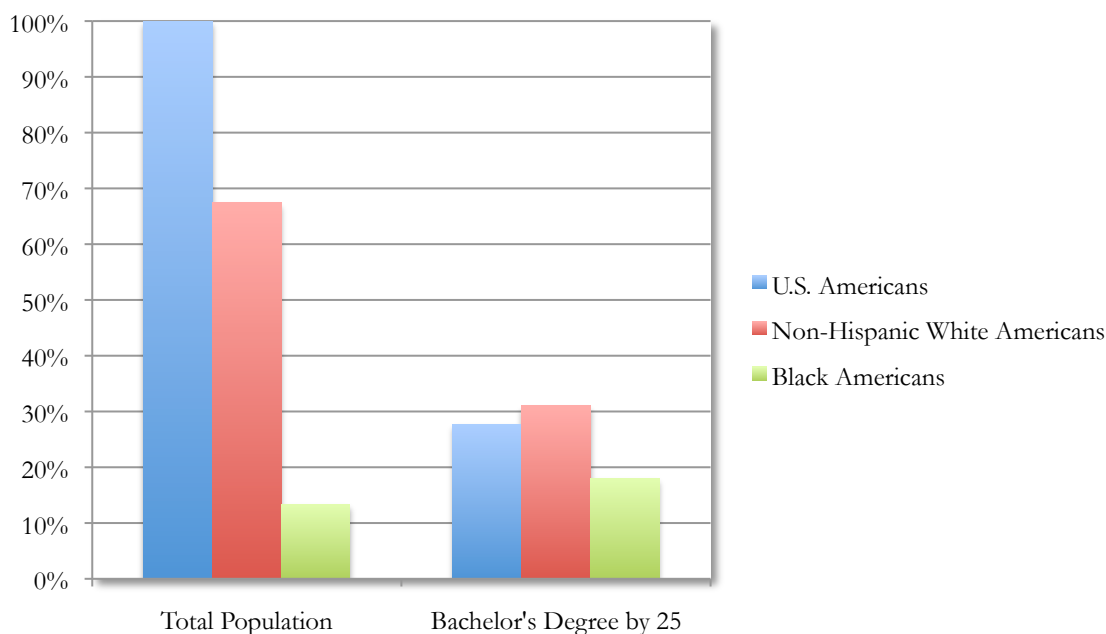


Figure 1. Population and Education Attainment between Non-Hispanic White and Black U.S. Americans

Despite the promising increases in higher education among African Americans in the last century, the completion of degrees is another matter. Aside from Native Americans, attrition rates for Black university students are higher than any other racial or ethnic group (NSSE, 2006). According to NCES (2011), 37.7% of African Americans will graduate in six years, while the overall average is 55.5% (with Asian Americans and

European Americans having graduation rates at 66.4% and 59.3%, respectively). Tinto (1993) and Harris and Nettles (1991) found Black students are more likely to delay entry into university, experience more academic difficulty, and (along with Hispanics) are more likely to leave college earlier than their White counterparts, usually in their first or second year. The reasons for this phenomenon include lack of academic preparedness, less social and intellectual support from the institution, and usually lower socioeconomic status that puts a strain on a student's ability to continue (Tinto, 1993). So it is worth noting that the difficulties experienced in primary and secondary education outlined earlier have long-lasting impact on Black students who do manage to enter into university from completing their degree.

2.2 Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Predominantly White Institutions

African Americans who do attend university have a choice between HBCUs and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). While at first Black students mostly attended HBCUs because they did not have many other options, a shift has occurred in matriculation patterns in the United States. In 2001, 86% of Black university students attended PWIs (New Strategists, 2006). Research has investigated the characteristics of African Americans who attend either type of these HEIs, as well as the experiences that students have while at them.

Fleming (1984) reported that HBCUs have welcomed members of the Black community since the end of the U.S. Civil War. With predominantly Black populations, these academic communities have fostered greatness in their students, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Thurgood Marshall. These schools embrace, as Perry (2003) termed it, "deliberate socialization" with traditions of affirming students' Black and American identities: "They were designed to forge the *collective* identity of African Americans as a literate and achieving people" (p. 91, original emphasis), assisting young Black adults to understand all facets of their identity, providing a nurturing and supportive environment to learn and grow.

According to the United Negro College Fund (2010), HBCUs grant around a quarter of bachelor degrees awarded to African Americans (despite having only 14% of Black undergraduates) and over half of all Black professionals attended an HBCU. See Figure 2. Allen (1992) reported, "Black students on Black campuses have advantages over Black students on White campuses in many respects. For instance, they display more positive psychological adjustments, more significant academic gains, and greater

cultural awareness and commitment” (p. 32), despite often coming from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and performing less well academically in secondary school. Fordham (1988), Allen (1992), Tatum (1997), McCowan and Alston (1998), and Flowers and Pascarella (1999) echoed these findings, commenting that these students “achieve higher academic performance, enjoy greater social involvement, and aspire to higher educational goals than their peers do at [PWIs]” (Tatum, 1997, p. 79).

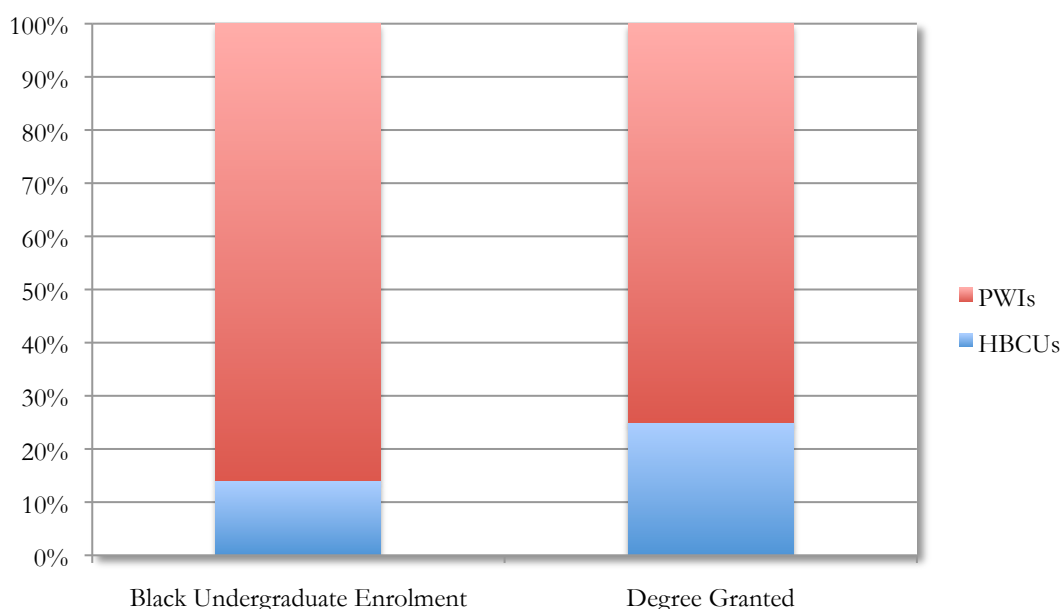


Figure 2. Comparative Enrolment of Black Undergraduates at PWIs and HBCUs

Looking at PWIs, we notice a different environment for Black students. Bakari (1997) explained:

“Too often, the experience of African American students attending [PWIs] underscores a general institutional ambivalence toward their educational needs, a lack of appreciation for their cultural heritage, and callousness toward values other than those held by the majority population. As a result, many African American students experience feelings of alienation, isolation, and racial hostility” (p. 3).

He argued that unless PWIs made an effort to understand the identity development and cultural needs of students of color, these students would continue to feel undervalued and thus underperform. Supporting the work of Bakari, Bennett (2005) reported, “The attrition rates of Black students [at PWIs] are five to eight times higher than the attrition rates of White students on the same campuses” (p. 861). The reason? “[First-year students] of color often experience difficulties beyond the generic adjustment problems.... experienc[ing] minority status stresses” (p. 861). African Americans face unique challenges where White counterparts do not, which can lead to leaving university

without a complete qualification, which arguably limits employment prospects. Thus arguments have been made that African Americans who attend PWIs do not benefit as much academically and socially as those who attend HBCUs (Allen, 1992). With one of my research aims of better fostering Black student support during study abroad, these findings showcase the importance of the need to understand the Black university experience.

2.3 The Experience

As the numbers of marginalised students have increased over the past several decades, universities have sought to meet the needs of students through academic and student affairs programs. Carlson (1998) stated, “The modern American college campus may be the most visible and best example we have of [the] new vision of multicultural community that is beginning... to emerge in the United States” (p. 108). Finding the correct balance in order to meet the varying needs of a diverse student population can prove difficult.

The African American university experience varies depending on many factors, including the student’s background. Like all disadvantaged populations, these students require particular types of support in order for them to make the most of their educational experience, both academic and social. They can face a lack of social and cultural support, further increasing their odds of attrition. Even within their own cultural group, African Americans must overcome stereotypes about their ability to succeed academically. Therefore the Black student is often seeking support to navigate through their university experience. Tatum (1997) stated, “Black students turn to each other for the much needed support they are not likely to find anywhere else” (p. 60). She postulated that better to cope with the struggles of being a minority, African Americans will look to other African Americans for aid.

Yet researchers disagree on exactly where Black students are in their racial self-understanding upon entering university, and thus if this seeking of other Black students will occur. White (2001) found college students do not experience a linear or predictable identity development model. She observed students developing more holistically in the understanding of their racial self-concept, and keeping separate tempos for understanding their cultural identity. Additionally, several researchers found that Black university students, in order to handle difficulties, adjust to their academic and social situations based on where they are in understanding their racial identity (Fleming, 1984;

Tatum, 1997; Bennett, 2005). Students who enter university with stronger ethnic identities often seek connections to reaffirm their identity, while those with weaker ethnic identification often feel more stress and lower self-esteem (Ethier & Deaux, 1994, p. 248; Parham & Helms, 1985). These latter individuals may not have received the resources to know where they should seek support for any problems they may suffer.

3. Summation

We see the difficulty in how to properly foster the undergraduate experiences of Black students. The research shows that they are a varied group with differing needs and challenges. A goal of this thesis is to better understand the self-concept and experiences of undergraduate Black women. I have illustrated in this chapter how the educational experiences of African Americans have been volatile and hard-fought, particularly for those who do partake in higher education. For generations, societal structures hindered, and in many ways continue to hinder, the academic advancement of Black Americans. Through shifts in policy and individual struggles, African Americans have grappled to earn the education that is so highly honoured in their culture. More can continue to be done at all levels to further break down the obstacles still in place.

An impactful opportunity of the university experience is the opportunity to study abroad during part of your undergraduate education. With the concerns outlined in this chapter about Black students even completing their degree, study abroad may seem superfluous to that experience. Yet the next chapter surveys study abroad's place in the modern university experience, and how that experience can impact the students who choose to participate in it.

Chapter IV. The Evolution of Study Abroad

It has been argued that too often international educators use anecdotal evidence instead of research-based data to demonstrate the power of international study (Mestenhauser, 2002). This chapter examines the research conducted into study abroad and its place in U.S. higher education, as this research provides a starting point for my research goals of understanding the effects of study abroad on African American females. First, I inspect the roots of study abroad in the United States and globally, before looking at the shifting experiences of study abroad for students. Next, the literature on the benefits of studying abroad is examined. Lastly, I look at the research on study abroad participants from marginalised backgrounds. I synthesise the research into how study abroad currently functions in the United States and the impact of this experience on particular marginalised groups. I also identify the strengths, weaknesses, and potential limitations of previous research that informs my own research design.

1. Roots of Study Abroad

Study abroad has become a unique feature in students' higher education. This section examines the difference between what study abroad is versus the wider concept of international education. I then examine the history of study abroad and how the experience has evolved over the past decades to be more inclusive and far-reaching.

1.1 Study Abroad versus International Education

It is important to understand that study abroad is a part of the wider concept of international education. While the exact definition of international education is debated, I work from the definition that international education is comprehensive education that fosters the personal growth of individuals to realise their influence in an interconnected global community. This education might take place in any location, from inside one's home or local school to travels beyond one's home borders (however that might be defined) either as part of a structured or unstructured experience to learn more about the world's machinations.

Study abroad is a subset of international education. Usually this type of education takes place between secondary and post-secondary levels of education, up to and including graduate studies. According to the IIE (2012), the majority of students who do study abroad do so during their undergraduate careers. For the purposes of this thesis,

study abroad refers to university students who do part of their degree program requirements outside of their home university and their home country for a temporary period.

1.2 History of Study Abroad

According to Hoffa (2007), study abroad can loosely be linked to study trips stretching back as far as ancient times and into the Middle Ages when scholars would travel outside of their home countries to learn at academic beacons like Athens or Rome. In seventeenth century England, young aristocratic men would partake in a ‘Grand Tour’ of the Continent. They would explore European capitals taking in the art, language, and culture in order to ‘complete’ their classical education. Hoffa (2007) and Lewin (2009) explained that over the next two centuries, this idea of experiencing European high culture expanded to other countries’ affluent populations, and young men would crisscross Europe educating themselves.

Hoffa (2007) reported that the oldest recorded study abroad programme in the United States came out of Indiana University in 1879 (though the University of Delaware lays claim that theirs was the first in 1923). Faculty members took a group of students to Europe for a three-month period to learn about the art, history, language, and culture of a handful of countries (Indiana University, 2013). However, it was the success of Delaware’s Foreign Study Plan, which eventually came to be known as the Junior Year Abroad, that offered a model for U.S. universities’ study abroad programmes. Brown (1983) and Bowman (1987) stated that after World War II, more U.S. universities became involved with study abroad programs in Europe, and by the end of the 1950s, programs were beginning in other regions of the world. Universities continued to diversify their opportunities abroad for students and by the 1970s third-party providers (for-profit study abroad businesses not affiliated with HEIs) were developing programs to send students overseas. Goodwin and Nacht (1988) noted the 1980s saw an expansion of study abroad as the dollar grew stronger against foreign currencies and U.S. Americans opened more to the idea of foreign travel. University academic credit allowed for students to break away from their colleges for a time while still earning credit toward their degree. Since that time study abroad in the United States has advanced to offer various overseas studies in different contexts to meet different students’ needs and desires.

1.3 Changing Contexts of Study Abroad in the United States

The evolution of study abroad is evident in the myriad programmes now offered for university students. Internships in foreign law offices, scientific research in jungles, and complete language immersions in small villages have replaced the finishing tours of the nineteenth century. Students have the option of choosing to study abroad for as little as a week for up to an academic year. They can choose whether they want to experience academic work with foreign students or other U.S. American students, as well as how they want their social life to look outside of the classroom.

Engle and Engle (2004) and Williamson (2008) described that now several models for study abroad exist: integration, island, hybrid, and field-based. With *integration*, university students directly enrol into a host university and take courses alongside local students. *Island* programmes have students in a host country, but they take their classes along with other U.S. American students at a study centre. *Hybrid* programmes combine integration and island programmes so that some coursework is done at a study centre and others at a local host university. Finally, *field-based* programmes are often experiential in structure, allowing students to focus on a specific theme or research in a host culture. Additionally, faculty from a university might have a specific study tour that they want to host in another country, and bring a small group of students along to explore particular topics. These different models appeal to different types of students. Some students might not feel they are well-prepared to study in a new university structure, so will opt for an island programme, while others might have a passion for a particular topic they want to explore in depth and will thus enrol in a field-based programme.

While abroad, depending on the length of the programme, students have the option of living with a host family, taking up residence in campus housing, or securing private accommodation. Throughout the past decade, the diversity of study abroad destinations has expanded. The IIE (2012) reported that while western Europe still remains the most popular abroad destination, non-traditional destinations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America have seen a marked increase in enrolment by U.S. university students. Given the varying lengths, models, and destinations for studying abroad available to students, we begin to appreciate the variety available. With the ability of students to fund their study abroad not only through scholarships and grants but also through their financial aid packages, the possibilities open even further.

The IIE (2012) research shows how the sheer composition of study abroad students has shifted. Between the 2000-01 and the 2010-12 academic years, the number

of U.S. university students who studied abroad increased over 177%. Indeed whereas in the 1960s only a few thousand students sought overseas education annually, now each year over a quarter of a million university students take part in study abroad trips. In that same timeframe, those students who identified as White decreased by 6.5%. More science-based majors are traveling abroad to study than before.

However, many abroad students now opt for shorter length programmes. Obst, Bhandari, and Witherell (2007) reported that the majority of students participate in short-term programmes lasting eight weeks or less (more than 50%), with less than 10% taking part in year-long programmes. IIE (2012) reported that between AY 2000-2001 to AY 2010-2011, students taking part in yearlong abroad programmes dropped from 7.3% to 3.7%, whereas 8-week or less programmes and summer programmes saw an increase of 5.9% and 4%, respectively, in the same timeframe. And while semester-long programmes are still one of the most popular duration lengths (with 34.5% of students doing a semester in AY 2010-2011), summer study abroad programmes now lead with 37.7% of the market. See Figure 3.

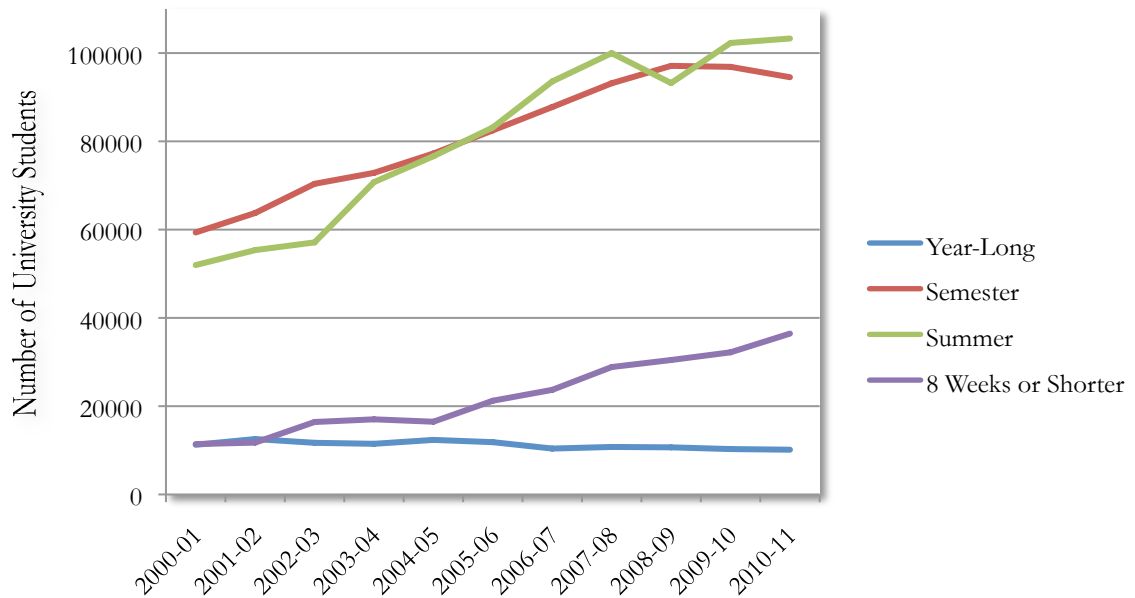


Figure 3. Student Participation by Programme Length from AY 2000-01 to AY 2010-11

Universities have pushed for more internationalisation on their campuses and to establish campuses abroad, and this goal has included a push for students to study abroad. The increased diversity of students and the types of programmes being offered has made this experience one that each student can make his or her own. They have an option of customising their abroad experience depending on their financial constraints and their academic, personal, and professional ambitions.

1.4 Changing Contexts of Study Abroad Internationally

Research finds that study abroad on the international stage has also seen an evolution since the Grand Tours of Europe. Neave (1994) discussed how European universities have begun to focus more on internationalisation since European integration began, including the push for increased student mobility. Jones (1991) investigated the impact of ERASMUS (EuROpean Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) on higher education; its advent in 1987 began a commitment by European countries to not only the betterment of individual citizens, but to the idea of a better European community. Overseen by the European Commission, the programme has had over 3 million students participate. Even the expansion of ERASMUS shows the heavy influence of study abroad in higher education. When started in 1987 only 11 countries participated sending 3244 students abroad, while in 2012 almost a quarter of a million university students from 33 different countries partook (European Commission, 2013). Jones (1991) explained, “The idea is to ensure that future professionals in all fields and walks of life will be able to act as multiples of further European co-operation and contribute to a long-term process of building stronger foundations of inter-cultural understanding” (p. 448). ERASMUS venerates the value of a person going beyond his or her borders to seek knowledge. This vision of international understanding through education is a theme throughout government policies worldwide.

Since this thesis focuses on the experience of a particular population of U.S. Americans, the international research is not a major focus of this literature review. However, the international literature on study abroad focuses on the reasons and hindrances of studying abroad (Araújo, 2008; Gatfield & Larmar, 2008; Raikou & Karalis, 2008; Celik, 2011), the cultural adaptation of international students (Dorozhkin & Mazitova, 2008; Huang, 2008; Xiaoqiong, 2008), and students’ impact on the host communities (Arber, 2008; Bolsman & Miller, 2008; Ratanakarn, 2011).

Researchers are beginning to investigate how study abroad impacts individuals, communities, and nations. Pan (2011), for instance, studied China’s very deliberate strategy of education abroad for many of its citizens. In fact, IIE (2012) reports that over 25% of all the study abroad students coming *into* the United States in AY 2010-11 were from China. Lee (2011) examined how study abroad affects South Korean students’ identity causing an ‘in-betweenness’ for students in the United States, as they straddle both countries. Yang, Webster, and Prosser (2011) investigated how Hong Kong study abroad students can enhance their time overseas if they set goals for their experience. With the

high priority put on international education, researchers currently seek to understand the mechanisms and consequences of study abroad, and will continue to build our knowledge of how this experience functions across the globe.

2. Benefits of Study Abroad

Initially research did not exist to provide empirical evidence into the positive changes that study abroad effected in students (Sell, 1983). However, current research on study abroad benefits shows why international programmes continue to be developed as researchers have discovered positive outcomes for participants. First, study abroad students differ from their university cohort. Schroth and McCormack (2000) documented that motivation and achievement in these students were higher than in students who did not study abroad. Since study abroad is mostly a voluntary activity, the students it attracts are those who see themselves as more internationally oriented, adventuresome, high achieving, tolerant, and multicultural (McCormack, 2000), with more knowledge of, interest in, and positive attitudes towards other countries, higher criticism of U.S. government and culture, more openness to graduate school and career possibilities, wanting to learn more about other cultures (Carlson, Burn, Useem, and Yachimowicz, 1990), and more likely to graduate (Sutton and Rubin, 2004).

These findings reach rational conclusions; all three studies used large samples (hundreds of students at different universities) to draw their conclusions, allowing for greater reliability. Students willing to travel to foreign locales logically possess the attitudes and behaviors listed, as they are more likely to thrive with these traits. However, questions might be asked as to how these students attained those characteristics. Given most abroad participants are affluent White females (NSSE, 2007; Picard et al., 2009) questions arise as to the societal upbringings that may have instilled higher motivation to succeed in school and curiosity in other cultures. Students without this background might not have been exposed to notions of adventure and scholastic achievement or might simply not have the possibility available to them because of factors like cost. Additionally, study abroad students may have higher college completion rates, but most students study abroad in their junior (year three of four university years) year and are farther along in their schooling, while college dropouts usually leave school in their first and second years (New Strategists, 2006). Thus, while noting these characteristics is important, we must also keep in mind the personal histories that enabled study abroad participants to have such traits.

2.1 *Personal Growth*

This section examines the research into study abroad's effect on individual growth, particularly personal development, national identity, as well as social and long-term individual evolution. Cushner & Karim (2004) noted that scores of studies have examined the impact of study abroad on students. Gillespie, Braskamp, and Dwyer (2009) and Che et al. (2009) found that abroad experiences aid in students' development as individuals, as they are forced into situations where they must reexamine themselves, their status, and position as cultural beings in the larger global order. Engle and Engle (2003) argued that the benefits of study abroad are largely dependent on the individual. Depending on one's background, values, and aspirations, each person will take something different away from the experience. Because students are thrown into a state where what is not normal to them is normal to everyone else, they are given "lenses through which to view oneself and one's culture, as well as other cultures, from vantage points that were previously inaccessible" (Che et al., 2009, p. 105). Their research suggests that study abroad may offer opportunities for reflection on the highly variegated nature of how a person views himself/herself and others when living under radically different cultural conditions. This variation provides an important base for this thesis as it highlights the power of mobility in the shaping of one's cultural and social identity – questions which are central to this thesis.

Gillespie et al. (2009) described how global learning occurring during study abroad may help intrapersonal growth "to understand oneself, and to gain self-possession and a clearer sense of identity" (p. 448). They argue that this step of intrapersonal understanding is important to developing an understanding toward others. Their case study of IES Abroad, a third-party provider, examined how faculty and staff assisted with the personal development of the 5500 students that IES Abroad sends overseas each year. The analysis offers insights into how abroad programs may positively affect student growth. However, a major concern with the study is that the data are collected from the professionals who worked with the students, not from the students themselves, who might offer different notions about how their abroad experiences affected their personal development. Yet many researchers have focused on the impact that students perceived study abroad to have on themselves.

Gmelch (1997) found in his analysis of 51 study abroad students who traveled to Austria in the mid-1990s that they saw themselves as developing more self-confidence, adaptability, and self-reliance. The perceived personal development indicates that the

study abroad experience enhances these skills as students navigated different cultures. van Hoof and Verbeeten (2005) discovered that 90% of participants saw the experience as extremely (67.7%) or very (23%) relevant to their personal development, as did Pfnister (1972), Nash (1976), Kauffmann and Kuh (1984), Yachimowicz (1987), Carlson et al. (1990), Kauffmann, Martin, Weaver, and Weaver (1992), Miller (1993), Sharma and Mulka (1993), Drews, Meyer, and Peregrine (1996), Bates (1997), Thot (1998), Christie and Ragans (1999), Dwyer (2004a), Gore (2005), Guerrero (2006), and Martinez, Ranjeet, and Marx (2009). The Institute for International Education of Students (2002) surveyed 3,400 study abroad participants who went abroad between 1950 and 1999, and found that 95% reported an increase in their 'personal development,' including the understanding of their own cultural values and biases (98%), resulting from studying abroad. The IIES pilot study conducted by Akande and Slawson (2000) unearthed similar findings. All of these studies show comparable results spanning over 37 years, indicating a high degree of reliability, and how personally impactful students see their abroad experience.

In relation to students' national identity, Dolby (2004) discussed the effect that study abroad had: "As students became aware of the negative sentiments that are often expressed about the United States and Americans, they recognized that they had to negotiate this perception, whether they agreed with it or not" (p. 166). Students developed an understanding of their identity as U.S. citizens, since others labeled them as Americans first and foremost. Yet what specific incidents occurred and how are students reacting to and internalising these experiences? Unfortunately, Dolby (2004) looked at a small group of students from one university who all traveled to Australia. Her findings are limited to how these students were affected in one country. Students from another university, programme structure, or in another country might react differently regarding their national identity. Additionally, she stated that these students negotiated their self-perceptions, but the details are neglected. Finding that these occasions occur is important, but so is the process. A next step must be taken in the research, and this thesis seeks to understand that process and how it affects identities.

Fry et al. (2009) conducted a longitudinal study looking at 684 study abroad individuals and how the experience impacted them into young adulthood. Participants ranged from recent returnees to those who had studied abroad 10 years prior. Major findings included a twice as likely chance to attend graduate school and a 32% participation rate in organized international programmes (e.g. Peace Corps or Fulbright).

Former participants stated that the main impacts from their experiences included: 1) language fluency; 2) appreciation of other cultures; 3) broadening one's perspective; 4) gaining a greater understanding of other countries; and 5) the experience itself (p. xii). Fry et al. (2009) used qualitative and quantitative methods that employed substantial samples from different backgrounds, universities, and experiences, giving strength to the validity and reliability of the findings. However, they themselves pointed out that the 53 interview respondents were more likely to share a positive study abroad experience, which might indicate a selection bias. This limitation of selection bias is important to note when considering the findings, while bearing in mind the powerful impact that Fry et al. (2009) discovered for those individuals who did respond.

These numerous studies show a multitude of benefits for studying abroad. They have used surveys, interviews, and case studies among different student groups going on different programmes over a range of years at a variety of universities in a variety of countries. Thus the fact that the findings have been consistent with one another indicates the validity of the conclusions. However, the research has only asked very general questions. Studies like IES (2002), Van Hoof and Verbeeten (2005), and Fry et al. (2009) give ideas of what participants are reporting about their abroad experiences but they do so in vague fashion. Additionally, they seek information after study abroad has occurred, and outside of individual contexts.

The nature of these studies indicates that many students are experiencing significant changes in themselves, their self-perception, attitudes, and values from their abroad experiences. However, why does a student feel s/he has a better appreciation of other cultures? What occurred for that person while abroad that shifted his or her thinking? Did something in particular cause the individual to examine his or her personal history or cultural beliefs? What role does a student's understanding of himself or herself play in these changes? Study abroad is not the only place where these opportunities for growth can occur, but (according to the research) offers a rich setting for such growth. Delving into the hows and whys about the nature of change and study abroad has not been asked, particularly in relation to the cultural status of the study abroad student. Not understanding the process of the transformations has left a gap in our knowledge of what exactly is occurring to university students while abroad.

2.2 *Academic Growth*

Researchers have found academic gains in study abroad participants (Hansel and Grove, 1986; Melchiori, 1987; Kaufman et al., 1992; Bates, 1997; Mizuno, 1998; Lathrop, 1999; Dwyer, 2004a; Guerrero, 2006; and Picard, Bernardino, & Ehigiator, 2009). Carlson et al.'s (1990) longitudinal study of study abroad alumni discovered that over 70% of the sample had obtained a post-bachelor's degree, over 90% had professional-level jobs, and almost 60% said their study abroad experience was directly relevant to their careers (pp. 92-96). McKeown's (2009) study indicated that students who went abroad for the first time developed more intellectually on the Measure of Intellectual Development than students who had been overseas prior to studying abroad. A major issue with this study is that this measure has received a lot of criticism in the field (King, 1990; Murray, 2009), since it does not focus on the complexity of intelligence. Can one test based on a few written paragraphs by subjects truly gauge intellectual growth? However, alongside personal growth, academic growth appears to be a common theme for abroad participants.

Carlson and Widaman (1988) found that students who studied abroad in their junior year showed "higher levels of international political concern, cross-cultural interest, and cultural cosmopolitanism" (p. 13) compared to non-study abroad juniors. Hanvey (1978), Yachimowicz (1987), Zhai (2000), Douglas and Jones-Rikkens (2001), and Williams (2005) noted study abroad students had greater increases in intercultural communication skills and understanding, world-mindedness, and global perspective than non-study abroad contemporaries. These studies indicate growth in global perspective, but some of these publications are old, while Zhai's (2000) sample included only 21 respondents from one university who together showed no shifts in global perspective, but qualitatively did. Douglas and Jones-Rikkens (2001) relied solely on one survey, which the authors themselves remarked "needs greater range of reliable subscales" (p. 7). These shortcomings show the importance of having more than one data collection method, as well as a diverse pool of applicants, to gather more comprehensive data.

Opper, Teichler, and Carlson (1990) conducted an expansive study on the impact of study abroad on 439 participants from five different countries and found that study abroad positively affected academic progress and opinion of the higher education in the host country, increased knowledge of the host country's culture and language, and increased expectations that the experience would positively contribute toward achieving professional goals (p. 199). One limitation is these gains were self-reported; more

accurate findings might try to gauge these changes through testing subjects about their host country and conducting longitudinal follow-up. The IES (2002) found of their participants, 52% obtained an advanced degree beyond their bachelor's, while the National Association of Colleges and Employers reported that roughly only 30% of all bachelor's degree holders go on to pursue an advanced degree, showing a remarkable 22% difference in graduate school participation.

Sutton and Rubin (2004) investigated learning outcomes of students in the University System of Georgia who studied abroad during summer or fall. They found the only statistically significant effects were functional and world geography knowledge. Though not statistically significant, studying abroad did powerfully affect knowledge of global interdependence and cultural relativism (i.e. individuals seeing the world based on others' cultural perspective), but did not affect a student's verbal acuity or cultural sensitivity knowledge (p. 75). However, the majority of this study's subjects participated only during the shorter summer term, which might be too short a period to impact factors where there were no significant findings. This limitation poses the question of how programme length might affect student growth.

2.3 Programme Length

Regarding length of study abroad programs, longer stays are found to be more beneficial than shorter trips (Dwyer, 2004b). These findings shape the methodology of this thesis when determining the length of participants' programs. With over 3700 respondents, the data from Dwyer (2004b) offers insight into the impact of program length. However, findings were self-reported, so while correlation can be seen, causation cannot be inferred. Kehl and Morris (2007/2008) uncovered that students who attended semester-long programs had more global-mindedness (through the use of the Global-Mindedness Scale) than short-term (under 8 weeks) abroad students. Kehl and Morris only used participants who attended island programmes, so the information is only pertinent to those students. In addition, questions arise regarding the use of the Global-Mindedness Scale, as Fielden (2008) found that respondents to the scale have differing responses when interviewed face-to-face, putting into question the validity of the scale. Herman (1996) reported shorter programs do not necessarily impact psychosocial development as much as longer programs, though his study had only a sample size of 54 Ohio students who merely filled out a questionnaire before and after their program. He did not analyse the students' cross-cultural encounters, relying on information from the

survey measure. Adding qualitative interviews with his survey to gain more insight into what occurred abroad to these students might have improved his research.

In studying programme length, Medina-Lopez-Portillo (2004, 2008) found students who attended the shorter seven-week program in Mexico had significant changes in perception of cultural identity, compared to students who studied there for 16 weeks. She hypothesised the semester students might have had greater cultural awareness prior to their program, allowing them to feel comfortable enough to attend a longer program, and were mostly ethnorelative (i.e. putting cultures in contexts other than their own) while the 7-week students were more ethnocentric (i.e. putting their own culture perspective before others). Her study only recruited a small sample of 17 students from the University of Maryland. Additionally, we must remember that while certain tendencies might be reported, each person will react differently to his or her study abroad experience because of myriad factors. Medina-Lopez-Portillo (2004, 2008) looked at the intercultural sensitivity of her participants, but did not go beyond the use of Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). While the DMIS has been empirically proven over the past two decades across cultures to measure intercultural sensitivity (Paige, Jacobs-Cassuto, Yershova, & DeJaeghere, 2003), interviews and in-depth analysis might have allowed her to determine the factors that influenced the attitude shifts, as this thesis aims to do.

Most research has focused on how study abroad can help develop a student's intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intercultural communication, as well as enhance academic performance and prepare for future careers. These studies have sought to explain how study abroad can benefit the individual; however, they have not looked beyond general conclusions and generic definitions in terms of student development. They look at a collective whole, instead of how individual circumstances influence the changes they discovered. With HEIs' emphasis on the importance of study abroad, understanding specific effects and processes within students are imperative. Stepping into the perspectives of study abroad participants is essential to understanding the alleged transformation that arguably leads to all the personal, academic, and professional developments reported.

3. Minority Ethnic Populations and Study Abroad

As noted earlier, the number of students of colour who study abroad is woefully low. Only Asian Americans and Native Americans come close to being proportional with their university enrollment rates. Monalco (2002) reported only 1.3% of participants in third-party study abroad providers were African American in the 2001-2002 academic year. Only 4.8% of Black students studied abroad in the 2010-2011 academic year (IIE, 2012), when the most recent data is available. See Figure 4. And while IIE (2012) reported that the number has been steadily increasing from year-to-year, the numbers still indicate a poor representation of this group going abroad as part of their undergraduate education.

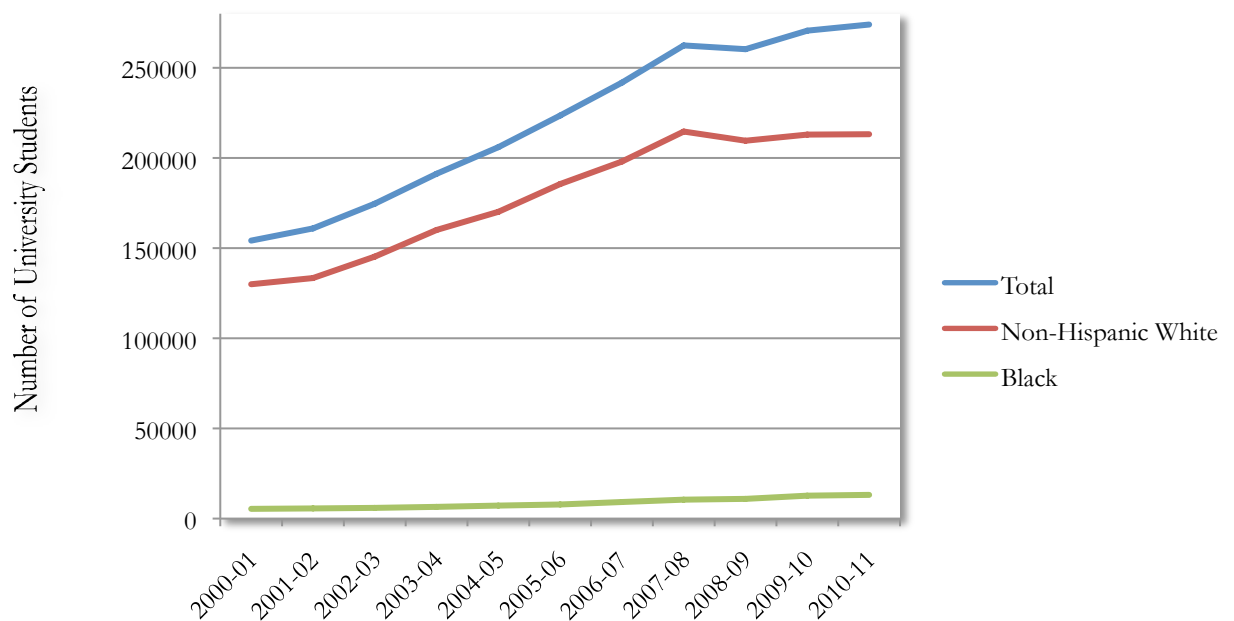


Figure 4. Non-Hispanic White and Black Student Participation in Study Abroad from AY 2000-01 to AY 2010-11

Wanner (2009) remarked that with the current number of study abroad participants, African Americans rank far below other groups, stating that for all groups to reach a four percent participation rate by 2016, White students would require an increase by a factor of 2.7 from levels in 2006, while Black students would need an increase by a factor of 13.3 (p. 94). With current projections of minority percentage growths indicating that 43% of university students will be non-White by 2050 (Ladson-Billings, 1994), the current rate of 16% minority ethnic participation in study abroad (when they make up 31% of university students) is abysmally small. This section focuses on the issues that serve as a barrier for marginalised students to go abroad, HEIs' response to minority

participation, and finally the research completed on how study abroad affects marginalised students who have participated.

3.1 Hindrances to Studying Abroad

Research done into marginalised students studying abroad has focused mostly on what hinders these students from participating (Campbell, 1982; Mattai & Ohiwerei, 1989; Cole, 1990; Conciatore 1990; Carter, 1991; Hembroff & Ruz, 1993; Carroll, 1996; Craig, 1998; Washington, 1998; Perdreau, 2000; Doan, 2002; Zambito, 2002; Clemens, 2003; Van der Meid, 2003; Gore, 2005; Jackson, 2005; Dessoiff, 2006; Green et al., 2008; Brux & Fry, 2010; Salisbury, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2011), how to get more minorities to study abroad (Jackson, 2005), and how these students are affected by going abroad, described as mostly positive (Zambito, 2002). Picard et al. (2009) found in their Georgia State University case study that the main factors deterring marginalised students from studying abroad were “insufficient information, indifference, lack of curiosity, limited or no travel experience, individual and family fear, lack of peer influence, financial challenges, and few if any mentors” (p. 329). Martinez et al. (2009) explained these factors can be difficult to overcome and advisors must be supportive of helping students see beyond concerns and embracing the potential for personal growth. McClure, Szelényi, Niehaus, Anderson, and Reed (2010) found similar reasons for why Latino/a students did not engage in study abroad, citing familial obligations (including financial ones) despite a desire to undertake study abroad as part of their undergraduate experience.

Taken together, these studies have done excellent work of identifying obstacles to particular communities’ study abroad involvement as the research examined students from HBCUs and PWIs, private and public universities, and different geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Ascertaining these issues is essential in order to increase participation. While financial means might not be as large a deterrent for a student from a higher income bracket, other factors apply (e.g. fear, indifference, lack of information). The next step requires understanding what *does* occur when these students go abroad. This insight could better prepare professionals to support these students’ distinct needs so that participants can maximise their experience.

3.2 Institutional Response

As noted earlier, HEIs are keen to increase their international scope. Obst, Bhandari, and Witherell (2007) highlighted strategies that a few universities have initiated to increase minority study abroad participation, including faculty education, financial support, and peer mentoring. Dessoiff (2006) stated the importance of making study abroad seem like a mainstream university experience essential for success. Morgan, Mwegelo, and Turner (2002) reported HBCU students are less likely to study abroad than Black students attending PWIs. However, Brown (2002) found many HBCUs have slowly begun to integrate study abroad into their institutions' goals. With globalisation being a vital component that impacts higher education's recruitment and marketing, HBCUs have realised the importance of sending students to experience and learn in other cultures. Yet due to budget cuts across much of the higher education industry, progress has been slow. Brown (2002) reported that HBCUs like Dillard University in New Orleans are seeking to increase study abroad participation from 0.5% participation before 2000 to 50% in the coming years. Gasman (2010) conveyed the creation of a foundation, which will act as a national clearinghouse of HBCUs' study abroad programs, can help increase involvement. As more universities embrace internationalisation (at least in their rhetoric), they are moving to enable all of their students to be part of the goal.

3.3 Effects of Study Abroad on Marginalised Groups

The preceding background has helped elucidate issues confronting HEIs handling marginalised groups' study abroad involvement. These studies have shown an area of higher education research receiving scant attention. Some researchers have delved deeper into the effects of study abroad on individuals in marginalised groups. This section looks at these studies and their contribution to our body of knowledge.

Beck (1996) did a textual analysis on W.E.B. Du Bois's (a sociologist, historian, and civil rights activist) experience in Germany in 1892 and how it positively affected him as an African American. He reported Du Bois grew intellectually, and better understood himself within global cultural contexts. Evans (2009) used textual analysis of diaries, letters, and other written materials to discuss the history of Black women who have studied abroad since the late 1800s. Specifically she looked at Dr. Anna Cooper, who studied at the Sorbonne for her PhD. While in France, Cooper reflected on being a doctoral student while also being an African American woman. Among the historical accounts, Evans (2009) found women recognised (intra-)connections between their racial

and national identities (p. 87). A shortcoming of both studies is relying on Beck's and Evans's interpretation of Du Bois's and Cooper's writings without being able to verify the original authors' meaning. Additionally, neither researcher delved deeper into how this self-understanding manifested in Du Bois's and Cooper's lives, and they look at experiences from over one hundred years ago.

Gillespie et al. (2009) found in IES's French immersion program that minority ethnic participants better trusted their own cultural identity, i.e. how the students understand their own cultural background. However, they did not articulate their particular definition of this terminology, which might detract from our understanding, as different meanings exist. Gingerich (1988) discovered study abroad increased cultural sensitivity and White racial consciousness, more so than in university students who did not study abroad. Guerrero's (2006) study of fifteen study abroad Latino/a students discovered changes in over 60% of the students, including academic and language improvement, as well as identity questioning when confronted with racism or being identified as White or American as opposed to Latino/a. While a small sample, these students' dissonance unveils a psychosocial component affecting them when labeled as something other than what they consider themselves to be. This, we deduce, has implications for transformation of self-concept and value structure.

Martinez et al. (2009) quoted one Black participant in the University of Connecticut's Liverpool program (who all come from low-income and often minority backgrounds), as saying, "The identity change shocked me. In England, I was American, but in America, I am something else" (p. 539). This statement ties back into Dolby's (2004) discussion on national identity formation while abroad, with students being defined by the host population rather than students defining themselves. Cushner (2008) wrote about the experience of a Black student studying in Australia baring his identity as an African American. Another participant commented, "I felt more welcome as an African American in Europe than I typically do [in the U.S]" (p. 171). In Fry et al.'s (2009) study, 6.6% of the respondents said they gained a "better understanding of [their] own culture, language, people, and self" and 5.5% felt they had "general personal growth and development"(p. 29). Another subject commented:

"My perception of race and ethnicity changed dramatically after studying and living in the Dominican Republic (D.R.) for a semester. For the first time in my life, I was told that I was not black, but "morena" because of my lighter skin tone. However, because I grew up in the U.S., I always thought of myself as black until I went to the D.R." (p. 31).

Cushner & Karim (2004) described these experiences as *role shock* where the student has “the loss of personal status. . . to a new role that is required to function in a new culture” (p. 292). Students’ understanding of their identity is often transformed when confronted by other cultures. These studies obtained first-hand information from students in how being abroad affected how they saw themselves.

Talburt and Stewart (1999) found the students they interviewed in a five-week program to Spain experienced race and racism differently. The one African American on the trip found that because of Spaniards’ sexualised stereotypes of dark-skinned Africans, she experienced negative encounters that highlighted her racial identity and her attitudes toward racism. She internalised her experiences to better understand who she was as a Black woman and how others viewed her, including Spaniards and her fellow students. Ganz (1991) and Luqman (2002) reflected on similar experiences of African American women traveling to Spain, and the cultural reasons behind it. The fact that these other studies had similar findings gives credibility to the generalisability of this phenomenon of Spanish behaviour toward Black women. However generalisability is not the only matter of importance; the young woman in Talburt and Stewart’s (1999) study had a specific response to her personal interactions in Spain. While it is important to remember she was but one respondent, how she felt about those encounters is important, as it illustrates her personal development from her abroad situation. This thesis seeks similar understanding of individuals’ abroad experience.

Landau and Moore (2001) wrote about Black and White Americans’ experiences in Ghana. While White Americans often attend the programme (an immersion programme at a university in Accra) to gain insight into African culture and have personal adventure, Black students usually attend as a “quest for personal history and roots” (p. 32). They found, however, that African Americans are often treated with indifference upon arrival, despite the students expecting a ‘Welcome Home’ embrace from the people and land of their ancestors (p. 45). In contrast, Ghanaians have different perceptions and (mis)conceptions of African Americans. Ghanaians do not associate themselves with African Americans and label them differently than how the students label themselves. These differences have led many African Americans to “examine their domestic racial codes” (p. 47) and what being African American means to them. This research brings forward interesting concepts pertinent to this thesis. Landau and Moore (2001) conducted detailed interviews and journal textual analysis into their participants’

African experiences, which brought forward the complexity of African Americans' self-understanding in relation to their heritage.

Ganz (1991) analysed the experiences of Black students and how their identities as African Americans were highlighted by the other culture, from a housewife in Austria calling her student "Die Schwarze" (the Black) to another student coming across an Englishman explaining the culture the student "should" have as a Black American. These women were able to use these instances as opportunity for self-reflection and self-definition, yet Ganz does not go beyond reporting incidents into how these instances affected the subjects' self-understanding. Tucker (1991) and Dungy (1991), African Americans who studied abroad, wrote auto-ethnographies about how their time abroad allowed them to reflect on racism in other parts of the world.

Day-Vines (1998) and Day-Vines, Barker, and Exum (1998) discussed the ethnic identity growth of twelve African Americans guided through psychological education intervention while studying in Ghana. They found, while not quantifiably measurable, qualitatively positive shifts in the students' understanding of their ethnic identity. These studies, though limited, help to inform this thesis, but the two findings (quantitative insignificant versus qualitatively affective) are contradictory, and do not go beyond the ethnic identity of the participants to consider other facets of their identity. Morgan et al. (2002) similarly reported benefits of Black women studying abroad and sharing experiences with western African women, stating they unite through increased awareness of cultural roots. We see different research finding Black students' self-concept being formed and influenced by studying abroad. However, as will be discussed in the next chapter, identity is comprised of many different components and understanding shifts within the context of the whole person.

African Americans are not the only students to receive attention regarding study abroad's effects. Park (2000/2001) wrote about her student experiences in Mexico and Africa and how they educated the understanding of her Asian American identity: "My ethnic identity. . . has never really been static but always in flux. It has continued to change and shift as I have moved within and through different circumstances and contexts" (p. 104). While her research is insightful and rich in detail, it is the experience of one woman who went abroad at a later life stage than most university students. Yet this research offers rich insight into how her identity has been crafted by her life experiences.

4. Summation

Overall research into study abroad has shown positive development for participants with students growing academically, professionally, and personally. Some inquiry has focused on several marginalised groups and how study abroad affected them on different levels. Kauffmann et al. (1992) wrote, “Living abroad provides potent new experiences that give ample opportunity to see oneself in a new light” (p. 100). With the research completed into study abroad’s effects on university students, some light has been shed on what a potent experience it can be. Research has ranged from longitudinal quantitative studies with hundreds of respondents who studied in scores of locations to qualitative studies focusing on a few students in a specific program.

Most of this research has been cursory and far too sparse. Researchers have asked generic questions about the effects of study abroad. Considering how minority ethnic students might react to study abroad has not been scrutinised as thoroughly as it could be, and requires more consideration. The groundwork laid offers a basis on which to continue research into study abroad. This thesis seeks to take the research further, with inquiry that takes into account the whole persons and how their life histories shape their experience abroad as a student and the multiple facets of their self-concept.

With this goal of understanding an individual’s study abroad experience within their personal context, we need to understand the context of identity theory and how it pertains to the individuals in this study. Additionally, we must consider how one’s cultural background can shape identity transformation. The next chapter examines the theoretical framework of identity, as well as African American psychological theory in relation to the formation of Black self-concept.

Chapter V. Theoretical Framework

With the goal of this thesis to determine how study abroad affects African American women's self-concept, it is important to define the different identity contexts this research explores. Sociologists, psychologists, and philosophers often disagree on identity's definition. Some researchers recoil from using the term 'identity,' since their definition does not coincide with others. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in the sociological critique of this terminology. However, I do seek to develop an integrated theory of identity and self-concept in a way that allows me to delineate a vast field for the purposes of my research. For the purposes of this thesis, identity encapsulates the self-concept that a person possesses in understanding himself or herself in relation to other people and within the context of his or her history, culture, and unique biography.

This thesis's use of identity theory within a specific cultural context seeks to recognise the intricacy of being human, by striving to understand both the individual and social aspects of self-concept. This chapter outlines various theories into the components of identity, intersectionality, and African American psychological theory. While I do not subscribe to one theory, I use these theories to frame and educate my methodology and data analysis in this thesis.

1. Identity Components

Defining identity is a difficult task. Corbin and Pruitt (1999) stated, "The development of identity is a complex process that involves a multitude of psychosocial factors. Ultimately, identity achievement includes defining who one is and hopes to be within a social context" (p. 68). Intellectuals have spent a good deal of time trying to understand the processes underlying identity formation. Erikson (1968), a pioneering developmental psychologist, argued that individual identity is composed of our social, cultural, and historical contexts; in understanding our place within these contexts, we begin to understand who we are as individuals.

Like Erikson, Hall (1992) asserted that we all have distinct histories that define who we are. "We all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture" (p. 258). A person's identity occurs within multiple frameworks that inform one another and how that individual sees himself or herself (Singh & Doherty, 2008; Kelly, 2008). Dei, James, Karumanchery, James-Wilson, and Zine (2000) expanded: "Identities are often referred to as 'multiple and shifting'...

[that] are not static or immutable categories, but rather... represent fluid boundaries” (p. 247). An individual’s sense of self can create and recreate itself based on numerous different factors and different degrees of exposure.

Che et al. (2009) explained one’s identity is enhanced through dissonance: “Development is facilitated when this discomfort is experienced within a social setting that provides safety and nurture. When new understandings are constructed this implies reaching a different level of development through the modification of one’s prior cognitive structures” (p. 103). Bauman (2004) stated, “In a state of social crisis, frightened individuals huddle together and become a crowd” (p. 58). Look at the effects 9/11 had on the U.S. psyche, when patriotism and identification as a U.S. American became the coping mechanism against the act of terrorism. When in distress (major or minor), we as cultural beings are more likely to feel the salience of our identities within certain contexts.

Grotevant, Bosma, de Levita, and Graafsma (1994) argued identity comes not only from self-understanding, but how others define us and how we internalise those definitions. Bauman (2004) discussed how we may identify who we are by identifying who we are not. Group exclusion is a potent identifier telling us where we do not belong and who we cannot be. Individuals must reconcile who they are in terms of their uniqueness, and in terms of the in-groups and out-groups of which they are (not) a part. Bauman (2004) stated, “[There] are those whose access to identity choice has been barred... and in the end are burdened with identities enforced and imposed *by others*.” (p. 38, original emphasis). Some intellectuals (postcolonialists) argue that past ills (e.g. war, genocide) have shaped current societal power structures (Fanon, 1967; Gilroy, 2004). Valadez (2007) commented, “People’s sense of self-respect is affected by the way which their ethnocultural group is perceived” (p. 305). Cass (1984) distinguished this identity as the *perceived identity* which others attribute to an individual, as differentiated from the *presented identity*, which a person displays to others, often based on the person’s self-concept (pp. 111-112). Benwell and Stokoe (2010) argued, “Identity is located not in the ‘private’ realms of cognition, emotion and experience, but in the public realms of discourse, interaction, and other semiotic systems of meaning-making” (p. 83). While I concur that the public sphere has a potent influence on how individuals understand their self-concept, identity occurs on various levels of experience both public and private.

Sen (2006) argued that while this tendency to define one’s self in relation to how others define you can occur, every individual has a choice of what identities s/he wants

to be most salient. A Black female may wish to be defined by her Muslim religion rather than her race or gender. Sen (2006) asserted that the cultures in which others place us might influence us, but that placement does not necessarily determine what identities we choose to project or feel: “We are not as imprisoned in our installed locations and affiliations as the advocates of the discovery view of identity seem to presume” (p. 36). Our perceived identity does not necessarily affect our presented identity; we can choose to some degree how we want to be perceived by what we present.

Bauman (2004) discussed identity’s many mediators that lead to a person’s self-understanding as a community member. He wrote most people do not notice their identity since they already “belong” to the collective, and only when displaced from that collective is their identity more salient. This moment might manifest in myriad ways or through a number of identities. A woman may feel her female identity more in the context of male-dominated societal norms. However, that same woman could have her Jewish religion thrown into sharp relief in a Methodist church. Park (2000/2001) found often identities are “social and political constructions firmly placed within given contexts of both time and place” (p. 107), indicating a malleability depending on context. Who you are greatly depends on where you are and your identity can shift dependent on various factors.

This shifting offers interesting implications within the realm of study abroad. Anderson (1994) noted, “Identity crises [are] the more or less natural outcome of contact with an alien culture” (p. 294). She maintained that cross-cultural adaptation allows for personal development, where a person becomes something more than s/he was before, building upon one’s old identity into something more integrated and transcultural. In relation to identity, Fry et al. (2009) found study abroad places participants in circumstances where they have to discover themselves, because, as one participant put it:

“I think in a lot of ways it makes you have a firmer sense, in some ways it makes you lose your sense of self, and in other ways it makes you kind of develop a stronger sense of yourself, because you’re in such a foreign environment, and you’re just left with who you are, you know, and you have to figure out who you are” (p. 50).

Zaharna (1989) wrote how intercultural situations can challenge one’s self-concept, identifying the concept of *self-shock*, where a person confronts conflicting self-identities because of encounters with people unlike himself or herself. A sojourner is attempting to understand various self-concepts and define who s/he is based on outside stimuli. A person will use self-attribution, meaning-making through host culture

perspectives, and creation of internal equilibrium while in the midst of cultural ambiguity. Zaharna (1989) outlined, “Self-shock emerges as a mismatch between *need* to confirm self-identities with *ability* to confirm self-identities” (p. 516, original emphasis), but where the need outweighs the ability to balance those self-identities.

Building on Zaharna’s hypothesis, Sen (2006) elucidated on the multitude of different identities that make up one’s whole identity. He claimed we all belong to numerous groups and the saliency of those identities depends on context. Despite these different identities and their varying degrees of prominence, Sen (2006) remarked:

“The recognition that identities are robustly plural, and that the importance of one identity need not obliterate the importance of others.... A person has to make choices... about what relative importance to attach, in a particular context, to the divergent loyalties and priorities that may compete for precedence” (p. 19).

He stated we must “(1) [decide] what our relevant identities are, and (2) [weigh] the relative importance of these different identities... [which] demand reasoning and choice” (p. 24). The individual must choose which identities come to the fore, though this choice might not always be possible in certain contexts.

Thomson (2007) and Tatum (1997) found, “Our awareness of the complexity of our own identity develops over time. The salience of particular aspects of our identity varies at different moments in our lives” (Tatum, 1997, p. 20). She stated we shall each understand our identities at different points in our lives, based on individual experiences and the pace of our unique psychosocial development. Additionally, different facets of identity develop at different times. Understanding yourself as a female might come at a different time than when you understand your Caribbean or Christian identities. She explained, “Just as we don’t all reach puberty and begin developing sexual interest at the same time... identity development unfolds in idiosyncratic ways” (p. 67). Since we are all on different journeys, everyone travels different roads at different paces to different destinations, though all with an objective of self-understanding.

To summarise, identity has several components, and to understand it within the context of my research questions, being aware of those components is imperative. Researchers have shown identity is 1) linked to personal contexts; 2) fluid; 3) enhanced by dissidence; 4) defined by in-groups *and* out-groups, 5) within present circumstance; 6) multifaceted; and 7) individually paced. Within these findings, we see the complexity of understanding any one person’s self-concept. With so many influential factors, we must be vigilant of each and how they affect one another.

2. Intersectionality

With increased globalisation, a new complexity of the identity components just outlined has emerged. As different communities interact with one another in new ways, “Globalization appear[s] to be bringing about mixing and inter-connection on a scale which was becoming increasingly hard to comprehend” (Wetherell, 2010, p. 13). The ways in which researchers have gone about understanding these new relationships have remained static, using outdated Western-focused philosophies. Given the complexity of identity, understanding how these identities manifest becomes important.

Returning to Benwell and Stokoe’s (2010) argument about identity occurring within the public sphere and Wetherell’s (2010) observation about the deep impact of globalisation on identity, we must consider how various aspects of our self-concept interact with our environment, and how in a globalised world we experience more environments than generations before. Where do the facets, fluidity, dissidence, self- and group-definitions of identity converge in relation to societal norms? Given the argument made in the last section, can this convergence be the same for everyone with our unique experiences? What role does societal power structures play in these experiences? Here, the critical concept of intersectionality surfaces.

With roots in feminist theory, intersectionality evolved from the initial assumption that all women’s experiences of oppression were the same; the Combahee River Collective in 1977 highlighted these differences among women’s encounters with power structures. The woman to first coin the term ‘intersectionality,’ Crenshaw (1991) argued, “[Identity politics] frequently conflates or ignores intergroup differences” (p. 1242). Intersectionality acknowledges that the differences caused by the multi-faceted nature of identity can lead to differing forms of oppression within our societal interactions (Crenshaw, 1989; Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Alexander, 2007; Parekh, 2007; Collins, 2010; Phoenix, 2010; Wetherell, 2010). Phoenix (2010) explained, “Intersectionality [means] that people are always simultaneously positioned in many categories so that there is no essence to any category.... [and] all categories are associated with power relations and cannot be neutral” (p. 303). An individual cannot merely be one thing, whether female, old, Japanese, or disabled. Each component plays off the others, making contributions to the whole person in a nonsummative equation, including determining the (un)privilege that the individual possesses.

When studying identity, Swanson, Cunningham, Youngblood, and Spencer (2009) noted, “Multiple ethnic identities and situational and developmental changes in

identity are clearly important” (p. 277). With these complexities, understanding any African American’s identity (or any identity, for that matter) becomes problematic. Cokley and Chapman (2009) contended, “It is important to consider the ways in which research questions [investigate]... the multifaceted nature of African American identity” (p. 290). Exploring identity cannot be dichotomous, as in-group heterogeneity exists. Belgrave and Allison (2010) contended, “Exploring the regional, historical, and cultural variability within the African American experience may also support a richer understanding by avoiding assumptions of the monolithic nature of the African American community” (p. 59). This thought reflects Sen’s (2006) theory mentioned earlier of the multiple identities each individual carries. Every person is unique and brings various aspects and experiences to his or her entire self-concept. Phoenix (2010) asserted that using intersectional consideration facilitates multi-level analyses ranging from statistical to single-case analyses; however, she also noted, “No concept is perfect and none can ever accomplish the understanding and explanation of all that needs to be understood and explained” (Phoenix, 2006a, p. 191). To gather more comprehensive and meaningful data, researchers must honour the intricacy of how all of these factors relate with one another in personal and public spheres. Given these complexities, my research aims to understand self-concept within the intersectional paradigm.

Davis (2008) argued that the ambiguity of intersectionality allows for researchers better to serve the search for knowledge. We are not bound within constraints which intersectionality seeks to discard anyway. She went on to state, “It promises an almost universal applicability, useful for understanding and analysing any social practice, any individual or group experience, any structural arrangement, and any cultural configuration” (p. 72). Within this thesis’s context, I question how identity, intersectionality, and the process of self-understanding might take hold within the study abroad experience. Students travel to an alien setting where the culture they are in is not the culture in which they were raised, causing discomfort and requiring the student to examine and possibly modify self-understanding. How do they understand themselves when outside their norm? What life experiences have students brought with them? When placed in another culture, how do they negotiate their perceived versus presented identities? How does their marginalised status in their home culture affect their response to another culture? What power relations in their host culture affect how they perceive themselves? The experience of study abroad may be a time when students must (dis)associate with particular identities to negotiate their experience.

Phoenix (2006b) commented that scholars may feel overwhelmed by the seemingly endless intersections available to understand anyone. However, she went on, “Researchers and other social analysts necessarily have to make creative judgments about which intersections to analyse when” (p. 26). My intention is to comprehend my participants’ experiences from a psychological perspective that seeks to respect a specific group’s ontology. I now consider how African American psychological theory informs the Black American experience, particularly one’s understanding of his or her self-concept and its many components and intersections.

3. African American Psychology

One commonly researched identity component is race. While a social construct, race is not an unreal experience (Parham, 2009; Elam & Elam, 2010). Power constructs have dictated the impact that race has on one’s understanding of identity, at both the individual and group levels. White (1980) argued that the conventional theories used to explain behaviour are not sufficient in explaining Black behaviour, saying that the composition of the Black experience is too contrary to the White lifestyle, making Black people look inferior or maladjusted through deficit models of analysis. Elam and Elam (2010) concurred, stating, “Race has the potential to be employed productively: it is a mistake to equate it with merely destructive impulses and effects” (p. 191). It is imperative that different frameworks be used.

Myers (1992) complained, “African culture has been badly misunderstood because of the imposition of alien world views in its analysis” (p. 8). Scholars who advocate for Black-specific psychological theory claim that current theory is Eurocentric in nature, and does not honour how culture might affect psychological understanding (Parham et al., 1999). This unwillingness to accept the culture’s influence in human development has led to culturally-bound findings being presented as universal.

However, some psychological theory attempts to take into account the role that external influence (such as culture) plays on internal understanding. Vygotsky’s (1978) social cognitive theory argued that culture shapes both *what* a child thinks and *how* a child thinks. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory also emphasised context’s role in psychological development. Therefore one’s character as well as one’s environment (e.g. family structure, community, etc.) interact in a specific way to determine how an individual will develop. Scholars have sought to understand what is specifically shared psychologically by individuals of African descent. Here I examine how current theory

frames the understanding of African American psychology, and how this applies to this thesis's data analysis.

The literature on African American psychology has grown extensively in the past decades. Belgrave and Allison (2010) write extensively on African American psychology as a field of research. They point out that this area of study has two research perspectives. One perspective is based in the belief that “psychological concepts and theories are universal” (p. 3), taking the belief that psychological notions developed by Western thought are applicable to everyone. However, the other perspective focuses on Africentric psychology, which “considers the core values, beliefs, and behaviors found among people of African descent that are central to understanding African Americans” (p. 3). The difference that arises in studying these two perspectives is in observable behaviour. Whereas Western psychology champions the idea of prediction and control of human behaviour, Africentric psychology also embraces the influence that intuition and self-knowledge play on individuals. Parham et al. (1999) indicated that a debate continues as to whether an Africentric norm actually exists, as some scholars argue that conforming to White norms is at one end of the spectrum (thus taking a Eurocentric perspective), while others insist that African roots should be the focal point of analysis.

Parham (2009) discussed the importance of trying to understand African Americans beyond the mindset of White psychological theories. He stated, “Traditional psychology, in its attempts to understand the lifestyle, thought, feelings, and behaviors of people of African descent, fails to capture their *ethos*, or ‘emotional tone’” (p. 4, original emphasis). He continued, “Using Eurocentric norms as a template from which to measure the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of people of African descent places Black people at a conceptual disadvantage, resulting in a tendency to characterize our behaviors as pathological” (p. 7). African Americans must not only try to carve out a life for themselves in a White-dominated society, but then they must also be labeled and constructed through Eurocentric lenses. Additionally, Phoenix (2010) remarked that White identity is so unacknowledged by White people that they do not understand the collective identity of Black people (p. 313), therefore can they ever truly understand the Black experience?

Myers (1992) explained that to understand the African mind, researchers must understand “the dynamic interplay between mystical intuition and scientific analysis” (p. 6). According to Africentric theory, the European perspective is one-dimensional,

neglecting crucial components of what being a Black person actually means. For instance, Parham et al. (1999) stated:

“General psychology [has] failed to provide a full and accurate understanding of Black reality.... Black psychology... attempts to study, analyze, and define appropriate and inappropriate behaviors of Black and African people from an Africentric frame of reference” (p. 9).

Quoted by many scholars in the field of African American psychology is the Asante proverb, “I am because we are; we are, therefore I am.” Africentric philosophy has a different definition of self that is not typical for Western thinkers. Here, conceptions of ‘the self’ are inextricably linked to the notion of ‘the group’ – a divergence from the individualised conception of identity that is normative within Western scholarship. Specifically,

“The [Africentric frame of reference] begins with a holistic conception of the human condition. There is no mind-body or affective-cognitive dualism. The human organism is conceived as a totality made up of a series of interlocking systems.... The basic human unit is the tribe, not the individual” (Parham et al., 1999, p. 12).

Because collective consciousness is not often considered or valued within traditional (Eurocentric) understandings of identity, Black people may automatically fall outside what is deemed ‘normal’ (Swanson et al., 2009). In response, African American psychologists have been working to create theories of Black psychology that explicitly incorporate notions of interdependence, and that are situated within wider Black history (Akbar, 1976; Nobles, 1980a; Nobles, 1980b; Williams, 1981; Myers, 1992; Kambon, 1996). These models all embrace the idea that African Americans’ self-concept requires individuals to understand not only their personal identity, but also their location within a collective historical past, present, and future, including the natural world and their interdependence. Nobles (1980a) stated that by understanding these concepts of African philosophy, one begins to comprehend their effects on behaviour and the validity and value of those factors. According to Belgrave and Allison (2010), Africentricity seeks to understand a person’s worldview, and how that individual interprets and harmonises his or her experiences, much like theorists search for patterns in other marginalised communities’ experiences (e.g. feminist and queer theory). Already we observe some differences from the identity theory laid out earlier in this chapter.

Africentric theories often run parallel with many of researchers subscribing to a uniform idea of African thought (Herskovits, 1958; Diop, 1959; Ford, 1964; Nobles, 1972, 1986, 1997; Wobogo, 1976; Asante, 1980; Boykin, 1983; Ani, 1989; Holloway,

1990; Shade, 1991; Akoto, 1992; Kambon, 1992). Parham (1993) identified eight facets from which to understand Eurocentric and Africentric worldviews: self, feelings, survival, language, time, universe, death, and worth. He stated that where African Americans fall on the spectrum of these dimensions is completely opposite to where European Americans fall. Parham talks about how *self* for African Americans comes from a holistic, spiritual integration, rather than fragmentation as in European Americans experience. *Feelings* are to be expressed and not suppressed by logic. Africentric tendency promotes *survival* through a collective orientation instead of individual preservation. African people honor *language* through the spoken, not the written word, emphasising the interconnectedness between the speaker and listener. For *time*, African Americans tend to be more present-oriented while referencing the past, and their relationship toward the *universe* promotes harmony and balance. Finally, according to Parham (1993), *death* is merely a transition from one life to the next, embracing the spirituality this entails. *Worth* comes from your contribution to the collective, instead of one's material possessions. These ideas are ones reflected in most researchers' thoughts on African philosophy. Yet each of these variables seems to be on a continuum, despite Parham's insistence of either/or scenario for each individual.

Perhaps the theme prevalent throughout the various incarnations of Africentric psychology is the idea of collectivism. Loneliness and alienation do not exist in African tribes because each member is interconnected, and there is concern and responsibility for one another (Belgrave & Allison, 2010). Baldwin, Duncan, and Bell (1992) looked at African self-consciousness (ASC), which is "the awareness and knowledge that African Americans have (possess and practice) of themselves as African people historically, culturally, and philosophically" (p. 284), as well as Africanity: "a bio-genetically defined psychological disposition or propensity that all Black people possess" (p. 284). They discovered that a higher ASC level is an important determinant on whether Black students had positive Black psychology functioning. This finding mirrors other Africentric scholars' insistence that to have a healthier Black personality, Black people should be more socialised into the African American cultural reality (Myers, 1992; Parham et al, 1999; Pierre & Mahalik, 2005, Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006).

Baldwin et al. (1992) indicated that though there are many intergroup differences between Black peoples, the similarities of interdependent tendencies that occur among various African descendants makes it impossible to ignore the Black consciousness idea.

Yet one could argue that many Africentric theories do not seem to take into account the integrated lifestyle of African Americans. Is there really only one ‘African American cultural reality?’ The assumption that the ‘healthy Black personality’ that Baldwin et al. (1992) and Parham et al. (1999) define is, in fact, the optimal reality for every single African American may place some Black Americans on the outside of what is ‘normal’ according to Africentricity. This idea seems to take away from the fundamental idea of Africentric psychology that each person’s self-knowledge creates his or her own truth, and the idea of intersectionality allowing for different experiences for people’s various identities. Additionally Baldwin et al.’s (1992) suggestion that that people of African descent are genetically different from other humans does not appear to have any scientific basis, and one that would be met with vehement criticism by most biological anthropologists (Templeton, 1998).

Belgrave and Allison (2010) take a different approach to understanding Black psychology: “It is important to note that there are variations in the Africentric and other worldviews, and individuals may function along a continuum, with some people of African descent having some Eurocentric worldview beliefs” (p. 29). They note that, “Africentric beliefs have been linked to self-esteem and self-worth. High Africentric beliefs may be linked to self-esteem through involvement in positive family and community activities that promote feelings of self and communal worth” (p. 48), but they still champion the argument that while Africentric thinking has its place, it is not the only perspective that can offer understanding for people of African descent. This thesis seeks to use Africentricity as a focus of analysis, while appreciating the complex layers of identity, as discussed in the first two sections of this chapter.

The question of validity and reliability about these conclusions might plague some Eurocentric academics. Parham et al. (1999) noted:

“African-American psychology has struggled and continues to struggle with how best to understand, study, and appreciate Africanness in an American context.... Black psychology has yet to achieve the paradigmatic coherence necessary for it to achieve discipline status” (p. 120).

However, Myers (1992) found that the theory of the structure of Africentricity had an independent convergence from several scholars in the field, and that future research may continue to strengthen the theory. If credence is to be gained from mainstream academia, acceptance that validity and reliability may be immeasurable to Eurocentric standards becomes essential; current understandings of validity and reliability may not adequate to

grasp Africentricity. Indeed, critical examination of culturally bound paradigms, theories, and methodologies has allowed this fledgling field to begin the dialogue of how best to understand a population outside of Western origins. The field of African American psychology has seen an evolution in its own identity. While I have provided an overview of Black psychology as it relates to my study, the field as a whole lies outside the scope of my thesis. I seek to explore how these conceptual frameworks can be used to understand the experience of my research participants. By giving them voice within specifically African American psychological concepts, I work to get closer to how these students' self-concept is affected by their study abroad experience.

Given the burgeoning research into African American psychology, I identified some major components that appear to affect an individual's self-concept based on the literature. I use these factors in helping to understand my research participants' study abroad experiences. Now I more closely examine these dynamics to lay the foundation of my analysis.

3.1 Family Structure

According to Parham et al. (1999): "The foundation for an authentic Black psychology is an accurate understanding of the Black family, its African roots, historical development and contemporary expressions, and its impact on the psychological development and socialization of its members" (p. 4). Billingsley (1968) reported that the dynamics and composition of a Black family can be complex and varied, not fitting one single description. When considering family structure, Belgrave and Allison (2010) noted that the boundaries of a Black family may differ from those of a White family, and that what is seen as effective family functioning might differ across cultures in certain respects. For example, Belgrave and Allison (2010) discussed *fictive kin*, those individuals who are not related (biologically or through marriage) but still feel and function as family. Black families often have this kin in place, having had to rely on others during slavery and economic hardship when one's own kin was not available. These relationships have contributed to the collectivist tendencies within the African American community (Scott & Black, 1989).

Parham et al. (1999) documented the different definitions of what family is and how it can change over the course of one's life. Even among Black Americans, the definition of family shifts for different segments of the community. They argue that the reasons that extended family plays such a pivotal role may come from "the common fate

of oppressive economic and social conditions” (p. 38). With origins in slavery and communal thinking, relying on others outside your core family was essential to survival. The differing definitions that come from how a family should look bring about the question of who decides what a ‘healthy family’ looks like. Hill (1971) reported that African American families have strong achievement orientation, strong work orientation, flexible family roles, strong kinship bonds, and strong religious orientation. These strengths enable Black families to thrive through any adversity that they might face.

The role of familial influence on children’s development of self-concept cannot be neglected. Children developmentally progress beyond colour categories and see racial categorisation that systematically occurs in society. This development occurs through age-related stages, but *how* children will view racial categorisation (whether positively or negatively) is reliant on numerous factors. Cokley and Chapman (2009) commented on its effects: “Group identity is often shaped by the content of parental socialization” (p. 292). The stance that parents take on racial socialisation can determine their children’s psychological adjustment, with positive types of socialisation often associated with positive psychological adjustment (Brown, 2008; Coard & Sellers, 2005; Neblett et al., 2008); parents can socialise their children to better understand their race in the context of the larger U.S. American society.

Williams (1981) explained that Black socialisation (Afro-typing) has a different impact on personality and self-concept development than if a Black child experiences Anglocentric developmental space. The relationship with race that caregivers foster in their children influences those children’s self-concept throughout their lives. With concern to the racial socialisation process, Boykin and Toms (1985) discussed that Black children are taught 1) their participation in mainstream American culture, 2) their role as an ethnic minority and the oppression that may come with that, and 3) the Black cultural experience. Therefore we note the powerful connection of family with understanding one’s racial identity and possible life trajectory. We also note how ‘family’ might be defined differently in Black communities based on a variety of factors.

3.1.1 Nationality

It is argued that national identity is an important component of one’s self-concept (Harris-Perry, 2011); thus we must seek to understand the unique way in which Black people identify with their country. With the complicated history of African Americans and the United States, the relationship they have with one another is different

from other racial and ethnic groups. Du Bois (1903), a leading intellectual in early twentieth century civil rights, discussed the idea of *double consciousness*, a psychological state in which African Americans struggled to balance the tensions between their U.S. American and African ‘souls.’ These two identities interplay with one another in a way that is not always harmonious as U.S. American culture and African paradigms can clash. As stated earlier, African thought often embraces a collective ideal that goes up against the U.S. concept of individualism. Du Bois argued that these opposing forces means that Black people will see themselves from the perspective of the other, creating two psycho-social experiences that individuals are always trying to bring into balance. Fanon (1967), an African critical theorist and scholar in postcolonial studies, argued that when Black people identify with the White mainstream, it takes away from their racial identity: “The individual who climbs into society... tends to reject his family” (p. 149), and therefore is subjugating himself to a power in which he has no voice. In the context of a White-racially dominated society, African Americans have largely been in this category for over four centuries due to their (lower) societal positioning.

Yet the experience of those of African descent are not all the same, nor are their experiences or understanding of what it means to “be” American. Solomos (2003) discussed how national identity and race have evolved together to mean more than just the collective history of a nation. According to Parham et al. (1999): “Any theory of [psychological] development must consider the impact of globalization and lack of socio-economic prosperity of African Americans and the ways that adaptive realities inform and transform notions of development in post modern, post industrial America” (p. 90). They acknowledge that nationality might effect one’s psychology. Perhaps this affect will occur differently for different Black people, as their definition of what it means to be Black *and* American could differ.

Patriotism and identification with a country does not have to mean that one shares the history of that country. Being an ethnic minority does not mean that you cannot identify with your nation. Pilkington (2003), who researched Black Britons, concluded, “The assertion of a Black identity does not imply a rejection of Britishness but a demand for respect towards a valued identity” (p. 204). Changes in understanding national identity comes from an embrace of multiculturalism. So being U.S. American, not only means different things for people within a particular racial group, but also that individuals can choose how their national identity fits into their overall self-concept. Additionally, Parekh (2007) suggested that people with the same racial background may

respect the values and institutions associated with that particular identity, but for different reasons: “This is common in a multicultural society where different cultural communities agree or converge on a common body of values on different meta-ethical grounds” (p. 133). These divergent opinions can come from a variety of places and/or experiences. For instance, Swanson et al. (2009) reported, “[Some] Black parents embrace both American and African-based values and endeavor to instill both value systems in their children” (p. 273). Again we see the potency of familial influence on one’s understanding of his or her self-concept. We also note how an individual’s understanding his or her national identity are contextually driven.

3.1.2 Religion and Spirituality

Belgrave and Allison (2010) found Black people reported having strong religious beliefs, spending more time in houses of worship, and using spirituality as a provider of comfort more than White people. The role that religion plays in the collective lives of people of African descent often reaffirms the collectivist nature of the community. Through the shared experience of religion, people are able to connect with one another on various levels, including their faith: “From an Africentric perspective, spirituality is intricately linked to all aspects of one’s life and cannot be viewed as a separate dimension” (Belgrave & Allison, 2010, p. 290). Again, identity is inextricably comprised of various components that build and strengthen on one another in meaningful ways for each individual.

Belgrave and Allison (2010) outlined the importance of religion and spirituality when understanding African American psychology. Spiritual beliefs play a large role in many Black lives, with many African Americans reporting more religious activity than any other ethnic group: “Spirituality [is] an influential factor in helping African Americans cope with problems and stressful life events. Spirituality gives meaning to one’s life and provides an alternative way of constructing an understanding for life’s outcomes” (p. 284). Black people are likely to find their spiritual life an integral part of understanding their self-concept.

3.2 Gender

Gender identity within the African American community has different contextual meanings. Various research has shown that Black women’s construction and understanding of their female identity differs from mainstream U.S. constructions of

female identity (Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996; Molloy & Herzberger, 1998; Fordham, 2000; Collins, 2000). Yet despite this different basis for understanding femaleness, Fordham (2000) pointed out, “African-American women are compelled to consume the universalized images of white American women, including body image, linguistic patterns, style of interacting, and so forth” (p. 330). Thus, Black women straddle two social worlds concerning how they might and do understand identifying as women between both Black and White American norms.

The role that African American females are forced to play because of mainstream U.S. American standards means these women often overlap different paradigms. How their own self-concept might fit within (and outside of) these distinct paradigms becomes an important component in understanding them. Parham et al. (1999) stated, “Black women’s lived experiences are affected by racism and sexism because these structures help to further maintain and perpetuate the political and economic domination of men” (p. 150). They also noted that many researchers seem unwilling to think outside Western-defined gender roles. Black women tend to possess androgynous gender roles, meaning they possess beliefs and behaviours that can be nurturing as well as independent and assertive (Harris, 1996; Corneille, Ashcraft, & Belgrave, 2005). “The notion that the mother could reflect a balance of the traditional male and female roles with respect to mental toughness and emotional tenderness, was largely ignored because of the rigid classification of psychosexual roles in American society” (Harris, 1996, p. 26). Their struggle to overcome such assumptions puts them at odds with White norms.

To understand the African American woman better, I consider the literature behind Black women and sexualised imaging and physical appearance, and Black women’s unique relationship with their hair.

3.2.1 Sexualised Images

African American women have been Othered by mainstream U.S. culture since they first arrived as slaves. Collins (2000) remarked, “African-American women occupy a position whereby the inferior half of a series of binaries converge, and this placement is central to [their] subjugation” (p. 71). By suggesting that Black women possess a Jezebel stereotype with insatiable sexual appetites, they are placed outside normal behaviour. Harris-Perry (2011) explained, “Sexual lasciviousness was a deliberate characterization that excused both profit-driven and casual sexual exploitation of black women.” This placement arguably allows mainstream culture to justify domination of Black American women.

Additionally Harris-Perry (2011) discussed the other African American female caricatures of Mammy (the asexualised dark, fat caregiver for White families) and Sapphire (the loud angry Black woman). These oppressive messages are systematically reproduced through media and other means so that Black American women must continually face pre-fabricated images of themselves before anyone actually meets them as an individual.

African American women face the catch-22 of being forced into the two extreme (non-) sexualized stereotypes of the mammy or the jezebel. Therefore, Black women face societal structures that can hinder their ability to understand their sexual identity. “Instead of changing structures, too many solutions in the public sphere involve enforced limitations on black women’s sexuality” (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 67). The media perpetuates these messages of African American women’s sexuality, continuing to label the women in this community as one or the other. In fact, Collins (2000) stated, “Efforts to control Black women’s sexuality lie at the heart of Black women’s oppression” (p. 81). With these oppressions coming from mainstream society, Black women often find themselves in a unique and difficult position negotiating their gender identity in relation to their entire self-concept.

3.2.2 Physical Appearance

Physical appearance defines another aspect of gender psychology as it relates to race. Parham et al. (1999) explained:

“Black women appear to use a different yard stick of beauty, with standards reflecting internal cultural norms. As a result, Black women, on average, tend to maintain a positive body image despite the fact that as a group they are heavier” (p. 156).

Belgrave and Allison (2010) agreed, noting that self-concept for Black women might also be tied to self-image, but self-image was not always the same by Eurocentric standards. Molloy and Herzberger (1998) found that Black women’s acceptance of their non-mainstream body images comes from possessing more masculine and/or androgynous traits, which have been found to suggest more positive, accepting body images.

However, even with many African American women embracing Black beauty, this community faces different messages from mainstream White culture. For instance, Collins (2000) wrote, “Darker women face being judged inferior.... Institutions controlled by Whites clearly show a preference for lighter-skinned Blacks, discriminating against darker ones or against any African-Americans who appear to reject White images of beauty” (p. 91). Harris-Perry (2011) pointed out, “Overweight women... experience

significant shame in societies where feminine desirability is defined by thinness” (p. 106). Therefore another incarnation of the double-consciousness struggle hypothesised by Du Bois (1903) emerges, with Black women facing the mainstream U.S. message about what should be considered physical attractiveness, and the message of African American culture which champions another ideal of beauty. Black women must negotiate (often with struggle) between these conflicting archetypes of aesthetics.

3.2.3 Hair

Banks (2000) explained the complexity surrounding Black women’s relationship with their hair:

“Black girls and women [understand] the political and material realities of black women’s hair. Hair holds value.... Hair can be a badge of cultural pride, as well as simply an indicator of style. Hair can be used as a medium to maintain the status quo or go against it” (p. 147).

How a Black woman chooses to wear her hair can be a powerful indicator of how she views herself. As mentioned earlier, Black collective consciousness allows a means to show pride in a group identity; hair can be a powerful means of showing an embrace of that ideology. Cooper (1971) stated, “Fashions in body hair seem to be a question of cultural conditioning, with personal preferences and sexual inclinations taking over the individual cases” (p. 114.) While people outside the Black community might not understand the importance, Banks (2000) made the observation, “If cultural theorists want to understand how black women and girls view their worlds, it is essential to understand why hair matters to them” (p. 4). Because of this important value I investigate my participants’ relationship with their hair better to understand their view of the world and themselves in various contexts.

Black women create meaning with their hair, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Given the strong reactions to hair in the Black female community, the socially constructed meanings have a powerful impact. Individuals respond to how others react to them, and the reaction of others to one’s hair impacts one’s self-understanding within the societal context. As Banks (2000) stated, “Hair emerges as a body within the social body and can reflect notions about perceptions, identity, and self-esteem” (p. 26). But hair also acts as a personal statement where individuals have the opportunity to look their best. This might be in regards to identity, but also in regard to a statement on gender. Perhaps the most essential finding of Banks’s (2000) study is that

there is an intersection of appearance, identity, and self-esteem, and all of these are informed by Black women's social and cultural meanings about hair.

3.3 *Academic Achievement*

Parental influence can fall heavily on a child's academic identity. As Perry (2004) noted, the African American community has a long history of encouraging academic achievement. As mentioned in Chapter 3, many Black families encourage educational excellence as a way to distinguish one's self and succeed. Noble (1988) suggested that the encouragement for Black children to attend university was not only because parents wished their children to benefit themselves, but also to better the race as a whole. Belgrave et al. (1992) found that those who did succeed recognised that their success was in part from the contribution of others. Put up against Mickelson's (1990) abstract and concrete attitudes toward education, as well as Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) findings that Black students also face the expectation from peers of not being too academically focused, we see Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness inserting itself into African Americans' academic identity. Collective and individualistic norms compete with one another as a student determines how s/he understands that academic self-concept.

Belgrave et al. (1992), Parham et al. (1999), and Hudley (2009) noted one's self-perception in academic ability may influence the academic achievement of Black students. "Although quality of interaction between parent and child is an important component in school achievement, we cannot overlook a youngster's willingness and motivation to respond to supportive environmental cues" (Parham et al., 1999, p. 69). Cokley (2003) took these ideas a step further, postulating the self-determination theory. He found that African Americans might have high motivation levels, but that this motivation does not relate to their academic performance or self-concept. This finding would indicate that perhaps African Americans have a different mode of viewing their self-concept (academic or otherwise) beyond the modes in which White researchers have envisioned and theorised self-concept.

Indeed, what exactly *is* academic achievement is another matter, when considered through the Africentric lense. Belgrave and Allison (2010) wrote:

"Knowledge acquisition from a Eurocentric perspective would be considered as valid and true if that knowledge is derived from measuring, counting, and quantifying information.... [whereas] an Africentric framework places the origins of knowledge within an intrapersonal and social context" (p. 244).

Knowledge from an Africentric perspective focuses on self-knowledge and that perceived truth might in fact be individual since it is based on a person's perspective.

Parham et al. (1999) reported, "The education a student received was intrinsically linked to one's personal development and transformation" (p. 70). Education is academic *and* social, leading to richer personal development on both outer and inner levels. Academic achievement (on whatever level) comes from the student but is shaped by his or her family, peers, and community. According to the Africentric perspective, an individual's self-concept in relation to these achievements is linked on various planes, though we also see the links with intersectionality and how our identities create a unique experience based on their interactions with various power structures. We can note the value in how study abroad may influence this personal development.

3.4 Personality

The influence of personality is a factor that must also be considered, with its particular relationship with one's racial identification. Wetherell (2010) noted, "The key insight [of Tajfel] was that the psychology of the individual might substantially change when she or he identifies with a social group.... The individual would behave in very different ways when acting in terms of social or group identity in contrast to more idiosyncratic forms of personal identity built around individual uniqueness and distinctiveness" (p. 11). Our individuality and inherent personality traits might, in fact, be affected by the societal clues we each receive due to our various group identities. For instance, Belgrave and Allison (2010) reported that thirty-five percent of Black Americans reported engaging in volunteer work on a regular basis. This sort of pro-social behavior could not only be attributed to individual personality, but also to the Africentric value of collectivism.

Interestingly, the reverse is also true, according to Phoenix (2010): "Individuals will have a range of possible ways of describing themselves extending from group identities to more idiosyncratic senses of identity. These various possibilities for self-categorization have been shown to have a moderating impact on ethnic identity" (p. 302). Again, the complexity of the relationship among aspects encompassing one's self-concept becomes apparent and warrants further investigation. Belgrave and Allison (2010) wrote how even the definition of success can vary from an Africentric perspective. Developmentally, material wealth may not be a key to happiness, but might instead focus on spiritual well-being, creative expression, and being a community or

familial resource. The way in which we define our successes and failures, in truth the structure of our personalities, might be culturally determined. While not considered directly in the analysis, as a general argument, I consider this aspect of identity in the context of the research participants' relationships within the other aspects of their identity.

4. Summation

Many identity theories seek to explain how people come to understand aspects of their self-concept through social processes. With the complexity of identity, most theories offer insights but do not fully explain the whole picture. Whether race, ethnicity, gender, spirituality, or sexual orientation, these components create one piece of the entire self-concept puzzle. So many factors interact on various levels creating who we are and how we understand ourselves.

This chapter has shown that identity formation relies on myriad aspects. Struggle and strife cause us to learn, change, and grow. When put in situations with others unlike us, we must reconcile the dissonance to understand who we are in a foreign context. These struggles and the need to grow from them interplay with the fact that though we are each just one person, we all have various identities and roles that make up our self-concept, and that we come to understand and take on these various identities at different times than others. We each have our own story that affect how we grow. Perceived identity versus presented identity can affect self-definition and is influenced by the labeling by others versus self-labeling. Particular identities also influence our overall self-concept. Identity is complex, as are individuals' journeys to discovering themselves. I must take into account the various influences within a person's experience to develop a full picture of what occurs with Black university women studying abroad. To create a comprehensive understanding of someone's self-concept, I utilise various techniques and draw upon a diverse literature to develop a holistic view.

In addition, some Black researchers have spent the last few decades using African perspectives to construct what it means to be African American. As with most identity theory, the answer is complex because so many facets play into the creation of self-concept. As Nobles (1980b) interjected, using Eurocentric theories does a disservice to people who do not necessarily think or experience their lives in the manner that Europeans do. Using the research of leading feminist and Black thinkers in the field, like those researchers cited here, allows progressive steps to be taken to understand the

experience and self-understanding of my research participants. By considering African American psychology, specifically in relation to family, gender, academia, and personality, a portrait of the individual can be contextualised within the cultural context of the individuals being studied.

5. Research Questions

With the gaps in current study abroad research and the need to understand individuals from their own cultural psychology, this thesis seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) How does study abroad shape the ways in which the U.S. students in this study who identify as African/Black American women think about themselves in relation to their multiple identities, including race, gender, and academic personas?
- 2) How does this study's participants' personal histories impact upon their account of themselves while studying abroad?
- 3) What specific factors in these students' study abroad experience affect how they reflect upon their various identities?

The next chapter explores the methodology to be used to answer the research questions asked within the theoretical framework presented in this chapter.

PART TWO: THE RESEARCH

Chapter VI. Methodology

This chapter looks at the methodology I use for answering my research questions. I relate the overall methodological plan and identify myself in terms of my position as the researcher. I then inspect the various data collection techniques used, including how I identified participants, and the process they and I went through to understand their study abroad experiences. The chapter concludes with the analysis and interpretation of the data, as well as ethical issues for the research and how I address them.

1. Epistemology and Ontology

This thesis takes the perspective of cultural constructivist epistemology. Seeking to understand an individual's self-concept means I must accept the truth each person attributes to his or her personal experiences, and that truth comes from that individual's cultural constructs (Watzlawick, 1984). von Glasersfeld (1995) argued, "[The concept of reality] is made up of the network of things and relationships that we rely on in our living, and on which, we believe, others rely on, too" (p. 7). In order to determine these constructed truths, I engage in life history case studies of individuals, which include interviews and field texts, to understand the unique perspectives of the participants' experiences before, during, and after their studying abroad.

1.1 Black Feminist Standpoint Epistemology

Collins (2000) contended that her preferred epistemology to understand Black women and their individual contexts as requiring a twofold approach. "Black feminist standpoint epistemology – placing Black women's experiences at the centre of analysis as well as interpretive frameworks that rely on intersectional paradigms" (p. 44). As discussed in the previous chapter, intersectionality demands that we as researchers must seek understanding of the various components of a woman's self-concept particularly in relation to power structures (Harding, 1993). Black feminist standpoint theory allows for this understanding to occur by seeking knowledge from each woman's unique perspective as a woman of colour in larger society. Black women can understand both the dominant and minority standpoints because of their position both inside and outside of the mainstream paradigm.

Some critics of feminist standpoint epistemology feel this theory does not examine closely enough the structures behind women's experiences. For instance, Gill (1998) argued for the understanding of the political definitions of feminist standpoints and how politics affects various women's constructions of truth. While my thesis does not delve deeply into the power and political structures for which this epistemology is employed, it offers a method of learning the truth about my research participants' understanding of themselves. By utilising this epistemology, I allow for my participants' own interpretations to be voiced within the framework of African American psychology. The production of their knowledge needs to be honoured in the context of their abroad experience; otherwise any interpretation of the development of their identity from the experience becomes muted.

1.2 The 'Truth' of Being Black

LeCompte and McLaughlin (1994) revealed the dilemma of the audience and how someone from power or privilege can arrogate the ability to research those people that might not have it. Yet they also stated that often the ultimate goal of research is empowerment of those very people with whom we work (p. 148). My own identification as a woman of colour, but outside the Black American identity may raise some questions. Parham et al. (1999) pointed out that researchers outside of African heritage do not necessarily have the correct mindset to examine the issues of Black self-concept. Yet one might also say that Parham et al. (1999) are only sharing one possible Africentric reality. While their reality is not invalid, does it make it the same reality for every other person of African descent? According to Parham et al.'s (1999) thinking, it does not. "When the theorizing is done about a cultural group other than the one to which the theorist belongs, the result is often the imposition of some form of cultural bias" (p. 85). While these claims may be true in many cases, again Parham et al. (1999) suggest that cross-cultural understanding is nigh impossible, or that cultural bias might not also occur *within* a cultural group, where one's mindset is assumed as the mindset for everyone else of a particular background. Presuming that a person must be within a certain culture to truly understand it creates a danger that any given person will always understand it simply because s/he is within that culture. It further suggests that those people from a certain background should not seek truth and understanding beyond their own.

Yet Obbo (1997) discussed the importance of researchers being able to reach beyond "territorial claims" of a community so that the researcher may learn about a

particular community or situation. Bhavnani (1990) pointed out that researchers outside a cultural group could produce theoretical notions that an insider might not see because of one's social difference from the group being examined. Nelson (1996) brought up the idea of *gradations of endogeny*, which suggests that even with sharing similar cultural reference points and perceptions of reality with one's research participants, researchers must practice 'a peculiar listening stillness that amplifies one's own idiocultural voice, in all its subtle variations' (p. 184). Regardless of the placement of the researcher we must be aware "of ways in which the researcher's identity unavoidably contributes to the kind and quality of the information we gather" (p. 184). I may not be African American or come from a similar socioeconomic background as some of my participants, but I identify as a U.S. American and female, like them. These shared similarities might instill in me certain assumptions about my participants that affect my analysis of them.

Parham et al. (1999) stated, "The theoretical and methodological demands for authenticating truth should be developed within culture and be consistent with that culture's worldview orientation, if it is to reveal truths to and about that culture" (p. 121). The issue for non-Western paradigms is that their epistemologies might not be verifiable by Eurocentric standards, allowing many researchers to question authenticity. Of course, Parham et al. (1999) went on to argue, "It is the responsibility of the African-American scholars to reject any system of ideology, theory, and methodology that proves itself to be antithetical to the sociocultural interest of the African community" (p. 123). But the question again arises of who exactly is responsible for deciding what is antithetical? While an African-centered methodological framework would help in the understanding of Black psychology, what guidelines must be set beforehand? With Black psychology in relative infancy as a field, how should non-Western paradigms be set, and are only certain people in a place to understand them? How do various influences of the African diaspora influence Africentric psychology?

2. My Positionality

Given my interest in working with marginalised groups and the examination of self-concept, it is important to position myself in relation to my participants. My ancestry stretches to Puerto Rico and the Cherokee Nation, though I am a phenotypical White U.S. American. I am a thirty-three-year-old heterosexual woman raised solidly within the middle class. As a child of two U.S. Army enlisted soldiers, I moved frequently growing up, living in two countries and over a dozen states. I was privileged to attend a

prestigious university as an undergraduate, though I incurred a lot of debt to do so. While an undergraduate, I re-encountered a passion of engaging with multiple cultures instilled in me as a child. To pursue this, I obtained a Master's degree in intercultural relations, where I began more closely examining wider questions of privilege, identity, and cross-cultural experiences. Now I find myself where many of my participants found themselves, as a student studying in a new country.

My professional career began in higher education where I worked directly with undergraduates and graduate students in a residential context. With a student affairs mission of enriching students' lives outside of the classroom, I used my education to help others grow interculturally, understanding not only others' backgrounds but also their own cultural identities. My work has also required me to act as a first-responder and counselor for students handling academic problems, family crises, and personal matters, including coming out as gay, mental health issues, domestic violence, peer deaths, and bullying. Professionally I have been involved with study abroad for four years when I switched my student affairs focus outside of the residential setting. However, with my background in student development, and my passion for identity self-awareness, my work in study abroad has focused on helping students make the most of their experiences inside and outside of the classroom.

3. Life Histories

The use of life history interviews can help develop a comprehensive picture of an individual by answering certain questions: Where do you come from? What has brought you to this space at this point in time? Research offers certain tools to construct this biography. Stake (1995) outlined how a case researcher can act as a biographer, obtaining the life history of a subject, usually within a contextual framework. The researcher should seek to "present people as complex creatures" (p. 97), due to the uniqueness and intricacy of each individual's experience.

Where does one begin to approach understanding the life history and study abroad experience of African American women? Penuel and Wertsch (1995) pointed out that there were two possibilities embraced by Western researchers: "Whereas many researchers [such as Erikson] have examined development as a process taking place within individuals, Vygotsky examined development as a process of transformation of individual functioning as various forms of social practice become internalized by individuals" (p. 84). They suggested an integrated approach to Erikson's and Vygotsky's

differing thoughts on identity formation, looking at something that takes into account the individual choices Erikson championed and Vygotsky's sociocultural approach. They argued that these two approaches should not be examined independent of one another, but in conjunction with each other in a *mediated-action approach*: "A sociocultural approach to identity formation considers these poles of sociocultural processes and individual functioning as interacting moments in human action, rather than as static processes that exist in isolation from one another" (p. 84). Thus understanding the evolution of an individual's self-concept requires a multifaceted strategy that takes into account various components. A person should not be confined into one way of knowing.

The use of life history as a research methodology offers a different means of obtaining 'truth.' Life history in the qualitative context allows for understanding of those individuals who are examined. Green-Powell (1997) noted, "[Qualitative research design] is ideal when the researcher is interested in seeking insight, discovery, and interpretation, rather than testing hypotheses" (p. 202). One of the objectives of this thesis is to understand the participants' lives and the role which study abroad plays in understanding their self-concept. Using life histories offers a means of reaching this aim.

In my research, I conducted a life story (also called 'oral history') interview with each participant prior to her departure. Life stories offer more than just the ability to obtain certain information from participants; it also can help the individual understand his or her own self-concept through the process of sharing one's life story (McAdams, 1990; Ochberg, 1992; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992; Atkinson, 1998, 2007; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Baddeley & Singer, 2007; Thomson, 2007; Merriam, 2009). These interviews not only gave me insight into these women before they embarked on studying abroad; they also gave these young women an opportunity to examine themselves in ways they might not have previously.

3.1 Constructing Black Life Histories

Some Black scholars consider the relationship between the researcher and the participant paramount (Etter-Lewis, 1993; Obbo, 1997; Vaz, 1997) when constructing a life history. While a completely objective reporting of a life history is almost impossible, the two people can collaborate in a way to construct a narration that encompasses the individual's life and experiences: "The final product of life history research is the result of dialogues between a narrator and a researcher. Each brings to the project differing agendas, worldviews, and dimensions of social power" (Vaz, 1997, p. 238). Participants are so immersed in their lives that the objectivity an outsider can bring to participants'

experiences, and knowledge of theory can offer insights about participants' lives to which they may be unaware. Therefore the perspectives of both the researcher and the participant can be utilised to arrive at a shared truth. And within an Africentric perspective, that truth might not be as quantifiable as some Eurocentric scholars might claim.

My motivation for this study, though I am an outsider to the group being examined, comes from my place as an advocate for empowerment of people often stifled by circumstance or societal structures. Gilroy (2004) stated, "Neither race nor racism are the exclusive historical property of the minorities who are their primary victims" (p. 16). The advancement of human rights has not been accomplished alone by members of an oppressed group, but often with the aid of outsiders, such as Viola Luizzo's and Anne Braden's support during the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. Patai (1994) stated that scholarship should not be solely at the hands of political activism, and that intellectual freedom cannot be hindered because independent thought is not politically correct. I hope to use my identities as a woman of privilege to examine the histories this thesis aims to unveil. As discussed earlier, I seek to understand the truth of these Black women's experience by immersing myself in their histories through their perspectives, while bringing my own insights into the process of constructing those histories.

3.2 Life Histories of Minority Ethnic Communities

Atkinson (1998) maintained life stories allow for marginalised voices to be heard within their own cultural norms, reasoning, "What may be of greatest interest in the life story is how people see themselves and how they want others to see them" (p. 20). With my focus on a specific minority ethnic group, my oral history interviews allowed these participants to share their narratives from their unique perspectives. This process honours individuals' stories while also obtaining perceptions on self-concept. The participants could share as much or as little as they wanted, which gave me further insight into their perceptions of the research process and me as an interlocutor in their lives. My hope was to create a researcher-participant relationship that fostered trust in the process and myself that carried into the rest of the data collection period.

The literature into doing oral histories specifically on marginalised women has developed over the past few decades. More researchers are interested not only in the stories that these women have to share, but also how these women share their lives. Brown (1997) wrote:

“Oral history is a valuable tool for stimulating interest and motivating students to do research and learn of past and present accomplishments of black women. Through this medium, knowledge can be expanded by recording and highlighting the changes that took place and discovering what did and did not work in the lives of these black women. In addition, one can discover how women viewed themselves and how this view affected the choices they made” (p. 83).

With the emphasis of this thesis on how a specific event (study abroad) affects the lives and self-concept of the research participants, life histories offer a powerful method to understand these women.

Efforts to overcome the large hurdle of masculine norms have been shifting the perspective of how researchers understand Black women. Hambrick (1997) asserted, “Historically, life experiences were talked about in terms of male structures. These structures were thought to be the epitome of human existence” (p. 66). With male perspectives dominating most modern civilizations, people have accepted that those perspectives are the standard. Obbo (1997) stated, “Even in societies where women’s public discussion is not restricted, men still assert their mastery over cultural knowledge on public occasions” (pg. 45). The same could be argued for White and Black discussion in the public discourse.

Vaz (1992, 1997) discussed *received knowledge* or the “taken-for-granted categories and interpretations that have been produced... by a community of experts, predominantly white men, who engage in a process of validating each other’s knowledge” (1997, p. 225). She noted that an issue with this tradition is that the information one obtains is free from judgment. That tradition, she continued, has often led the White knowledge base to be the standard for all understanding and further reflections to build upon. Thus Black women face misunderstanding on both the levels of their gender *and* their race. As will be discussed later in this chapter, this thesis uses African American psychological theory outlined in the last chapter to avoid this *received knowledge*.

Etter-Lewis (1996a) delved into the process of examining women of colour’s lives through life histories, and the complexities involved. She noted, “Traditionally, it has been convenient for researchers and educators alike to regard women as an undifferentiated collective” (p. 1). She goes further to illustrate that the ‘universalism’ that has been hoisted on the population is in fact a European cultural imperialism that diminishes those individuals who do not fall within this cultural paradigm. “Denial and ignorance establish a comfort zone or buffer that allows the cycle of neglect to continue” (p. 2). As researchers, we cannot allow ourselves to fall into this trap of looking through

our Eurocentric and male-dominated lenses. Being open to other ways of knowing might be foreign and uncomfortable, but as researchers we must be the ones to adjust. We should not expect to understand our research participants within our own cultural perceptions and paradigms, as this does an injustice to those individuals that we seek to truly understand.

For African Americans, the sharing of life histories goes beyond stating chronological events. Since much of African history has been transmitted orally, the importance of this oral tradition has permeated throughout the generations. Slaves used stories to report accomplishments of others and these have been passed to present-day researchers who collect African American life histories. Etter-Lewis (1996b) stated, “African Americans have persisted in articulating their life histories within and outside their communities” (p. 169). Life histories have been a way to share truths and insights about the world learned through one’s life experiences. “African American oral family histories are significant because of their sociohistorical content, but also because of their function as a means of establishing group solidarity” (Etter-Lewis, 1996b, p. 171). Phoenix (2008) argued the importance of recognising how these narratives unfold, looking at not only the events being shared, but also how the telling of these events unveils deeper aspects of a person’s life beyond just the actual vignettes. Africentric psychology hypothesises that African Americans can better understand themselves within the context of the collective, and life histories offer an avenue for that understanding by taking into consideration these various levels of a narrative.

The crossing of intersectionality with narrative constructivism seems not only natural, but also necessary. As Ludvig (2006) wrote, the complexity of any person means “the list of differences is endless and even seemingly indefinite” (p. 246), so in hopes of reaching any modicum of ‘truth’ means, researchers must seek to know the entire individual and understand her within her own contexts. Prins (2006) noted how these multiple constructs also have the influence of the social spheres in which everyone is a part, whether willingly or unwillingly. With so many aspects of one’s self interacting in a multitude of ways in certain settings (for my participants both in their home and host countries), trying to obtain the most complete picture possible can only help with getting as close to the ‘truth’ as possible. As Buitelaar (2006) wrote, “Analysis is done in terms of dialogues between various voices within the self, each one embedded in field-specific repertoires of practices, characters and discourses informed by specific power relations.

It allows the exploration of how particular identifications are always co-constructed with other categories of identity” (pp. 272-273).

The research into Black women’s oral narratives opens exciting opportunities for analysis. Over the past few decades, researchers have sought to understand these women’s stories, and not necessarily with the aim of developing theory or making generalisations. Hambrick (1997) wrote about her own use of a small sample size of Black female inventors, stating that the project was an opportunity to hear personal stories with analyses that looked for themes within the context of just those stories, not to be generalised to the masses. Green-Powell (1997), who examined Black female school principals in Florida, noted with her own qualitative case study of six women, “The primary aim. . . is to gain an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon or specific phenomena, rather than to generalize or state what is generally true across populations” (p. 205). She went on, “Conclusions apply, therefore, solely to the group investigated in this particular case” (p. 214). While I do hope that this research might begin to offer some insight into Black students and study abroad, I do recognise that foremost this thesis aims to comprehend these five participants’ study abroad experience, and that I seek this understanding within the Africentric context.

As suggested earlier, Hambrick (1997) explained, “Story in the black community is important. Here we can recollect and renew ourselves and our creative genius” (p. 66). The use of narrative enables African Americans to build their own understanding of themselves, even as they share it with others. However, Peterson (1997) cautioned that each narrative must be put within its own context and not within paradigmatic portrayals:

“The stereotype of the strong-willed black woman has been a double-edged sword. If used as a compliment, it is, in fact, recognizing the resilience, the fortitude of character that many black women seem to possess. But often it has been used to depict a ‘super’ woman who can make it on her own, who does not need the same kind of nurturing and support that other ‘more feminine’ women need” (p. 157).

Each story must be allowed to unfold within its own right. Placing a woman into this archetype takes away from the individuality of the person and her experiences. Etter-Lewis (1996b) noted that African American women tend to center their narratives around character traits rather than episodes about past events (p. 174). Being aware of tendencies, but also honouring the stories that each woman has (and how she tells it) is imperative to drawing an accurate picture of that individual and her self-concept.

4. Case Study

My research consists of five life history case studies of university students who studied abroad in the 2011-2012 academic year. The purpose of following only a few participants is to allow for in-depth understanding of the students' experiences. Lincoln and Guba (2000), Yin (2009), and Stake (1995) explained that case studies are not done to understand other cases, but instead to understand the particular case under scrutiny: "We want to appreciate the uniqueness and complexity of [the case], its embeddedness and interaction with its contexts" (Stake, 1995, p. 16). Thus the 'unit of analysis,' as Yin (2009) termed it, will be each participant, as I seek to understand each individual, her study abroad experience, and its impact. Gitlin and Russell (1994) stated the importance that both the researcher and participant "are united by the quest to examine the topic at hand. . . . [and] to scrutinize normative 'truths' that are embedded in a specific historical and cultural context" (p. 185). My goal throughout the data collection process is to create an atmosphere of trust with participant-driven methods where the students and I can discover together the answers to my thesis's questions.

Equally important for the reasoning behind this data collection method is the constant appeal from Africentric psychologists: the need for proper methodology when examining different cultural groups (Myers, 1992; Parham et al, 1999). For instance, Belgrave and Allison (2010) stated, "According to Africentric scholars, self-knowledge is the most important type of knowledge and is the basis for all knowledge. Self-knowledge then is more important than knowledge that is acquired from the external environment" (p. 9). Therefore, using a typical psychological experiment might not be the best methodology for gaining knowledge about Black people, but instead focusing on personal interviews for data collection (Carruthers, 1996; Semaj, 1996; Kambon, 1998). The reasoning is: "Self knowledge is derived from asking people about themselves, not from observing them under experimental conditions" (Belgrave & Allison, 2010, p. 23).

I aspire to showcase the intricacy of these students' lives and grasp the role that study abroad played in their life experience and self-understanding. In order to build a comprehensive picture, several data collection techniques were employed to understand the participants' life histories. Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007) explained that using several methods allows for greater breadth of understanding and corroboration of findings (p. 122). This thesis utilises life history as a means to understand these participants' self concept in relation to their study abroad experience, with interviews and

participants' field texts while they studied abroad. Each of these methods will be discussed in greater detail later in this section. I turn to the participants of this research.

4.1 Research Participants

The participants of this research are five U.S. American females between the ages of 20 and 22 during data collection. They were all enrolled full-time in a four-year U.S. college or university. The participants personally identified as someone of African descent whether they choose to call themselves African American, Black American, or something else. Each participant took part in a study abroad programme in the 2011-2012 academic year at a higher education institution outside of the United States, either for one semester or for the entire academic year.

Sampling was purposive and convenient as potential participants met certain characteristics for the research as outlined above. I used professional contacts in the field of study abroad as gatekeepers to help identify participants, by contacting U.S. colleges' and universities' study abroad programs. (See Appendices A and B for the letters of solicitation sent to study abroad offices and students, respectively.) The HEIs did not select whom to contact, but instead sent my letter of introduction to their entire outgoing study abroad participants who then self-selected to contact me with their interest in participating. Universities from different areas and demographics were targeted for participant identification. These HEIs included privately-funded institutions with various enrollment sizes and locations in the Northeast varying from small towns to large cities. Several public state-funded universities from around the U.S. were also solicited for participants. The final group was HBCUs based in the South. With such a small percentage of Black students studying abroad annually, I solicited for contextual diversity to increase the number of initial participants. Of the thirty-plus different colleges and universities contacted, ten schools agreed to forward my letter of introduction to their students. Of those HEIs, five had students respond to my request. Eight students total responded, though the two from an HBCU had to withdraw not meeting all of the criteria, and one of the students withdrew being unable to set up an interview before departure. Goodson and Sikes (2001) noted, "Research samples for life history research are usually quite small" (p. 22). Since life histories are a part of the methodology to be used, this small number of case studies creates a meaningful group with which to answer the research questions. Since I analyse each participant in her own chapter, I use more description there. See Figure 5 regarding this study's participants and their characteristics.

	Mia	Tasha	Vanessa	Taylor	Rhonda
Home Region	NE US	NE & Southern US	Southern US	Southern US	NE US
Generation and Ethnicity	First-generation Haitian American	Multi-generation Black American	Multi-generation Black American	Multi-generation Black American	First-generation (Nigerian) American
Type of University	Large rural state university	Large urban state university	Large urban state university	Large urban state university	Ivy League university
Subject Area	Communication Disorders	Applied Linguistics	International Business	Economics	French
Study Abroad Location	Florence, Italy	Tokyo, Japan	Seoul, South Korea	Venice, Italy	Paris, France

Figure 5. Research Participants

4.2 Interviews

Interviews allow for researchers to gather unobservable information and discover the unique experiences of those interviewed (Yin, 2009). This thesis had each participant taking part in two interviews each. The first interview occurred from one day to three weeks prior to participants' departure to their abroad destination to obtain life stories and assess their thoughts on their self-concept. This interview lasted approximately one and a half to three hours. Both Vanessa and Rhonda's interviews were in a meeting room of a public library. Taylor's interview took place in her home, while I interviewed both Mia and Tasha at a café which was not preferable due to background noise. I will briefly examine the structure of life story interviews and their context within this research. I used my computer to record these interviews for later transcription. See Appendix C for the questions used to guide the pre-departure interview.

The route for obtaining oral history might be a strict formal interview with set questions, but other styles might include a semi-formal interview or conversational process which allow for more flexibility in finding answers and getting experiences from subjects (Merriam, 2009). Etter-Lewis (1996a) stated that the method of information elicitation might differ depending on the participant: "Efforts to adapt interview methods to the needs of the informant are neither consistent nor widespread" (pp. 8-9). As each individual is unique, so is the style of the interview. The participants all responded more to a conversational style, but few required more prompting than others. Some would weave elaborate stories (e.g. Mia) while others wanted to ensure that they answered the

question asked (e.g. Taylor). As the interviewer, I had to respond to the specific personality of the participant and how they perceived the interview and its progression.

I invited participants to bring visual artifacts to their interviews to begin the process of exploring their biographies, including their family life, education, and defining events. With the artifacts, family stories may also grow, so that insight into a participant's narrative in relation to his or her family evolves. The use of visual artifacts in life history interviews can help shed light on stories by directing interviews, sharpening memory, and drawing out participants (Collier, 1967; Walker & Kimball Moulton, 1989; Cronin, 1998; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Bach, 2007). Collier (1967) took an anthropological approach to photography in his research and, though dated, shows how this tool helps foster a positive environment where information can be gathered, by reducing the stress of participants as they can concentrate on the pictures instead of worrying about being the object of discussion. Bach (2007) agreed, "Having conversations with photographs may bridge psychological and physical realities for participants and researchers.... [by] building trust and rapport for self as a researcher working with participants" (p. 290), maintaining that this method allows for the research to become a collaborative process. Some of the issues with my artifact-elicitation include that participants get to self-select the images they bring to the discussion, and that their interpretations of photographs may indicate a distorted self-image (Cronin, 1998). However, since my questions hope to understand participants' self-concept, students' presentations of themselves through their visual artifacts allowed me better to understand those self-concepts. Only one participant (Tasha) brought photographs to her pre-departure interview.

I also conducted semi-structured interviews approximately one month (Rhonda and Tasha) to three months (Mia, Vanessa, and Taylor) after repatriation to gauge participants' views on their experience and the evolution of their self-concept. These interviews lasted one and a half to two and a half hours, and I conducted them at the participants' home university, either in the campus library (Mia, Taylor, Tasha, and Rhonda) or classroom (Vanessa). The hope was to allow participants time to settle back into their lives in the U.S. and reflect on their experiences overseas. The main goals of the post-interview was to debrief the event, review field texts as necessary (discussed below), and gauge each participant's self-concept after her experience. These interviews allowed me to delve into each participant's thoughts and ideas regarding herself, her life, and how study abroad impacted her. See Appendix D for repatriation interview guidance questions.

4.3 *Field Texts*

Thus far I have described my methods for gathering data regarding participants pre- and post-departure. While this data provided rich information about the students, their background, and self-concept, my research questions also seek to understand what occurs *during* the abroad experience that act as significant moments in participants understanding their self-concept. Yin (2009) stated, “Documents play an explicit role in any data collection in doing case studies” (p. 103). For this reason, I collected data through different field texts generated by the students themselves, mostly as journals or letters.

Simons (2009) contended that non-face-to-face interviews allow subjects time to reflect more deeply on their experiences. My use of field texts allowed participants to contemplate their abroad encounters in their own time, and write about it. The field texts focused on their initial experience, abroad events, understanding of others, and understanding of self. Questions guided their field text submissions, with specific questions being asked every month, as well as any follow-up questions to what they may have written about the previous month. See Appendix E for the standard questions asked for the field texts.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted that letter writing formats allow participants to give a personal account, make meaning of their experience, and the experience of others. Letters allow for a personal, conversational tone to be taken about topics covered (pp. 106-107). Students might share the initial impressions, critical moments, or travel occurrences that capture their experience and insight. Taylor wrote her field texts as letters to me, and they were often vivid in their description of her experience and thoughts on her experience.

Participants and I determined in the initial interview which method would best capture their experience, as some may be more inclined to one over another, or have easier ability to execute a specific one. For example, a participant might not have regular access to the Internet, so blogging might not be the best option. Participants were asked to write at least every month in one of the mediums available, and make these entries available to the researcher within another two weeks, though all participants were encouraged to write more often if they had something to share. As mentioned earlier, my goal was to create an atmosphere where participants felt they could be open and honest with me about their experiences in their field texts. All the participants chose email correspondence as their preferred method of submitting field texts. They all sent in their

entries in a (mostly) timely manner, though because of the busyness of the final weeks abroad or perhaps a lack of motivation while finishing their time abroad, all were tardy in their final entries and submitted them after repatriating to the United States. For a complete timeline of the data collection, see Figure 6.

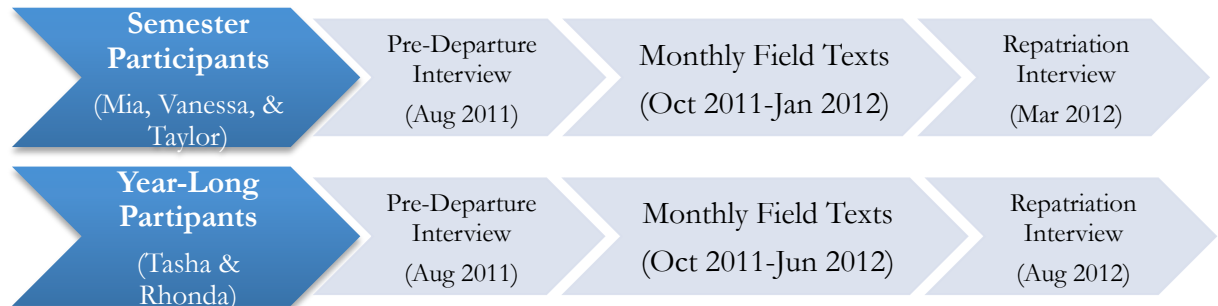


Figure 6. Data Collection Timeline

The field texts themselves started out differently for each woman but became more uniform for all of the participants throughout the course of the study. I contacted participants on the day of the month that they arrived in their host country requesting their field texts. For example, Tasha arrived in Tokyo on the 17th, so I always contacted her on the 17th of each month. As mentioned earlier, all the participants were asked uniform questions regarding their experience, but additional questions were also asked regarding responses from the previous month. Since I had specific aspects of identity that I wanted to examine (e.g. religion, gender, race) as well as trying to immerse myself in their experience from afar, I tried to garner as much detail as possible from each woman's day-to-day life and thoughts about her host country. See Appendix F for examples of different field text responses and supplementary questions.

My third research question asks, "What specific factors in these students' study abroad experience affect how they reflect upon their various identities?" These field texts informed a large part of the analysis in order to answer this question. I could put into detailed contexts how studying abroad was influencing the participants' identity components. I could distinguish specific themes that were central to the women's identities. For instance, Rhonda showed her need for a religious support group, while Vanessa highlighted her feelings of Otherness in public. Therefore each participant's field texts allowed for the important factor often missing in previous study abroad research regarding the actual events (and the students' reflections on them) transpiring that makes study abroad so impactful.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) outlined the importance field texts play in creating a narrative inquiry; they allow the researcher to move between intimacy with participants

and a reflective stance on the questions. They explained that interwoven field texts can create an intricate picture of answers to questions being asked by the researcher. For this reason, many of the questions from the repatriation interview were drawn from what participants shared in their field texts, in order to clarify and build on how participants experienced and interpreted their time abroad. Additionally, I hoped that referencing events mentioned in the field texts a few months after they occurred would give the women time to reflect and integrate what those instances meant to them in the context of their self-understanding.

5. Analysis and Interpretation

I used different but complementary methods for the interpretation of the data collected. McCall (2005) discussed the various analysis techniques used with intersectional research, and mine focuses on the intra-categorical complexity approach. Yin (2009) outlined five analytical techniques for case studies, including pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case synthesis. This thesis focuses on explanation building, time-series analysis, and cross-case synthesis through an intra-categorical complexity approach defined through the lens of Africentric theory. I examine each of these and then how I account for rigour and authenticity in my research.

5.1 Analysis Methods

McCall (2005) discussed the appeal of using case study research when examining the complexity of intragroup differences, as it allowed the researcher to more closely examine the diversity within a selected intersection of identities. Explanation building is a more advanced form of pattern matching where the researcher can look for associations within a phenomenon (Yin, 2009, p. 141). Looking for relationships between different abroad experiences and thoughts about self-concept, I seek to understand if and how the two are linked. Stake (1995) discussed the use of direct interpretation and categorical aggregation for case study analysis, where the researcher uses a direct instance to explain something or uses several instances to draw a conclusion, respectively: “Our primary task is to understand the case. It will help us to tease out relationships, to probe issues, and to aggregate categorical data, but those ends are subordinate to understanding the case” (p. 77). The intersectional analysis approach of intracategorical complexity allows the researcher to “focus on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection...in

order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups” (McCall, 2005, p. 1774).

Using the theoretical framework discussed earlier, I see if events affect how different participants understand themselves in the context of Africentric psychology, and the identity structures discussed that are key to Black women’s self-concept, as outlined in the previous chapter. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argued that narrative inquiry can be difficult when it comes to analysis, with a plethora of information. However, using interpretive-analytical considerations, the researcher can make sense of the data and can begin to put it in contexts of research literature. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that qualitative analysis for case studies should include 1) *data reduction*, selecting and summarising the copious amounts of data collected into a workable, coherent form, 2) *data display*, producing logical means of presenting the data, and 3) *conclusion drawing and verification*, placing the data in context and assuring that it is both valid and reliable. They went on to list several ways that meaning can be generated from qualitative data, which are used in this thesis during data analysis, such as noting patterns, logging key events, noting relationships between variables, and building a logical chain of evidence. All of these analytical methods are employed to understand the case studies in relation to the research questions.

Because of the time-sensitive nature for answering my research questions (i.e. how a specific event in the participants’ lives affects their self-concept), time-series analysis must also be considered. I aim to understand any shifts in individuals over a certain timeframe and place, with my theoretical framework in mind. I look for shifts caused by the time spent abroad and how that factor affects my participants’ self-concept in relation to the assorted elements I identified as important to Black women’s identity.

Richards (2009) discussed how the analysis of qualitative data can seem a monumental task, noting, “[The records] have to be generous enough to show the complexity and context of the stories or accounts of behaviour you are gathering” (p. 56). Yet when it comes to the analysis of life histories, Etter-Lewis (1993) commented:

“Content alone cannot reveal all of the information present in an oral narrative. It is equally important to look at the structure of a narrative. The very words and phrases selected by a narrator give a distinct shape and meaning to her story” (p. 83).

She seems to advocate for a discourse analysis, but wants even more thoughtful scrutiny to occur to reach the truth: “On a macro level or the level of the whole [narrative] text, several variables must be considered such as story structure, narrative style, and

suppressed discourse. Each of these variables influences the whole text in distinctly different ways” (Etter-Lewis, 1993, p. 177). She continued with the White, Eurocentric tendency to report stories chronologically, even though many cultures will share recollection outside a linear timeframe. “The final text contains a complexity of live events and crises woven into a multifaceted whole, shifting between past and present” (p. 178).

I underwent a process in developing the actual analysis that appears in this thesis. With an initial intention of allowing the data to speak for itself, I composed a descriptive account of Vanessa’s life story and her experience studying abroad, using broad categories of character, education & professional development, identity, and relationships. These categories in turn had sub-categories for further dissection of her experiences and attitudes. (See Appendix G for an example of the descriptive analysis coding.) The analysis gave Vanessa a distinct voice as she described herself within the context of these various categories, using the story structure advocated by Etter-Lewis (1993). However, the sheer quantity of data created a fifteen thousand-word examination without viewing her from any specific perspective, except how the reader might choose to interpret her.

Given the length limitations of this thesis and the research aim to utilise a culturally appropriate analysis technique, I reworked Vanessa’s analysis by choosing to focus on the data within the specific contexts of the theoretical frameworks outlined in the previous chapter. With the copious amount of information, I present each case study through the lens of these theories; I reference the vignettes and insights from the participants’ interviews and field texts.

For this reason, my analysis strives to understand my participants’ experiences within the context of their oral histories. With this and Africentric and intersectional theory in mind, I used the recordings, transcripts, and field notes from my participants to distinguishing the major themes emerging from the data. Identifying stories, ideas, and insights that the women reported, I structured my analysis around how these women framed their experiences within African American psychology and Black feminist theory. However, I also sought to put my participants’ voices before theoretical standpoints so as not to demand that these women must fit into preconceived notions of experience.

Even the creation of themes for data analysis and interpretation causes some disagreement. Richards (2009) stated:

“The researcher discovers themes, or threads in the data, by good exploration, good enquiry. By handling the data records sensitively,

managing them carefully and exploring them skillfully, the researcher ‘emerges’ ideas, categories, concepts, themes, hunches, and ways of relating them” (p. 74).

Yet Etter-Lewis (1993) contended:

“Separating an oral narrative into various components can be problematic in that the totality of a text is rarely the sum of its parts.... [Each component of analysis] can uncover numerous and different shades of meaning submerged in the social fabric of a text” (p. 185).

A balance must then be struck. The categorical aggregation advocated by Stake (1995) might appear too Eurocentric from the Africentric standpoint, but using Africentric theory through which to understand the truths of my participants seems a reasonable avenue for analysis. The richness of the data provided by these five young women offers in-depth understanding through the lenses of Africentric perspective outlined previously.

5.2 Rigour and Authenticity

It is important to ensure the information I collected was analysed accurately and appropriately. I utilised member checking to assure the authenticity of the analysis. Stake (1995) defined ‘member checking’ as the process of allowing subjects to review information written about them to check for accuracy (p. 115). Each participant verified my analysis of her case study. If discrepancies were found between my interpretation and theirs, steps were taken to ensure that the proper meanings are articulated. Yin (2009) supported the use of multiple sources of evidence in order to triangulate data and ensure that the information gathered and the conclusions drawn are more convincing and accurate. Besides assembling a more vivid picture, this ability to triangulate data shows another reason why multiple data collection methods are being used within each case study.

For academic rigour, Yin’s (2009) suggestion is “to make as many steps as operational as possible” (p. 45) so other researchers cannot doubt the research’s structure and findings. One technique for accomplishing this is maintaining a transparent chain of evidence; having the ability to show directly from where statements, incidents, and ideas are pulled to substantiate the findings. And while generalisation is not a goal of case studies, Stake (1995, 2000) asserted that modifications in generalisations may occur based on the findings as readers often find others’ experience to be the basis for generalisability. This thesis does not seek to understand the identity evolution of all Black students who study abroad; it seeks to understand the histories and processes of the

participants examined in this research, as an illustration of the kinds of experiences that other students might have.

6. Ethical Issues

My research seeks to understand intimate aspects of a student, from their life story to how they understand their core selves. Merriam (2009), Yin (2009), and Simons (2009) outlined the importance of ethical behavior in the case study process, especially so “participants [do] not feel let down, ‘at risk’, or disempowered” (Simons, 2009, p. 97). Respecting the subjects’ rights becomes paramount. To ensure these goals, I laid out several safeguards to assure my research meets ethical standards. My study received ethical approval by the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge.

All participants received and signed an informed consent form that laid out the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the research, as well as protection of data and who owns and has access to it. (See Appendix H.) All information regarding subjects’ identities is confidential and anonymised, and participants could opt out at any time without penalty. As the researcher, I had access to all the data in password-protected files; my supervisor had access to information in forms of various drafts, though all subjects remained anonymous to everyone but me. These students’ home universities are not identified beyond certain demographic information, though the students’ host universities are identified by name to put in specific context.

Each academic year participant received \$100, and each semester participant \$75, for costs incurred from participating in this study. Because of the research’s correspondence nature, this benefit compensated students for expenses such as transportation, journals, or Internet usage required to contact me. Money was paid at the conclusion of the follow-up interview.

Because my research questions ask students to be self-aware and reflective, they also had an opportunity to more deeply understand their study abroad experience than if they were not participating, as they considered their history, identity, and how studying abroad interplayed with the two. Of course, delving into their self-concept could be seen as a potential psychological harm, as students might have to face aspects of themselves and their lives that they have not considered before. As stated earlier, participants were free to withdraw at any time, or were free to decline answering any question. Vanessa declined to answer a question about her early childhood but otherwise all of the participants were very open about their lives and opinions. In addition, at the initial

interview and throughout the data collection phase, I provided all participants with the contact information for their universities' counseling services which are offered free of charge and can support students if they feel the need to speak with a professional regarding anything that may have been brought up through the research process. At the final interview, participants were debriefed about their experience as a research participant, and I reminded them of university counseling resources available to them. For instance, when Rhonda disclosed to me about a specific incident that occurred during her time in Paris, I reminded her of her options should she choose to discuss it with a professional.

My own background as a student affairs professional was also of relevance, as I do have a background in counselling. However, my role in this study is that of the researcher, and I utilised my supervisor to ensure that I stayed within the territory of researcher and not counselor. Mostly this research offered little opportunity for harm (physical, psychological, or emotional) to befall participants, and no participant had any obligation to complete this project.

I am also aware how culture plays into people's self-understanding. Andrews (2007) remarked on the importance of honouring the different cultures being voiced. While all the participants were U.S. citizens, they do not all come from the same place, and I had to remain cognizant of that fact. The researcher might often look at data through his or her own cultural lens, which might affect the truthfulness of any findings. For this reason, I have made visible my own background and my analyses were checked with participants to ascertain that I have not misinterpreted what was actually experienced.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that researchers using narrative inquiry, "owe [their] care to compose a text that does not rupture life stories that sustain them. But as researchers, [they] also owe [their] care and responsibility to a larger audience" (pp. 173-174). I balanced these responsibilities so participants' truths may be articulated, while allowing my research questions to be answered honestly and efficiently.

Researchers like Jackson (1998) have argued that collection of such narratives do not always allow the attainment of these objectives given a dilution of first the individuals' self-selection of what to report, and then the researcher's own biases with her interpretation. I do not necessarily dispute these concerns. The methodology of this thesis seeks to understand the participants' experience of study abroad in a particular context. As Jackson herself noted, "Narratives entail processes of representation,

interpretation and reconstruction” (p. 49). By laying bare my own positionality as well as the purposefully-chosen theoretical constructs, I hope to allow the reader to understand that the truth presented here is subjective for both the participants and for me. These frameworks act as a guide to enable me best to honour these participants’ experiences in the way I feel will get me closest to the ‘truth’ of my research questions.

In this chapter, I inspected the methodology used in this thesis. I use a life history case study format to understand each of the participants, whose criteria were outlined. I discussed the data collection methods used for these case studies, including interviews and field texts. The plan for data analysis and interpretation was presented, and I closed the chapter with ethical issues I have considered for this research.

Chapter VII. Mia: Florence, Italy

“I’m more than [just an American].”

Mia is a first-generation Haitian American woman who lives outside a major city in the northeastern United States. Before she went abroad, she was twenty years old attending a large state research university in a rural setting about two hours from her hometown. A petite woman, she studied Communication Disorders for her degree. The advancement of Mia’s understanding of her identity following her time in Florence, Italy indicates the potent impact of study abroad on this understanding. I examine the evolution of different aspects of her self-concept, including racial, gender, and academic identity from this time abroad.

1. Race

Mia’s understanding of her racial identity shows the complexity that comes from being a first-generation U.S. American. With her parents emigrating from Haiti, her self-conceptualisation is built upon her understanding of what it means to be U.S. American, Haitian, and first-generation, and how (at times) that can place her outside of even mainstream Black America. I examine her family and nationality in relation to her racial self-concept, and how her experience as an abroad student in Florence contributed to this understanding.

1.1 Race and Family

Her parents’ largest gift to Mia as she grew up was their trust: “They respect my independence and they encourage it.” They supported Mia to make mistakes and grow from them. Belgrave and Allison (2010) noted that this encouragement is the norm among many African American families: “African American parents are more likely than White parents to value and stress autonomy among their children” (p. 147). Black children, therefore, tend to be socialised to function more independently. This encouragement might seem contradictory to the collectivist nature emphasised by Africentric theory. However, it does not mean that the group is less important, but that independent exploration allows for Black individuals to be better prepared for independent problem-solving and societal structures. Collins (2000) explained, “The conceptualization of self that has been part of Black women’s self-definitions is distinctive. Self is not defined as the increased autonomy gained by separating oneself

from others. Instead, self is found in the context of family and community” (p. 113). Trust given to children offers them the opportunity to find their own voices and understand their place within the larger community. It is about empowering a new generation toward self-reliance instead of following blindly.

The trust Mia received from her parents better prepared her for her experiences in Florence and her travels throughout Europe. Because she was supported to try new things on her own and not be discouraged by setbacks, she faced the challenges of being abroad with the confidence that she could negotiate her way through them. In a field text, she noted, “Despite all the traveling stress, which added to the experience, it was the one of greatest additions to my life accomplishments.” Mia reflected upon repatriation that she felt her independence expand while abroad. She controlled her life, making decisions for herself and having to accept the consequences of those decisions. “I have always claimed that I am an independent being, but being in Italy has reiterated that statement to a whole other level.” Mia was challenged in new and various ways, and it was her parents’ trust that gave her the confidence she needed to grow in that independence. She felt she could travel by herself around Europe, and navigate different cultures.

When her parents first immigrated, Mia’s family would be considered members of the lower-middle class. Her parents made certain sacrifices to allow her to attend dance classes and the like, but her father and mother worked long hours to provide for the family. Miller (1992) wrote about the *trickle-up effect*, which she defined as “a progression of increased socioeconomic status through generations” (p. 107). She stated that the reasons for this effect could be found in the social support that Black women receive, usually in regards to the family network structure, which allow them to have higher self-esteem and trust levels that can help them navigate through more negative life events. Mia’s mother came from a large family where Mia’s grandmother struggled to support eight children in an impoverished country. Currently Mia’s family falls into the upper middle class, which Mia attributes to her mother putting herself through school to obtain an advanced nursing degree. In turn, Mia’s mother was able to obtain that degree because of the support of the extended and fictive kin of their family. The mantra of work hard was a constant message for Mia as she grew up, both in words and the actions of her parents. Families can have a powerful effect on how people understand the intersections of their socioeconomic class with their racial identity.

Fictive kin and extended family perform an important role in Mia's self-concept. Belgrave and Allison (2010) and Parham et al. (1999) described how African American families often have family and or close friends taking on varying roles in the raising of a child, like other collectivist cultures (e.g. many Asian cultures). Mia's childhood was no exception, being surrounded by family that might not have been blood-related: "Usually, when you say aunts, half the time you call them 'aunt' and they're probably not really your aunt." Older cousins would take on the role of mother throughout the generations. Along with her parents, the rest of Mia's family influenced how she understood herself as a first-generation Haitian American. These additional family members would at times take up residence with her nuclear family, adding to message enforcement. Even with their wide geographic dispersion across three countries, they all conveyed to Mia that she should strive toward success and independence, while remembering that she has obligations toward her family and community. The trickle-up effect and the fictive kin and extended family have grounded Mia, enabling her to have the confidence to better herself academically so that she might succeed financially.

Mia also did what many of her family members did for her by taking on a "half-parent" role for her little brother Colin, six years her junior. She stated plainly, "My brother is my responsibility." When asked why she took on this role of keeping up with her brother's academic work and at times giving consequences for not achieving goals, she said, "I don't know. It's love. Responsibility. I have no choice." Mia does not appear to question or protest fulfilling this parental role, but rather, accepts it as a normative feature of her family structure. When she discussed Colin, she spoke both as a big sister would (for example, noting his annoying tendencies) but also as a mother would (for example, highlighting his potential and strengths). The flexible family roles discussed by Parham et al. (1999) are illustrated in Mia's variable relationship with her brother.

Upon her return from Florence, Mia saw how Colin continued to struggle with school, even though he had the goal of attending university. She said she made it clear to him how studying abroad should be a part of his education: "He knows [he needs to have a study abroad experience]." She also saw how, through his failures, he was learning about life choices. Much like their parents' push for her independence during her childhood, Mia acknowledged that Colin has a different pathway for personal growth. "We grew up a different way; I don't care what anyone says. But you know, those six years somewhere- something was different down the line. But I think he is going to get it. He's getting it." Mia's time in Italy allowed for this acceptance of growth. Prior to her

departure, she indicated slight bitterness about being treated differently as the elder sibling. The differences in sibling roles which she saw in Italy allowed her to put in perspective these variant childhoods.

For Mia, family (whether real or fictive) is about respect and keeping those connections strong, a mantra she received from her mother. “You keep close to the family,” she said in her initial interview. And her experience abroad in Italy reminded her that she has obligations to that family. Belgrave et al. (1992) noted that Black achievers often recognise and honour those people in their lives who helped them to excel. After repatriation Mia made it clear that she would not have had the experience she did without copious support from her various family members. They were the ones who aided her in not only getting to Italy, but also giving her the psychological and emotional tools to get the most out of her experience.

1.2 Race and Nationality

Several researchers (Parham et al., 1999; Coard & Sellers, 2005; Brown, 2008; Neblett et al., 2008; Cokley & Chapman, 2009) discussed how familial influence shapes a person’s understanding of his or her racial identity in relation to being U.S. American. Interestingly for Mia, this understanding comes differently for her as a first-generation U.S. American compared to multi-generation U.S. Americans. Her parents emigrated from Haiti as adults, and thus have a different understanding of what it means to be U.S. American than she does (Parekh, 2007). She does not consider herself Black or African American, but labeled herself in her initial interview as Haitian American. “I don’t really like to say I’m Black because it’s like, my skin is technically not black. It’s actually brown. And then, I’m not African American because.... I don’t know relatives who were slaves, who are slaves and anything like that.”

Being a first-generation U.S. citizen has specific meaning for Mia. “We [first-generation children] grow up on the morals and the basis of our parents coming there.... As first [generation] kids, we have to figure it out.” Identifying as a U.S. American is based on the lessons of her parents, as well as the influence of the United States. It is about striving for the American dream: “I’m able to be who I am at least and look for opportunity.” Mia has negotiated this aspect of her identity without many of the traditional methods available to multi-generational U.S. Americans who carry the history of being U.S. American from generation to generation. With her parents having a different national history from which they draw, Mia received those messages as well as

U.S. American messages through school, media, and other sources; she in turn had to shape all of these into her own unique understanding of what being a U.S. American means to her.

Interestingly, upon her repatriation, Mia focused on a different aspect of being Haitian American beyond being first-generation and crafting her identity from that. Instead, she mentioned how being Haitian American was about the history of Haiti that she carries within her. “I’m still in touch with my roots, and where I came from, and the back history. And even though I wasn’t born in Haiti... all that still runs through my blood.” This appreciation for cultural heritage could come from her experiencing a country where their history stretches back thousands of years and is on constant display as she walked through the Florentine streets. She noted during her history lectures how Florence became her classroom, offering her the opportunity to experience a location’s history intimately. Additionally, Mia traveled to Haiti upon her return from Italy. Her first time in her parents’ native country might have put into perspective her own familial history after seeing Italians live with their history. Belgrave and Allison (2010) maintained, “Situational and environmental factors have an impact on one’s ethnic identity. Identity change may occur if an individual moves into a new situation or a new environment, or has a change in life circumstances” (p. 70). Mia’s first-generation status had always been the point from which she crafted her relationship with the United States. Being Haitian American now had a different context from first being in Florence where Italians take pride in their heritage, and then traveling to Haiti and experiencing her personal heritage.

While abroad, Mia was surprised by the touristy nature of Florence, and that this tourism had an impact on being a U.S. American there. “[The Florentines] form their stereotypes of ‘Americans’ or ‘American students’ so they already expect a set behavior or attitude.... There are a few preconceived notions made towards American students such as the fact that we are wild and crazy, or easy (in the case of girls), or [have a] lack of respect for the way of life.” Mia described how some of the Italians she met consciously avoided parts of the city where they felt that Americans were too crazy with their partying. She admitted, “That stereotype was definitely played out when you go to bars,” but it annoyed her that for most Italians it was the only aspect of her identity that mattered to them, especially since with that label came the assumption that she was wild, crazy, and easy.

Mia's reaction to Florentines' stereotypes of U.S. Americans testified to her persona. "I try not to be so American, where some people are so oblivious to culture differences and values.... But I can say that I am adapting as much as I can and trying to live as the Italians do." Mia made the conscious choice to work outside the stereotypes that others created. Harris-Perry (2011) noted that this behaviour is typical for Black women because it is a habit that they must constantly practice. According to her, "[Usually] there are clear connections between public misrecognition and black women's experiences. It is painful to labor under negative stereotypes" (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 42). Thus Black women work hard to overcome those stereotypes through their public persona. Mia did this in Florence, but not just for her 'Black' identity, but also for her U.S. American identity. She adapted this behaviour to a new environment where it is not her race, but her nationality that instills negative assumptions in the mainstream culture. We can observe an intersection of nationality, race, and power occurring with Mia's interactions with Italians. As Davis (2008) explained, "Intersectionality initiates a process of discovery, alerting us to the fact that the world around us is always more complicated and contradictory than we ever could have anticipated" (p. 79). Mia experienced a new level of oppression unknown to her before because of the new environment and the identity with which her host nationals marked her.

Mia also appreciated when others looked beyond the negative stereotypes of her nationality and saw the complexity of her as an individual. "I grew up in a very multicultural society so it was nice for someone to realize and recognize that." She found that others from diverse backgrounds (like an Iranian man living in London) were those people most likely to appreciate the multiple facets of her identity. They would ask where she was from in the United States, what her background was, and try to find out more about who she really was. This open-mindedness on the part of others gave Mia an appreciation of others' complexity of identity. She herself could begin to see how the intersections of her various identities created meaning for how others perceived her and for how she perceived herself.

Another method which Mia utilised to adapt to her host culture was striving to learn the language. She wrote in a journal entry, "Though many people speak English here, I still want to know the native language to be able to converse easily and get my thoughts across." Mia already speaks a few languages, so her willingness to learn came from a desire to want to understand her hosts. She felt having increased language capacity would make her more accepted by her hosts, while also allowing her to feel

more confident to enjoy her experience abroad. She does note that because she was involved with an island programme with only other U.S. American students, she was unable to develop her abilities as much as she would have liked. Living and learning with other U.S. Americans, instead of mixing with Italian students or living with an Italian family, meant that upon her exit from Italy she could understand what was being said to her, but her “response[s] might be a little botched.”

Mia’s desire to master Italian (and her seeing ways that she might have done so) indicates an open-mindedness to learning about her host culture, and seeing beyond the superficial. “Learning another language opens doors for you.... I feel speaking another language also plays into culture or in how one acts. You learn that language, but you also learn a piece of the culture as well.” Having been bilingual since childhood, Mia appreciated how her ability to speak Creole gave her a deeper connection to her heritage. Meeting Europeans who spoke multiple languages while she lived in Florence and traveled around the continent allowed her to appreciate the multicultural understanding that is capable through knowing another language, and the national identity that one may associate with their native language.

Mia’s increased appreciation for different perspectives also translated into grasping the priorities that other cultures might have in life. “I think I could say I love the way [Italians] live life. Everyone more or less seems relaxed and easy going. It makes me realize that there is so much to enjoy in life. Eat, laugh, and drink wine all in good company.” Still, this appreciation did not overshadow her ability to critically analyse difficulties faced by Italy as a whole. Mia could perceive the benefits of embracing an Italian mindset, but she could also acknowledge the problems plaguing Italy’s economic and political structures. In fact, seeing Italy as a whole facilitated Mia’s deeper understanding of how even with its flaws, the United States offers her a range of opportunities as one of its citizens. As a Black woman she may face certain setbacks, but overall she indicated feeling empowered by the institutional structures in place for her.

Despite others’ presumptions about her U.S. identity, there were certain aspects of being U.S. American that were important to Mia. While she made traveling a priority during her time abroad, Thanksgiving to her meant not traveling: “I felt obligated.... I just feel like I needed to stay home. Florence at that time was my home. So we had a nice Thanksgiving dinner which was really touching because we still could make it work thousands of miles away.” She expressed a need to respect certain traditions engrained from her familial experience and making up part of her national identity. Collins (2000)

explained, “Because American citizenship is so often taken for granted among U.S. Black women, [they] often have difficulty seeing how deeply nationalistic U.S. society is, but how nationalisms affect us” (p. 230). While Collins made this observation in the context of mainstream U.S. culture not respecting Black women’s part in that patriotism, the statement holds true for Mia’s Thanksgiving experience. Mia identifies as Haitian American. She feels U.S. American; she does not feel Haitian. She does not feel less U.S. American because of her first-generation status. Pilkington (2003) and Solomos (2003) discussed how even if someone does not share the entire history of their nation (e.g. immigrants), it does not mean that they are less patriotic than multigenerational citizens. Perhaps Mia felt compelled to honour her U.S. American traditions while in Italy because being out of her national context made this aspect of her identity more visible to her. So while negative stereotypes from her Italian hosts about her U.S. identity might have frustrated her, those stereotypes did not diminish her pride in taking part in an annual celebration of Thanksgiving.

Mia appears to have successfully navigated with balancing the double consciousness that Du Bois (1903) discussed. As mentioned, Parham et al. (1999) and Parekh (2007) alleged how some Black Americans can understand their U.S. and Black identities differently from the majority of other Black Americans. Mia’s status as a first-generation U.S. American and having to delineate what that signifies for her means that her self-definition created a unique perspective on this identity. But it does not mean she does not struggle with the collective nature of her Haitian heritage and the individualistic tendencies of being U.S. American. As will be discussed later in this chapter, Mia experienced a shift into thinking about her future and how she needs to spend her free time: “I want to be on the go for the [coming] summer, but I also realise that I do need to take some time to spend with some people that I haven’t been with.” Mia has obligations to her family that she had to neglect during her abroad experience, but she also acknowledged her need to focus on her future and career. She stated she must find the time to do both because of their equal importance in her eyes. As Swanson et al. (2009) conveyed Black parents often work to instill both American and African-based value systems in their children. Mia continued to embrace this ideal after her time in Italy. Studying abroad allowed her to better comprehend the multiple layers that she not only has as a first-generation Haitian American, but also the multiple layers that others carry within their own personal histories.

1.3 Race and Spirituality

Mia converted to Seventh-Day Adventist from Catholicism with her mother when she was a young child, attending church regularly. Her mother taught her to put faith in God to carry her through life, emphasising the power of prayer. “She’ll definitely put that God-factor, prayer.... but definitely I just love her for that.” Belgrave and Allison (2010) noted how spirituality offers African American communities a way not only to connect to a higher power for guidance, but also a means to connect with the larger community. Mia’s mother had a potent influence on Mia trusting in a higher authority, and understanding how religion supports her bond with others. Harris-Perry (2011) observed that Black women empower their daughters to achieve greatness through these approaches of identifying a community in which to belong.

Mia felt she was able to stay connected to her religious beliefs while abroad. She was hesitant to attend church in Florence because most of the places were Catholic, until her mother reminded her, “Church is church.” Mia therefore attended mass at the Duomo in Florence, and stated that despite the experience not being her particular Christian denomination, “It was still respect at the end of the day.... And I felt really good to do that.” Again, her mother reminded her of the importance of holding to her spirituality. The label of being Seventh-Day Adventist was not as important as connecting with God and connecting with the community. A Black mother’s role in emphasising these ideals demonstrates the powerful role she plays in ensuring her daughter’s successes.

Her ability to have that connection while also seeing the important role Catholicism plays in the Italian lifestyle allowed Mia to grow in her religious identity. Faith for her had started out as a notion of specific practices. Perhaps conversion at a young age had made her think that the particular label of the religion was an important factor. But with her mother’s continued guidance and her own observations of Italians’ relationship with religion, she adopted a more encompassing understanding of the role spirituality plays in life decisions. “[It] just made me to realize this is the reason why [Italians] act like this.” And her own reason for acting certain ways and making religion important in her life have become for her about respect and being thankful for the many gifts with which she feels God has endowed her.

2. Gender

As Shorter-Gooden & Washington (1996) indicated, Black women rarely detach their race from their gender. Mia's understanding of herself as a woman is linked with her roots as a Haitian American. Mia acknowledged a preference for maintaining traditional gender roles, particularly within the context of marriage. Mia's parents performed very typical gender roles during her childhood, helping to shape her own beliefs that, for example, men should drive the car and women should provide a stable home life.

At the same time, Mia expressed her appreciation for the evolution of female rights and how that affords her opportunities. She stated that being a woman for her means being in control, being able to make decisions that were not available to women in the past, and above all, feeling empowered. Collins (2000) explained, "Black women intellectuals from all walks of life must aggressively push the theme of self-definition because speaking for oneself and crafting one's own agenda is essential to empowerment" (p. 36).

Indeed, Black women have a tendency to refer to their identity as being strong. Shorter-Gooden and Washington (1996) suggested:

"A sense of strength is the key to self-definition and survival when one has nothing else to fall back on—perhaps when, as a Black woman, one is forced to survive in a sexist and racist society. A sense of strength may be an important coping mechanism for African-American women" (p. 473).

Mia may have discovered that for her to succeed as a first-generation Haitian American, she has needed to focus on the empowerment and strength that Black Americans have used over the decades to advance their place in U.S. society. Examining her views on sexualised images, physical appearance, and hair in regards to her racial identity, especially in the context of her study abroad experience, I unearth how these factors play into her overall self-concept.

2.1 *Sexualised Images*

Mia's gender identity is about empowerment and looking beyond the stereotyped images of Black women as Jezebel, Mammie, or Sapphire discussed in Chapter 5. Mia reclaims her sexuality from these stereotypes by being comfortable with her appearance, her intellect, and her choices.

Mia stated upon repatriation that while she did not experience any blatant racism in Italy, she did note, "You would see underlying things, like just even someone looking

at you too hard.” However, Mia realised that much of this scrutiny did not come from her being a Black American (even though there were presumptions about her nationality, as discussed earlier). Mia noted, “Many of the Black population... in Italy more or less are African immigrants that are there illegally.” Because of the large influx of illegal immigrants from Africa, austerity issues, and raised crime rates, Italians display a bit of distrust toward obvious foreigners.

Mia did not encounter U.S. stereotypes, but Italian stereotypes of Black women. Mia felt that Italians perceived Black women as sexualised beings trying to entice men. She therefore had to renegotiate how she perceived her own gender in relation to her skin colour, and within the Italian context. Intersectional encounters arose, so Mia tended to forefront her U.S. American identity (as well as her identity as a student) as a means to downplay her racial identity in order to cope with these stereotypes and power structures in place. “They could tell [I am] not an immigrant, but [I am] definitely a foreigner.” Prior to studying abroad, Mia drew on her belief in her own empowerment as a Black woman to handle being an ethnic minority in her country. In Italy, she relied on others’ acknowledgement of nationality to distance herself from being perceived as an illegal immigrant who might be harming the country (as she felt Black women in Italy are seen). The contextual climate of her host country required Mia to find a new avenue to understand that aspect of her self-concept. Thus, the power and privilege associated with the label of U.S. American citizenship provided a sort of protective feature, allowing Mia to feel comfortable navigating a different cultural context. That empowerment does not necessarily translate to being a Black woman from another country when in the Italian context.

2.2 Physical Appearance

Mia displayed a lot of confidence regarding her self-image. She noted that she does have some passing insecurities about her petite height and the extra weight she carries: “Not that I’m saying I’m uncomfortable, but I’m little and I do feel out of shape.” Molloy and Herzberger (1998) found, “Caucasian and African-American women hold significantly different definitions of beauty and perceptions of themselves. African-American women’s perception of beauty is more flexible and fluid than Caucasian women’s” (p. 632). Mia’s slight discomfort with her body might come from that continuous struggle that Du Bois (1903) discussed of understanding one’s self within both the African and U.S. American concepts. Mia has a strong Haitian American

identity, but as a U.S. American she received all the mainstream messages in U.S. media about what constitutes beauty for (White) women, including being tall and slender. Fordham (2000) noted, “African-American women are compelled to consume the universalized images of white American women, including body image, linguistic patterns, style of interacting, and so forth” (p. 330). Having slight misgivings about her physical appearance while also overall accepting her body implies this double consciousness struggle.

While in Italy Mia made a conscious effort to assemble positive wardrobe choices. “I was always [nicely] dressed every time to go the class, and it’s funny because people took notice of that.” She had read prior to departure how Italians take pride in their public appearance, and so she decided she would as well. “[Italians] have this saying *la bella figura*. Basically you put your best foot forward; how you are should reflect on when someone looks at you.” Mia identified with this sentiment. Even with her own insecurities about her appearance, she discovered that taking time on her appearance helped boost her own conceptions about herself. Mia was able to better define her self-concept in terms of her physical appearance by spending time on her outward appearance. Prior to this time abroad she might attend class in pyjamas or run an errand with track bottoms. Seeing the importance that Italians put on this concept of *la bella figura* exposed Mia to a new idea of embracing her physical appearance.

Schlenker (1980) explained, “Self-presentations function to create definitions of the situation and social identities for the actors and these influence what types of interactions are appropriate and inappropriate for the interactants in the situation at hand” (p. 4). Mia took control of her appearance so that she might better influence the types of interactions she had with others. Looking her best for her meant dressing up, and that, in turn, positively shaped how she perceived herself and others perceived her. Out of this experience, Mia has come to value her appearance as one avenue to put her “best foot forward,” and as a source of positive female identity.

2.3 Hair

As mentioned earlier, hair for Black women can be a contentious point. Banks (2000) stated that a Black woman’s relationship with her hair often reveals how she perceives herself. Mia commented in her initial interview about her hair, “Mainly, I usually wear my hair in an Afro, twist outs, natural, nothing, no perm, no chemicals per se.” As a teenager, she often wore her hair in braids. However, when she left home to

attend university, Mia decided she wanted to go totally natural. Revisiting Schlenker's (1980) idea of self-presentation to influence social interactions, for Mia, it meant accepting the nappiness of her hair, and allowing people "to meet me, just me." Having only relaxed it once or twice in her life, she found her more authentic self in letting her hair be what it is. Thus, presenting herself with her natural hair meant Mia felt that she would have a more authentic experience with people if she was not hiding behind braids. Firth (2011) explained, "Woman's... hair is a symbol of her femininity in general, the mode of wearing it may be an index to the quality ascribed to that femininity" (p. 268). As mentioned earlier, Mia indicated strong beliefs (both before and after her abroad experience) that being a (Black) woman is about being empowered. Thus, one way that Mia expressed her empowerment, and her femininity, was through wearing her hair naturally.

The negative feedback she initially received from childhood friends concerned her at first, making her rethink her decision to go natural. Eventually, however, she made peace with others' discontent. "My hair is my hair. And it's mine and I like it. So if you don't, that's your business but I love it." Banks (2000) wrote, "At the core of these daily and seemingly casual dialogues [about Black women's hair] exist complex narratives of identity politics" (p. 147). In this instance of others not appreciating her hair shift, Mia decided not to play into the identity politics associated with hair. By saying that others' dislike over her hair is their business and not hers, Mia claimed back the power her hair gives her from individuals who tried to disenfranchise her for her choice of not accepting a more mainstream hairstyle. Though it is difficult to pinpoint where this confidence manifested for Mia, her parents' support of her independence and choices seems one likely source, displaying an overlap of how facets of identities influence one another to inform her whole self-concept.

With regard to the future for her hair, Mia said, "Unfortunately you have to succumb to the professional environment ways. Okay, maybe you can't really wear a fro over a time." Banks (2000) made mention of this submission to mainstream standards: "Women make attempts to conform to a norm they believe will yield personal and social rewards" (p. 34). Mia's willingness to alter her hair for professional betterment shows that even individuals with strong self-concepts, even in regards to divisive issues like hair, might bend to societal pressures in order to advance. The dominant societal paradigm about acceptable hair indicates interesting intersecting oppression for a Black woman regarding her hair choices.

Mia's priorities, however, do not necessarily mean that she thinks less of herself as a Haitian American, or feels disempowered by having to alter her appearance to be more accepted in certain circles. If anything, these alterations indicate the intrinsic problems in wider society, the unwillingness of mainstream society to accept different standards of beauty, and Mia's own agency to adapt yet acknowledge that adaptation. "Black women's hair, in general, fits outside what is considered desirable in mainstream society" (Banks, 2000, p. 2). Collins (2000) might label Mia's readiness to submit as an acquiescence of her power as a Black woman:

"Self-definition speaks to the power dynamics involved in rejecting externally defined, controlling images of Black womanhood. In contrast, the theme of Black women's self-valuation addresses the actual content of these self-definitions. Many of the controlling images applied to African-American women are actually distorted renderings of those aspects of [their] behavior that threaten existing power arrangements" (pp. 114-115).

However, Mia does not feel shame about her hair and stated she would not feel disempowered in altering it; White society is ashamed of her hair. Until White mainstream culture adjusts its views, Mia is willing to shift herself without relinquishing the power she claims for herself as a Black woman in U.S. society.

Mia decided prior to departure: "When I go away to Italy, I'm definitely putting in braids just 'cause I don't want to deal with it 'cause it is a lot of maintenance." She knew that she did not want to spend her time worrying about the presentation of her hair and decided on a low-maintenance style that she had favoured in high school. While in Italy, Mia found those long braids to be a point of interest in making friends with others when she was out. Both U.S. Americans and Italians responded positively to her hairstyle. Additionally, she enthusiastically stated in her repatriation interview, "I loved my hair myself." Individuals respond to how others react to them, and the reaction of others to one's hair impacts one's self-understanding within the societal context. As Banks (2000) stated, "Hair emerges as a body within the social body and can reflect notions about perceptions, identity, and self-esteem" (p. 26). An interesting question, however, is whether people's positive reactions made Mia love her hair as much as she did, or if with her loving her hair as much as she did, that positive self-esteem came across in how she carried herself and others responded to that positivity.

Hair also acts as a personal statement where individuals have the opportunity to look their best. This might be in regards to identity, but also in regards to a statement on gender. Perhaps the most essential finding of Banks's (2000) study is that there is an

intersection of appearance, identity, self-esteem, and societal pressures; all of these are informed by Black women's social and cultural meanings about hair. Mia's experience in Italy allowed her to appreciate her hair's ability to influence her self-concept. With her conscious effort to appear her best in public mentioned in the last section, her hair played into her ability to better appreciate her gender through physical appearance.

3. Academic Achievement

Parham et al. (1999) and Cokley (2003) suggested that academic achievement among Black youth can be attributed to their own self-perception of their abilities. Mia always took advanced classes throughout her primary and secondary education. She constantly received top grades and recognition for her intelligence. Mia's abroad experience transformed not only how she interpreted her ability to achieve academically, but also how she defined achievement on the personal, professional, and racial levels.

3.1 Personal Advancement

As noted earlier, Fordham (2000) suggested that Black women, in order to achieve academically in mainstream White society, must deny a part of their Blackness that does not mesh with scholastic success. For Mia, however, this has not seemed the trend. Perhaps her first-generation status altered her self-concept in relation to academia, where she had to discover her own balance of being educated as a Haitian American. Her mother working hard to put herself through university while raising two children might have indicated to Mia that hard work, even though it might be labeled as Eurocentric, can mean success. Still Mia showed indications of having a very Africentric experience in her schooling. She was garrulous and did not mind challenging ideas. When she recounted her school experiences, she did mention her academic achievements, but mostly she reported on the relationships she built with others. As Parham et al. (1999) and Belgrave and Allison (2010) noted, education from the Africentric lens is academic *and* social. Mia's connections with others were the most salient outcomes from her school years.

For Mia, the knowledge component of academia was about doing her best. "In high school, I was able to realise that, 'Mia, you do things for yourself and you get through it.'" She wanted to achieve scholastically for herself, and she focused on being a good student because it made her feel better about her self-concept. Given her ruminations on her brother's lackluster schooling mentioned earlier, Mia shows an

understanding that academic success leads to positive consequences, whether meaning a better university experience or more opportunities opening up in the future.

Studying abroad reminded Mia of this mindset. Rumours had circulated that studying abroad was a time for personal exploration and the academic work was not as important. But Mia's first field text indicated the dashing of those rumours. "It was a real smack to reality that I actually still had to deal with legitimately studying and cracking down." Mia learned quickly that studying abroad was more than just the Africentric notions of learning within intrapersonal and social contexts which Belgrave and Allison (2010) discussed. In a later letter to me, Mia wrote, "Let me be completely honest, the course load is about the same as back home, but it only seems worse because I am here [in Italy]." Mia faced copious novel stimuli in Florence and the rest of Europe. She had to learn to negotiate her two academic identities of Eurocentric knowledge acquisition in the classroom and Africentric contextual understanding outside of it.

Fordham (2000) stated, "Black women's struggle to commingle or fuse two divergent [academic] lives concurrently" (p. 329). Yet while Mia may have laboured with this task, she did find that equilibrium where past experiences were mediated through self-concept. She made the Dean's List during her semester in Florence, even though she wrote at one point, "I must admit that I know I could have done better." This statement indicates that Mia still held herself to a high Eurocentric standard of academic success, even while being open to Africentric aspects of learning (i.e. social contextual construction).

Mia had to negotiate several differences in her learning experience while in Florence. She discussed how one of her professors decided to post grades publicly, as is the custom at many Italian universities. In the United States, universities are very strict about the releasing of students' private academic records, so this practice was new for Mia and her classmates. She found that not only did it really make her look at how she performed for her midterm test, but also feeling an inward competition with the others in the class. She discovered with small classes, the intimacy of her academic experience made her rethink how she built relationships with faculty. "I never was really one who would always go to the teacher.... But in Italy... you're there; you have no choice. If you have a question, you just ask the professor." These new experiences of balancing schoolwork with cultural immersion and the incorporation of different teaching methods gave Mia a new skill set with which to handle issues, and also began a slow shift in perspective-taking and her learner identity.

Immediately after repatriation, Mia noted in her last journal entry: “I’m not sure if I can say that I have experienced a drastic change in myself. Maybe now that I’m back and continuing to get into the groove of things, someone will see the change or I will eventually realize it for myself.” Her final interview, six weeks later, had a different insight. “I realise slowly through different little things that it has changed me.... I look at things on another level.” Mia stated that she sees how decision-making processes might differ between cultures, and the reason behind those differences. Mia felt she shares a common language with others who have studied abroad. Even if they traveled to different countries, being outside of the U.S. culture has created an understanding: “There’s a same trend between our conversations.” Mia’s ability to adopt perspectives beyond her own (and appreciate others’ ability to do so) indicates an integration of her Eurocentric and Africentric learning foci. She cannot only take in factual knowledge, but also place it within context. The early mention of her tying language learning to cultural understanding is an example of this.

Her academic advancement through study abroad demonstrates that perhaps study abroad is about the merging of different perspectives, and not just cultural perspectives of the host country. Mia’s experience allowed her to not only push her Eurocentric knowledge acquisition because she found herself within a compelling environment that vied for her attention outside of her schoolwork; it also afforded her the chance to put the knowledge she learned in the classroom into a contextual framework of the Italian mindset. There does not have to be the eschewing of one’s racial identity that Fordham (2000), Collins (2000), and Harris-Perry (2011) state occurs within mainstream U.S. education systems. Study abroad appeared to offer Mia a pivot on which to find the balance between these two ideals of learning.

3.2 Professional Advancement

Prior to being abroad, for Mia work was about accepting responsibility for yourself: “It was just that at 16, it was like, ‘Okay, it’s time for me to work’.... Everyone started getting jobs.” Even though it offered her more independence, Mia knew working was a part of growing up. Her time in Florence has allowed her to evolve to the next dimension in her work life. Upon repatriation from Florence, Mia has put careful consideration into her future. Whereas previous summers outside of school have been spent working at a summer camp for children, she instead thought about how she could focus more on her career and her major. Reading for a communication disorders degree,

she found a summer research program at a Midwestern university that encourages minority students to pursue postgraduate degrees. Even though she is not certain if graduate school is the option for her, Mia noted, “I hope I could see what my options are... especially for professionals and then move on from there.”

Harris-Perry (2011) discussed how Black women must learn to overcome the stigmatized views that other cultural groups have of them. “Black women accommodate other people’s expectations by shifting their tone of voice, outward behaviors, and expressed attitudes” (p. 35). Mia’s decision to attend a summer research institute for underrepresented minorities indicates that she understood on some level that to make herself marketable to graduate schools and employers, she can benefit from the workshops the institute offer in preparing applications, resumes, and interviewing techniques. Harris-Perry (2011) might say Mia is shifting herself to meet the expectations others would have of her so that they would consider her successful.

3.3 Racial Contribution

Upon an initial, cursory glance, Mia does not necessarily exhibit the marks of someone who might be thinking about racial contribution through her educational opportunities. For instance, she consciously chose not to attend a historically black college or university (HBCU): “I had no interest in going to an HBCU; it didn’t occur to me. A lot of them had my major. It would have been nice, it would have been fun but I really thought about it. And unfortunately, it’s just.... I need to embrace everyone.” She felt that being at an HBCU would be too restricting after having grown up in such a diverse town. As Perry (2004) stated, HBCUs “were designed to forge the *collective* identity of African Americans as a literate and achieving people” (p. 91, original emphasis). However, because Mia had a stronger Black identity, she probably did not feel she would benefit from being at an HBCU (Allen, 1992).

Interestingly, Mia’s strong Black identity and academic achievement could be attributable to her relationship with a mentor from her church. This man gave Mia and other Black teenagers in her church time to visit universities when they were still in high school. He assisted with their applications, essays, and financial aid forms. He pushed Mia to go abroad and to look at destinations that would challenge her. Sanders and Campbell (2007) found that community-based organisations, like the local Black church, can positively influence the scholastic achievement and self-concept of students. With this man, racial contribution comes from his commitment to the young people in his

church. Mia is a beneficiary of this commitment; she looked beyond safe choices in her education because she had someone pushing her to think bigger.

Mia's study abroad experience offered an opportunity for the racial advancement which Africentric psychology also espouses (Noble, 1988). For the most part, Mia never indicated in her interviews that she thought much about Black advancement, showing more of a focus on her own growth in relation to her academics and career. However, when speaking about her academic experience in broader terms, Mia did display consideration of her place in the Black American community. Upon repatriation, she stated she has started pushing her Black friends to study abroad: "I want everyone to experience, because it's such an experience.... It's everything to take in and it just gets you outside of America – what you are used to. Even if most of us grew up with dual cultures being American and second- or first-generation." Mia demonstrated a desire to help other Black Americans (particularly her friends) realise their full potential through an abroad experience. Since she saw how being abroad allowed her to expand her own perspectives and how that will help her in the future, Mia wanted that for other Black Americans. She knows that having those multiple perspectives will "open doors" previously closed as more first-generation Black Americans can see beyond their own viewpoints. She has taken a similar role to her mentor by challenging others to better themselves academically.

Mia's time as a student in Italy allowed her to better understand her self-concept. She saw shifts occur in how she understood her place as a first-generation Haitian American. Her gender and academic identities were also enhanced, as being immersed in a foreign culture permitted her new insights into that self-understanding.

Chapter VIII. Vanessa: Seoul, South Korea

“I’m straight from the South.”

Vanessa is a multi-generation Black American woman who lives outside a major city in the southern United States. Before going abroad, she was twenty years old attending a large urban research university just 35 miles from her hometown. Studying for a degree in Marketing with a focus in International Business, Vanessa is a short woman who wears her hair in braids. To understand the evolution of Vanessa’s self-concept from her semester-long study abroad experience in Seoul, South Korea, I examine different aspects of her identity, including racial, gender, and academic identity. I consider how the intersections of these various components shifted Vanessa’s self-understanding. By looking at these components, I demonstrate how studying abroad provided a powerful tool for helping Vanessa better appreciate herself within these contexts.

1. Race

This section investigates Vanessa’s understanding of her racial identity within the context of her family and her nationality. It also seeks to reveal how this identity evolved through her study abroad experience.

1.1 Race and Family

Vanessa grew up in the South, only leaving once prior to traveling to South Korea. Her values reflect her Southern origins, with an emphasis on manners and respect. Her family has been in the South for generations, and she sees how this history has shaped her perspective. The large meals and gatherings she discussed are common in southern Black families as a way to spend time with one another, indicating the Africentric notion of collectivism (Parham et al., 1999). She is accustomed to everyone contributing to the whole of the family and the family unit as a site of identity formation.

Vanessa has a close and complicated relationship with her mother, explaining in her initial interview, “We don’t like each other, but we love each other.” Through discussing her upbringing and values, Vanessa came to realise the acute impact her mother has on who she is. Collins (2000) reported:

“The mother/daughter relationship is one fundamental relationship among Black women. Countless Black mothers have empowered their

daughters by passing on the everyday knowledge essential to survival as African-American women. Black daughters identify the profound influence that their mothers have had upon their lives” (p. 102).

Vanessa and her mother, Petra, are no exception.

Vanessa grasped that a great deal of her traits and behaviours come from her mother: “I understand some of the ways I act now. Especially when she’s not around, I’m like, ‘Oh my gosh I get it from her.’” Vanessa also recognised the impact that Petra had on her character:

“Just seeing my mom and seeing everything she’s had to go through to get where she is now in life. And that she’s able to provide for us a lot better than before. So I think that’s why I act the certain way[s] I do.”

Petra was very strict in Vanessa’s upbringing and that she was “raised to be understanding” shows in many of Vanessa’s values and goals. She mentioned that she constantly thinks of how she can help others through her actions.

The bond between these two women created an intense dynamic that affected Vanessa deeply. Black collectivist thinking presumes interdependence between an individual and those around him or her (Swanson et al., 2009). Vanessa’s compassion shines through with her relationship with Petra. She may not like her mother, but Vanessa’s actions indicate that a lot of the decisions that she made for her future are focused on making things better for her mother. She appreciated the sacrifices that her mother made for her, and she hopes to reciprocate. Vanessa’s goals, actions, and thinking are tied to her relationships, especially the one she shares with her mother. Petra provided for Vanessa. Individualistic societies might value this behaviour as preparing another generation to care for themselves; Vanessa sees her mother’s actions as more than a unidirectional act. Vanessa feels she has just as much obligation to her mother. She talked continuously about succeeding financially so that she could provide for Petra.

Collins (2000) delved into the role that mothers play in helping build strength or weakness within their children:

“Motherhood as an institution occupies a special place in transmitting values to children about their proper place. On the one hand, a mother can foster her children’s oppression if she teaches them to believe in their own inferiority. On the other hand, the relationship between mothers and children can serve as a private sphere in which cultures of resistance and everyday forms of resistance are learned” (p. 50).

Vanessa’s understanding of being Black American versus being African American also comes from her mother, Petra telling her when she was nineteen, “You’re not African

American, you're Black.... I've never associated myself with being African American and neither should you." Vanessa had never really considered the differences until her mother made the clear distinction that she saw between the two labels. Not only throughout her childhood, but also into her young adulthood, Vanessa continued to be influenced by her mother's messages about her role as both a woman and a *Black* woman.

Upon repatriating Vanessa voiced her complaints about the different expectations from her time in Seoul where she only had responsibility for herself and her return to her household; Petra said, "You are not [in Korea] so you need to just get over it." Petra reminded her daughter that Vanessa continued to have responsibilities, not only to herself but also to her family and community. Vanessa realised that her studying abroad was not only about the experience itself but also a means to an end to achieve her goals of being financially secure in the future to provide for others. "Through the lived experiences gained within their extended families and communities, individual African-American women fashioned their own ideas about the meaning of Black womanhood" (Collins, 2000, p. 10). Vanessa applied Petra's influence to interpret her experiences and to understand her self-concept as it evolves.

Additionally, Vanessa's family structure illustrates the inherent flexibility outside of standard White American familial paradigms (Billingsley, 1968; Belgrave & Allison, 2010). Vanessa's half-brother, Malcolm, is eight years her junior and, as she stated, is her "best friend in the whole world." Vanessa adopted a somewhat motherly role toward Malcolm, which links into the Africentric thought about shifting family roles. Malcolm has a diagnosis of Asperger's, and she wants him to succeed, and thus pushes him to do his best: "Hopefully I can try to promote him to do a bit better in school and encourage him to focus on his grades more." Because her mother always encouraged her to focus on succeeding academically, Vanessa wants the same for her brother. When at home from school, she often takes on the mantle of caring for Malcolm, not only because she loves him dearly, but also to help her mother and stepfather out. "Sometimes my parents will refer to my brother as my son, because... I kind of raise him a little because I'm always telling him what to do." As Hill (1971) indicated, flexible family roles have become important to the successful functioning of African American families. Family members will take on the roles needed. These flexible roles indicate the intersection of class structures to race, with the socioeconomic (in)ability of families to provide support to the family's needs (e.g. hiring a nanny for a child or a home nurse for an ailing

grandparent). Vanessa has contributed to the family unit by taking an active maternal role in her brother's life.

“Black daughters learn to expect to work, to strive for an education so they can support themselves, and to anticipate carrying heavy responsibilities in their families and communities because these skills are essential to their own survival and those for who they will eventually be responsible” (Collins, 2000, p. 183).

Vanessa's responsibility is not just to be Malcolm's sister. She strives to fill in the gaps, which her parents might miss in the raising of her brother. She does not feel burdened by this role, as it is merely an accepted part of her place within her family unit, and there is not an expectation of equitable return for this “added-on” role (Miller, 1992).

Even upon her return from South Korea, Vanessa continued to display this function toward Malcolm. They both missed one another, “[be]cause he's my heart and soul secretly.” Vanessa was able to share her experiences with him and told him how travel can expand his perspective beyond their home state. She promised her brother that when she has the money, she will take him to Asia. This goal continues to show the expanded relationship beyond sister toward him, but also her overall goal of being able to provide for her family by being financially prosperous.

Collins (2000) noted, “Black women intellectuals from all walks of life must aggressively push the theme of self-definition because speaking for oneself and crafting one's own agenda is essential to empowerment” (p. 36). Vanessa empowered herself through studying abroad. She is able to put her understanding within the context of her experiences, as well as her mother's upbringing of her. “My mom has always been so honest with me since a young age. Some days I am just like, ‘Oh I wish it was not difficult.’ But at the same time I understand that it just is.”

And Vanessa saw it was difficult every day in Seoul, where she was a constant object of fascination as a Black person in an extremely homogenous society.

“I now feel more comfortable in my skin after being there and being [the] center of attention. I do feel like I can do anything in that sense; my race doesn't stop me from doing anything or wanting to do something. That's one of the benefits because I have been in a society which I've been different and I was able to cope with it for the most part of it.”

Again, Vanessa has been able to integrate her mother's lessons of being a Black American to her own life experiences, and the personal growth that comes with it. She took the experience of being abroad and being a super minority in her host country as a means to define herself in her own way.

1.2 Race and Nationality

As mentioned earlier, Du Bois (1903) wrote about the double consciousness struggle of African Americans between the African-part and U.S. American-part of their identities. Prior to studying abroad, Vanessa showed pride in her nation and the positive opportunities that it offers. Her background as a multi-generational U.S. American feeds into her identification with her country. But she acknowledged that with that label came an avalanche of negative stereotypes to which she did not want to be attributed: “I... feel there’s a big stereotype on Americans just as a whole – that you still have to deal with – about being overweight, lazy, arrogant, all those things.” She understands that her upbringing in the United States has molded her to a certain type of lifestyle. Vanessa believes in the American ideal of working hard to achieve your goals, as that value is a core part of her self-concept. Vanessa sees that there are positives of being American, in that her country is innovative and she has received a lot of privilege from her citizenship.

A complicated link exists for Vanessa as a Black American woman. Collins (2000) discussed how Black women must negotiate the fact that being U.S. American allows them to “pursue focused educations and challenge [negative] portrayals of U.S. Black women,” but that in order to do so they must do it within the mainstream U.S. American context (p. 276). Additionally, both Swanson et al. (2009) and Fordham (2000) noted African American women are pushed by parents and mentors “to flee the African-American community and, in the process, paradoxically, enhance their affiliation with the large American society” (Fordham, 2000, p. 329). Vanessa found herself initiated by others (her mother, for one) into the American dream of working hard to make it. But to her, “making it” does not just mean being able to provide for just herself which is often the individualistic focus of White U.S. Americans; it means that she can provide for her loved ones, because she also embraces the Africentric idea of being a part of a collective, especially for her family, which I discuss later. She found the balance of double consciousness that Du Bois (1903) discussed in this regard.

Perhaps the most important part of the evolution of her understanding of being a U.S. American in relation to her Korean experience is that Vanessa shows understanding that no nationality is superior.

“I do realize that as an American, you do have a lot of freedom and privileges that other people don’t have who aren’t American.... [But] I think it’s a double-edged sword because in a sense I do think freedom-wise, we do have more freedom. But when it comes to just say living, I feel [South Korean] society is probably more – there’s a little more harmony in their society than in ours.”

She respected the value that Korean culture places on family, but struggles with the notion that family or government might determine the future that an individual may have. While she comprehended the cultural norm, her U.S.-centric background finds the idea outside her realm of comfort.

Like with notions of race in regards to family, Vanessa's self-concept has grown from her studying abroad by putting ideas within context. Prior to going abroad, she had very basic thoughts about how nationality affected her and what it meant to her. Her appreciation for being U.S. American, and being a Black U.S. American has evolved by seeing people with different rights and different notions about what is proper and acceptable in relation to being a citizen of a particular nation-state. She also grasped how her national identity affords her certain rights and privileges.

2. Gender

Like Mia in the previous chapter, Vanessa's understanding of her identity as a woman ties in closely with her identity of being Black. The two are closely intertwined because she sees them both as giving her disadvantages over which she must prevail. "I feel like being Black and female just kind of adds on and so, I just try personally to just do the best that I can." But she also acknowledged that these two identities provide her a reservoir of strength because of the history of Black women. She told of how her great-grandmother built a life where she could raise and provide for her family despite little education and fortune. If African American females from the lowest socioeconomic status could find that power, Vanessa knows she possesses it as well:

"I feel like being a female, you have to be more strong and independent because people have this mindset that females just are these people who want to be taken care of, who don't want, or have, a mind of their own. And it really disappoints me, because I definitely have a mind of my own."

Here we can see the intersections of race, gender, and class, as Vanessa identified the need of Black women to be powerful and able to care for themselves, particularly financially. She feels the societal pressures where these points converge that she takes as the message to be strong, independent, and capable. This section discusses how Vanessa shaped understanding of her gender in regards to sexualised imaging of Black women, her physical appearance, and her relationship with her hair.

2.1 *Sexualised Images*

When asked what being a woman meant to her, Vanessa conceded, “It’s hard being a girl.” She and other Black females must continue to toil against stereotypes about their gender and appearance. Prior to departure to Seoul, one of Vanessa’s study abroad colleagues showed a hyper-sexualised music video of Black women in bikinis who had money being thrown at them, commenting on how he thought it was funny. Here was a prime example of the jezebel (or evolution of jezebel into a modern-day hoochie, i.e. a seductively promiscuous woman) being fostered through contemporary media (Harris-Perry, 2011). “Images like that – I really hate when people see that. Especially if they don’t have any friends of colour to show them that we all just don’t act like that.” Vanessa and another Black woman in their study abroad group felt they had to make certain that everyone knew that they themselves did not act that way. Vanessa’s efforts to present herself as a certain type of woman who is the antithesis of these stereotypes has made her gender identity a prominent part of how she understands herself. The intersection of her race and gender has created a power paradigm that places Black women in a disempowered preconception. Vanessa is all too aware that she faces this preconception with every new encounter.

Yet even while abroad, Vanessa was not immune to these presumptions. Collins (2000) noted, “The growing influence of [media] constitute[s] new ways of circulating controlling images. Popular culture has become increasingly important in promoting these images, especially with new global technologies that allow U.S. popular culture to be exported through the world” (p. 85). Vanessa took a module at Korea University on Popular Culture; during one lecture, race was discussed. When asked about what Black people they knew, the Korean students (two-thirds of the class) named actors, musicians, and athletes. Vanessa again faced the influence of the media and the stereotypes that have been constructed of African Americans in general, and women in particular. Prominent figures like Harriet Tubman or Condoleeza Rice were ignored for names like Beyonce and Halle Berry. The ability of media to control the global perceptions of African American women and the world’s willing consumption of these messages speak to the privileged societal structures that disadvantaged groups face in different ways.

Vanessa realised, after speaking with her mother and with the passage of time, that Koreans really only had the experience of Black people through the media, what they saw on television and the Internet. She comprehended that her presence at Korea University acted as a powerful means to shift the preconceptions they may have created

from their sole exposure to Black women through media. When reflecting on the lecture a few months upon repatriating, Vanessa commented,

“It put things back in perspective. At the time it was just so random. It showed me, even the Korean people only have what you see on TV. It’s not like I can be mad. That is why I don’t even feel they’re even that racist to begin with because they don’t have people there to prove what they see on TV to be wrong.”

This observation in and of itself shows Vanessa’s ability to empathise with her host nation’s limitations in appreciating difference. But Vanessa’s following comment shows how her presence at Korea University offered her personal growth.

“[Their ignorance toward Black people’s diversity] opened my eyes.... That’s why they are probably so shocked that [I am] there and in school. You have to do these type of things to try to help fight against these stereotypes because now these people can say, even though they thought only Black people can be Kanye West and Beyonce, they met people who got into the same school that they went to.... It was a big deal and so I was actually really proud to say I did that.... So for me it was really empowering.”

Vanessa found meaning in her presence as a Black female in South Korea as a means to further break down stereotypes about African Americans, and reclaim some of the power that media stripped from this aspect of her identity.

Her achievements are not just her own but, as Belgrave and Allison (2010) noted, also the successes in the collective African American community. “Rather than an individualistic model of... achievement and progress, work is described within a communal framework and linked explicitly to a sense of interdependence and responsibility for members of the group” (p. 455). Wanting to or not, Vanessa represented Black women to the people of South Korea, beyond their previous media-fueled conceptions of sex symbols or diva singers. That Vanessa recognised how her actions benefit both herself and the Black community indicates that her abroad experience allowed reflection into her role not just as Vanessa, the undergraduate student, but also as Vanessa, a U.S. Black woman.

2.2 Physical Appearance

While abroad, Vanessa had to confront her conception of her physical appearance. Before her departure, Vanessa’s opinion implied acceptance of her physical appearance. Within the Black American communities, beauty standards are different from those of mainstream White U.S. standards (Parham et al., 1999; Belgrave & Allison,

2010). While the U.S. mostly favours slim body types, African societies often favour larger bodies with robust rears and buxom tops. Vanessa expressed this view:

“Black people aren’t really that big into being skinny in comparison to other races. We really appreciate having a shape and having a body.... I do believe in America there are different standards of beauty.... As a whole Black people, we just want to [have] shape, with curves and hips. It’s okay.”

While overweight herself, she stated it never really troubled her:

“I never really worried about my physical appearance that much. Because I know that if I really want to do something about it, I can.... I wish I could lose more weight but at the same time, it doesn't really bother me.”

Vanessa indicated her ability to control her physical form. She has chosen to have the body shape that she does. If she wanted it to be different, she could change it. Vanessa may also have learned to accept her size because it has been an issue since she was a child. With her asthma causing her to gain a lot of weight, she was the target of bullying. “I remember people used to just make fun of me, because I used to... be really overweight.” As an object of bullying, Vanessa had the option of feeling inferior about her appearance, or accepting that she was different from what others found acceptable. She understood that her weight might affect people’s opinions of her in the U.S., and thus is another stereotype that she must work hard to surmount. The intersection of her physical appearance, her race, and her nationality creates a friction because of the larger U.S. cultural expectations about weight.

With her experience in South Korea, Vanessa discovered new extremes in beauty construction among Koreans. In one of her field texts, she wrote, “I realized that Korea is a very vain country.... People really do care about their appearance and will do anything to look good physically.” Upon repatriation she expanded on this observation, “They are probably the vainest country on earth. I am hundred percent sure.” She discussed how Koreans seem to be obsessed with their skin (wanting it as pale as possible, and investing heavily in blemish balm (BB) cream), hair, make-up; they also consider plastic surgery to be a non-taboo method of improving one’s appearance. Vanessa mentioned, “Weight is a really big issue. One of my Korean friends [told me] she really hates the standards there because she feels really pressured to be skinny.”

Vanessa’s exposure to Korean beauty paradigms had an interesting effect on her own self-image. “I knew I was automatically different to begin with so honestly there was nothing I could do to ever fit in. I won’t even attempt to do half those things myself.” Vanessa’s position as a super-minority enabled her to feel more comfortable with her

own appearance while in Seoul. Since she knew she was so far outside Korean culture in terms of physical appearance, she did not feel any pressure to conform. She stated,

“My physical appearance, I am okay with it. Even being in Korea – even being in this society where everybody wants to look the same – I never let that phase me because overall I like how I look as a person.”

For her, seeing an entire culture fixated on one ideal, and going to extremes to reach that ideal, helped Vanessa reaffirm her own culture norms in terms of her physical appearance as a woman. However, though Vanessa indicated both before and after her study abroad experience that she accepted her body shape, she also mentioned at both points that she would find losing some weight amenable. It would appear that Vanessa struggles somewhat between the Black women’s appreciation of larger body shapes and the U.S. White mainstream messages that slimmer is better. This struggle ties back into Du Bois’s (1903) theory of double consciousness, where Vanessa tussles, like Mia, with beauty standards from the two cultures of which she is a part. In this aspect, the acute views that Korean people take on beauty, and Vanessa’s exposure to those views did not necessarily cause sweeping shifts in her self-conceptualisation of her physical appearance, but it did confirm her self-conceptualisation of accepting her body how it is. She did not agree with taking drastic measures to alter physical appearance, and finds self-acceptance the preferable avenue, which could tie back into her upbringing and a mother who never encouraged her toward a particular physical ideal.

The Korean obsession with beauty also had an impact on Vanessa’s ability to read motives behind certain cultural behaviours. Vanessa showed learned empathy for her host country’s extreme (to her) ideas and behaviours about appearance. “I appreciated that people really care and people have a sense of style and fashion.... [The market’s] really competitive there, so they are trying to do anything possible to get a job and stuff.” Despite the skin creams and hair treatments and cosmetic surgery, Vanessa perceived that the reason her host nationals were so willing to spend copious amounts of money and time on their appearance was so that they could have better chances at employment opportunities or to find a partner. While she might not agree with the methods used (or that the methods are even needed), Vanessa learned that the underpinnings of Korean culture required Koreans to adapt accordingly to achieve economic and social ambitions.

2.3 Hair

Vanessa's response to my initial question about her hair shows the volatility of the question.

“Oh, fuck! Wait, what about- Wait. How do I feel about my hair? I mean hair is just – it's a challenge. I always tell my friends, ‘You guys don't understand how hair makes or breaks you as a person’... If I'm having a bad hair day that will just put my whole mood down for the day. And so I feel like hair is just a constant challenge.”

Vanessa had a very passionate response about her hair, cursing the moment she realised I was asking about it, despite not having cursed in the previous hour of the interview. A White woman asking about Black hair often creates tension (Banks, 2000); though hair is a private decision, it is also a public display (Synott, 1987).

Vanessa's hair holds a key facet in how she understands her physical appearance, and (in turn) her self-concept. This complex relationship with her hair originates from the context within which Vanessa finds herself. As a U.S. American, Vanessa has been exposed to the media about how hair should be. As a Black woman, she has received messages from family and friends about the significance of her hair. These messages can be contradictory, as mainstream U.S. media often shows long flowing locks, which are not genetically customary in the African American community. Oftentimes to obtain such hair Black women must purchase expensive weaves, which illustrates another societal oppression of a White standard of beauty requiring a higher disposable income to achieve. This incongruity can lead to the fiery reaction like Vanessa displayed, as she seeks to understand herself within the Black and U.S. American communities. One statement from Vanessa in particular highlights again the significance of her relationship with her hair: “That's the only thing I will care about more is my hair over my physical appearance.” She went on to state, “I do view hair as being special.” Vanessa's self-worth can be tied to how she feels her hair looks. In this way, hair is perceived as a form of power that Vanessa can claim (or not claim) for herself.

With her studies taking her to Seoul, Vanessa realised that she was traveling to a country with a fairly homogenous population that does not have a substantial Black community. She admitted that with going to South Korea, her hair was the one thing about which she was truly worried. She remarked, “I'm pretty picky about who does my hair to begin with. I just don't want anyone's hands in it.” Our personal control over our hair and how we choose to display it can be a telling marker of how we understand ourselves and how we wish others to perceive us (Firth, 2011). Vanessa feared the loss of

power her hair gives to her self-concept, feeling she would have to relinquish it because she did not know if there was anyone in Seoul that she could trust with her hair. To try to preserve that sense of power, Vanessa researched (before departing the U.S.) what she might be able to do with maintaining her hair while she was in Korea, finding a salon near a U.S. military base that stated it could work with any type of hair. Vanessa's researching allowed her some control over the unknown – that she is not going totally blind into a possible threat to her identity (i.e. being unable to maintain her hair, which she has stated is important to how she views herself).

Two months into her stay in Seoul, Vanessa did get her hair re-braided, which “surprised even [her].” This self-surprise indicates that Vanessa was wary of the idea of relinquishing control of such an extremely important aspect of her self-image to a stranger. Her willingness to do so (thus surprising herself) implies a readiness of Vanessa to have a less-than-optimal hair experience. Vanessa stated, “The overall quality wasn't exactly what I was hoping, but I didn't complain since I didn't expect too much anyway,” giving the rebraiding experience a 6 out of 10 compared to her U.S. experiences. Before departing, Vanessa had made clear the importance of her hair to how she felt about herself, yet here she was allowing and being content with a mediocre result for her hair styling. Perhaps because Koreans are not as familiar with African hair, Vanessa was not as concerned about the message that it sent to them if it was not perfect in her (and other Black women's) eyes. She may also have shifted the importance of her hair in defining herself while abroad. Either way, Vanessa showed a conversion in the meaning she places on her hair, at least while in South Korea. This ability to suspend elements of how she understood herself shows the transformative power of being placed outside one's native environ. Vanessa had to adjust to a place where the power she might usually have over her hair (and thus her self-worth) was lessened.

In Seoul, Vanessa found her hair a feature of marvel for her host country's population. People would approach her to ask about it or to touch it, having never seen anything like it before. She said that hardly a day passed without someone coming up to her to compliment her hair. She found, “Some people would just stare or some people would just have to come up and touch me to see if I'm real.” As a novelty to Koreans (and one that they found “pretty”), the reaction her hair received possibly contributed to the power that Vanessa had always attributed to her hair. The positive response from people unfamiliar with her hair type sent Vanessa signals that hair that is usually dismissed in mainstream U.S. culture can be attractive and appreciated by individuals

who do not have that hair. Banks (2000) explained, “Because hair is attached to physical *and* social bodies, it is given meaning... because of its very relationship to self” (p. 25). Black women create meaning with their hair, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Given the strong reactions to hair in the Black female community, the socially constructed meanings have a powerful impact. Individuals respond to how others react to them, and the reaction of others to one’s hair impacts one’s self-understanding within the societal context. With Koreans’ reactions, Vanessa built upon her previous notions of herself in regards to her thoughts about her hair.

Vanessa also had to reconcile with the fact that the curiosity her hair generated made her a focus of attention. According to Banks (2000), Black women struggle because of the intercultural curiosity about Black hair. “The ‘price’ is an invasion of personal space, and a reluctance to permit such an invasion is read by nonblacks as blacks’ attempt to be mysterious” (p. 80). Vanessa admitted that she was not sure if she should tell people to stop touching her on the subway when they would come to investigate her. Perhaps Koreans felt that as a super minority, Vanessa owed them some explanation as to her existence. Yet despite having to yield this privacy, Vanessa did not allow it to disempower her. While it frustrated her at times the constant attention she received, she realised after her repatriation that it benefitted her immensely. “I now feel more comfortable in my skin after being there and being... [the] center of attention.” So while Banks (2000) painted this invasion of privacy as negative, in the intercultural context of studying abroad, Vanessa found it empowering. With reflection, she found that these challenges added to her ability to define herself despite how others might define her (e.g. Koreans considering her a curiosity). The extreme attention she received forced Vanessa to decipher how she viewed herself. The initial reaction may have been discomfort and self-questioning, but Vanessa found inner understanding and appreciation through other people’s scrutiny. And with the narrowed control over her hair due to lack of resources to maintain it as she might have in the United States, Vanessa became more comfortable with herself and found power in however it might look.

3. Academic Achievement

As mentioned earlier, Black American families have long pressed their children to excel academically because they see it as an avenue to secure a better future (Perry, 2004). This security served the twofold purpose of allowing the individual to live comfortably, but also to further African American people as a whole. Vanessa, before and after her

study abroad experience, showed indications of how her academic work and her attitudes toward her academic work affect her self-concept.

3.1 Personal Advancement

Vanessa always strove to do her best in school. Even before she attended school, she was passionate about learning, and free time was spent reading historical fiction. Petra was strict about Vanessa's schooling, "She's always pushed me to try to make good grades – the best grades you can. She's instilled that in me.... I don't like to make bad grades now. She's made me want to make good grades." Petra's influence had a stark impact on Vanessa so that she internalised the desire to excel. This desire propelled Vanessa through her primary and secondary schooling as a high-achieving student, and ensured that she did not rebel when opportunities arose to miss classes or try illicit substances. "I didn't even have those desires. And I think that's one thing I can be grateful for my mom is because I was raised the way I was. I never had those tendencies to wanna be... rebellious." The deep influence that family has on academic attitudes (Parham, 1999; Perry, 2004; Belgrave & Allison, 2010) affected Vanessa's belief that in order to succeed in life, she would first need to succeed in school.

Vanessa never struggled with the Eurocentric academic structure in her schooling discussed by Africentric theorists (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986, Harris & Nettles, 1991; Delpit, 1995; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Ogbu, 1997; Nieto, 2000; Steele, 2003; Perry, 2004). Perhaps her personality allowed her to adapt to the Eurocentric style, or she felt the pressure to excel so that she adopted what Fordham (1988) described as a 'racelessness' where she assumed behaviours and attitudes outside her Africentric norms in order to excel. She displayed Parham et al.'s (1999) Africentric notion that self-determination has on academic progress. Either way, Vanessa thrived which allowed her to attend university on a merit scholarship.

University set another challenge for Vanessa academically, which showed that she would need to adapt again to different scholastic mindsets. Her academic experience there helped her to grow and better understand herself. Seeing the competitive nature on campus, Vanessa had to adapt to a new way of learning and studying. The workload at her university challenged her. "Even though I'm a hard worker, and I try to do good in school, that doesn't necessarily mean I'm a straight-A student, 'cause I'm not actually." But that did not stop Vanessa from working hard. With the strong work ethic instilled in her by her mother, she maintained at least a 3.0 GPA to keep her merit scholarship,

knowing her degree was essential to achieving her goals. Again Vanessa adapted to what is required of her academically because she desires to be financially secure in the future; that desire stems from her mother's wish for her to do well.

Vanessa needed to study abroad in order to satisfy a requirement of her international business certificate, a part of her undergraduate degree. She was able to choose the location, and settled on Asia because of her longtime interest in Asian culture. While she wanted to travel to Japan, the programme there was more expensive than South Korea. Even academic choices like study abroad destinations can rely on socioeconomic circumstances and create power structures on where a person may or may not travel for education. Even at higher education levels, we notice intersecting oppressions; they may not be as extreme as other intersections, but do still create an unequal balance of accessibility.

Aside from the requirement of her certification, Vanessa had other reasons for wanting to study abroad. "I feel like I need to go on this empowerment trip. And I feel like doing this is gonna empower me honestly." With Vanessa's ambitious life goals, she knew she needed to challenge herself to grow personally, and she understood that throwing herself into another culture would accomplish that. Since she has never really been outside the southern U.S., she saw the opportunity for development.

"That's mainly why I wanna go abroad so badly is because I feel like I haven't been able to really see the world.... I really just can't wait to see if there's any differences [*siz*] on how other people live in other places. And also making those connections [*with other people*]."

While these ideas might seem outside the scope of personal academic advancement, Africentric psychology finds it fully encompassed within it. Belgrave and Allison (2010) discussed how simple knowledge acquisition is not the only aspect of growing academically; being able to put knowledge within social and interpersonal contexts is essential (from the Africentric perspective) for scholarly growth. Vanessa displayed these Africentric notions with her desire to immerse herself in and understand a different culture. This understanding, she felt, will have the twofold benefit of not only educating her on Korean culture, but also allowing her personal development on the social and interpersonal planes (Parham et al., 1999).

Korea University, like many of South Korean academic institutions, emphasises rote learning. Vanessa reported, "Academics here focus more on memorization of everything rather than critical thinking." She struggled with adapting to this new style of learning. Attending as an exchange student showed Vanessa an entire new way to

understand the learning process. “I never thought how difficult it would be to adjust to campus and dorm life here at Korea University. The classes here are difficult not because of the workload, but rather the teaching and test-taking style.” At KU, students are usually assessed with two or three exams and/or projects. “This in itself is a big culture shock since I am use to having multiple assignments and exams throughout the semester.” While she found the course load to be easier than her home university, the attendance policies, essay writing, and exam formats challenged her understandings of how a university education should be implemented.

Even after repatriation, Vanessa still found the Korean system of learning arcane: “I hate how they do memorization. To me, it makes me think they don’t care about what you think but rather if you can just repeat everything you learned word-for-word, without any personal insight included.” She did not see how learning mere facts could prepare someone to excel in life. With both her U.S. American and Africentric mindsets, she understands education to be something more involved beyond the simple ability to recite facts. So even though she was able to adapt to the learning style in order to do well, she was not able to understand the reasoning behind why Koreans value this type of learning over her own, and that a student’s own insights have no place in academic discourse. Given African Americans’ constant effort of having their own academic inclinations accepted by mainstream U.S. culture (Ogbu, 1997), Vanessa’s empathy is lacking in the realm of understanding academics. Vanessa’s reaction indicates that while she was able to learn from the content of her courses at Korea University, she was unable to show awareness of the value in these teaching methods.

3.2 Professional Advancement

As discussed earlier, Vanessa committed to a goal of becoming financially successful so that she will be able to provide for herself and her family. She obtained her first job when she was sixteen at a fast food franchise; she wanted to be able to buy things for herself and knew she could not ask her mother to pay for her personal expenses. Her initial jobs were not career-focused, but she stated that she learned a lot from them, especially handling relationships with other people. She worked nearly full-time while finishing high school and when she started university, and when asked why she confessed, “I just love making money!” For that reason, she stated she knew she had to study business. Thus she majored in International Business, despite her friends thinking she might read for Asian Studies given her long-term interest in Far Eastern

cultures. Her practicality prevailed, with her desire to want to care financially for her family.

Vanessa stated upon repatriation that studying abroad had solidified her desire to work abroad. “It’s made me more determined that’s for sure.... [It] opened my eyes to show that there are other options for me. So the fact that I have back up plans just in case something doesn’t really work out, I can go to Option B or C or something.” Prior to going abroad, she had lofty goals and a general plan on how to achieve them (work hard, get a degree, get a good job). Afterward, she was able to state specific action items to reach those goals, and alternatives if one does not work out. This maturity indicates Vanessa can see practical avenues to attaining her desires, which includes providing for her family. Study abroad exposed her to these ideas through the people she met in Seoul and the volunteer opportunities in which she took part.

3.3 Racial Contribution

As mentioned earlier, academic achievement within the Africentric perspective is also seen as an opportunity to advance African Americans as a whole (Noble, 1988; Belgrave et al., 1992). While not a primary reason for study abroad, Vanessa did find that this was an outcome of her time in Seoul. Returning to the lecture on race in her Popular Culture course at Korea University, Vanessa spoke with her mother about how frustrating the Korean students’ perceptions were of African Americans.

“[My mom] put it back in perspective because she said, “That’s all they know... That’s why they are probably so shocked that you are there and you are in school. But you have to do these type of things to try to help fight against these stereotypes because now these people can say even though they thought only Black people can be Kanye West and Beyonce, they met people who got to the same school that they went to.””

Merely being a student at a prestigious institution like Korea University, Vanessa begins to normalise different experiences. By Vanessa living her life and striving to achieve her goals, she is helping to advance views on African Americans. She demonstrates to strangers that their stereotypes of Black Americans might not be accurate. She shows that Black Americans can be not only musicians or sports legends, but also business students with career goals in international marketing.

This by-product of racial advancement for Black Americans had an effect on Vanessa’s self-concept. “For me, it was really empowering to know a lot of things that I am doing – I’m even the first or one of a few to do it, even though for me I wish I can get more people to hop on board.” Vanessa felt her own personal growth and power in

helping other Black Americans, however small, by being a positive example of what can be accomplished. These feelings show Vanessa's ties to the Africentric notion of collectivism discussed earlier. She is part of the whole and makes contributions to that whole in her own ways (Parham et al., 1999).

Vanessa's evolution in her understanding of self occurred on various levels from her time studying abroad in South Korea. She grew in her self-concept in relation to her race, including family, nationality, and gender, as well as her academic work. Vanessa's comprehension of her identity became clearer to her as she put it within the context of her abroad experiences.

Chapter IX. Taylor: Venice, Italy

“I feel unstoppable.”

Taylor self-identifies as a multi-generational Black American woman; she lives outside a major city in the southern United States. She attended a large urban research university to study Economics just 20 miles from her hometown. A tall striking woman with an athletic build, Taylor was twenty-one when she traveled abroad. Taylor’s understanding of her self-concept does not appear to have altered much after three months in Venice, Italy. While her experience abroad does seem to have helped enhance certain aspects of her gender and academic identities, she appeared to evolve little in her racial understanding upon repatriation. This chapter examines Taylor’s understanding in regards to these factors, and how studying abroad affected her.

1. Race

Taylor’s awareness about her racial identity is complicated. She knows that she is a Black woman, but she prefers not to label herself as having a race, because she feels that it should not matter. Yet she explained that being Black in the U.S. places certain impediments in the way of being treated as equal. This section considers how Taylor’s self-concept about her race manifests in relation to her family, nationality, and friends, and any impact that her time in Venice had on her understanding about these aspects of her identity.

1.1 Race and Family

Taylor’s main familial relationships are with her nuclear family: mother, father, and two brothers (one older, one younger). Her family had their struggles while she grew up, including moving consistently every few years and her parents separating for a year while she was in elementary school. These events took an emotional toll on Taylor, as she said she did not really understand the separation as a child. She reflected that while her family had a lot of problems, they were not unhappy and she felt her childhood was a good one.

For the most part, Taylor indicated tense relationships with various family members. She showed a love-hate relationship with her brothers, stating, “I have to love them because they’re my brothers... [but] they get on my nerves so much.” Despite them all attending the same university and sharing a living space in the basement of the

family home, Taylor seemed to tolerate her brothers more than engage with them. As for Taylor's extended family, she mentioned in her initial interview that while her numerous aunts and uncles had a presence in her life, they were not close knit. She stated, "They're not the type to be really involved." She vehemently stated that she did not like her cousins because they are "crazy." The distance in her relationship with her extended family indicates a divergence from Africentric theory about the role that extended family plays in the upbringing of children. Taylor's key familial connections appear to be with her parents.

Despite her parents both being very religious, Taylor noted that she and her brothers are not religious. "It's not like I don't feel like religion is important. It's just that it's not the top of my mind and I actually do feel guilty about that. I think you need something to believe in." Taylor does not see attending church as indicative of being religious. While she believes in the Christian faith, it is not a priority in her life. Yet her parents' commitment to an organised faith still creates some dissonance for Taylor, as she does not carry that faith with her as readily.

Taylor's father, one of thirteen children, grew up happy and content despite living well below the poverty line. Her mother, one of five, was raised in the inner city but still found a way to thrive. Taylor's first descriptors of her parents was that they were both hard-working, and have been so since a young age. Just a few months prior to her departure to study abroad, they started a company together for her father's career as a lorry driver. And even though all three of their children are adults attending university, they continue to provide for them. Yet her parents' willingness to maintain financial control over their children created some interesting reactions from Taylor. She said in her initial interview, "I love my parents but I don't want to be under their control anymore." Taylor also looked forward to her Italian abroad experience because it meant she would be moving out of her parents' home for a while. "[I'm looking forward to] being on my own."

Her parents appear to come from a higher economic bracket, as Taylor mentioned that her parents might purchase her brothers and her a home for them to stay in and use exclusively. However when we discussed socioeconomic class, Taylor indicated that her family lived in relative poverty compared to some of her classmates in secondary school. "I knew there were rich Black people but I never knew there were so many in one place. So when I saw that, it made me feel like... an outcast." She felt she should be a part of this rich Black community, even though before she was exposed to

them, her socioeconomic status had never crossed her mind. Suddenly, Taylor faced an intersecting conflict between her race and how she understood it within the context of class. Taylor showed a lot of presumption regarding her classmates. She said she would rarely have people over because she was embarrassed by the fact that her home was tiny in comparison with her friends, indicating a sense of shame that came with not being of a higher class. The one rich friend that she allowed to see her home, Taylor stated, “wouldn’t judge me, so it was okay for her to come over.” Taylor seemed to have a distorted view of her socioeconomic situation. Even though she always felt that her parents were not as well off as other Black families, she indicated that she owned a pony as a young girl. Taylor appeared to be very aware of what she does not have, as opposed to what she does. Additionally, she seemed deeply concerned what image her socioeconomic status projected to others.

During her initial interview when I laid out the timeline of her parents’ meeting and having children, Taylor interrupted me because I had not mentioned their marriage in that timeline: “They had us after they were married. They were very sure to have us – They didn’t want to have a child out of wedlock.” She wanted to make clear that I knew her parents married prior to having children. Given her parents’ religious background, their desire to do so makes sense; yet Taylor’s insistence that I was aware of this fact again indicates a preoccupation with others’ perception of her (by extension of her family). Shorter-Gooden and Washington (1996) found,

“Most [Black women] talked about an identity based on the need to overcome the negative aspects of being Black... There was a positive sense about Black identity... because struggling against society’s negative views of Blacks impelled the woman to work harder to accomplish her goals” (p. 469).

Taylor stated that she has personally witnessed the manifestation of the stereotype of African Americans as unwed parents; her proclamation of her parents marrying before having children demonstrated a need to overcome her assumption of my presumption (as a White woman) of a negative Black stereotype.

While abroad Taylor began to notice differences in family structures that were not typical to some of her experiences in her home state. “I hardly see any single unmarried mothers around here. They are very family-oriented so if a couple has a child, they are married, end of story. No broken families. The fathers are very involved with their children’s lives. In fact I see more fathers [than mothers] with their children. Their mentality is different and very refreshing compared to those [at home].” While these

observations may not indicate any shift in Taylor's personal understanding of her identity, they do allow Taylor to understand the different cultural values that create family structures around the world. African Americans, while deeply family-oriented (Parham et al., 1999; Belgrave & Allison, 2010), have had to adjust family structures to handle societal constructions like slavery and high imprisonment rates among Black men. Even her own family, which has the more mainstream structure of a nuclear family, appears different from what she witnessed in Italy, with fathers heavily involved with hands-on child-rearing (instead of just providing financial stability). Being abroad has offered up to Taylor an understanding that families, no matter what their composition, can provide an atmosphere for children's growth.

1.2 Race and Nationality

Growing up Taylor believed that having more White people around was what was normal. Her family's mobility allowed her to see that different communities existed with higher concentrations of Black people. Her exposure to various neighbourhood racial compositions may have led to Taylor's convoluted understanding of her racial identity. When asked in her pre-departure interview how she defines herself culturally, she stated she considered herself American: "I'm not from Africa. I think that they just call me African so that they can identify me as a brown person, but I see myself as an American." So when asked about what being Black meant to her initially, Taylor said,

"I know society would disagree with me big time but I don't really feel there's any difference between being Black or White. I try to see us as people, so that's what I'm trying to do.... Being Black, I don't like to think there's a difference even though, there is."

Taylor appears to believe that while the societal constructs of race exist within U.S. society, there is no point to having them, which might seem paradoxical given her desire to portray a certain persona, as mentioned previously.

Though she could readily mention how discrimination and oppression occur regularly against Black people, Taylor appeared to struggle between what her ideal would be for race relations and the reality. Bennett's (2001) DMIS (mentioned in Chapter 4) would probably place Taylor's thinking into the minimisation stage, where human similarities (biological structures) outweigh any cultural differences that might exist among people from different backgrounds. Inequalities she personally experienced, including being referred to as a 'nigger' when she was thirteen years old, seem to have manifested as superficial reflections of societal constructions. Instead she appeared to

have formed an identity based on rebuffing prejudice with the unconventional approach of trying to discard race as a component of identity all together. She stated that after the incident, “I was thinking, ‘What did I do?’ I know I didn’t do anything.” But people’s ignorance and vulgarity confused her. Taylor’s desire to see beyond colour might manifest from these situations where she has been reminded that her race gives her an inferior status in some of her fellow citizens’ eyes.

Given these conflicted opinions about being Black in the U.S., Taylor’s understanding of her national identity might be better formed, seeing that she does not see herself (according to her own words) as being Black but rather being U.S. American. In her initial interview Taylor was emphatic about the importance of Independence Day above other holidays:

“I love 4th of July. I celebrate 4th of July because that actually is like a real purpose to it. I don’t know how to explain it but it’s like that’s when, America got their independence so that’s actually something to celebrate.”

Yet later in the same interview, Taylor admitted:

“I’m not really that patriotic to be honest, but I really do want to leave America. I do want to live in another country. Not that I don’t love America, [I] just feel like there’s so much more out there to experience.”

Taylor seemed to struggle with her understanding of what being U.S. American actually means to her, even after claiming it to be an important part of her identity. Identifying exclusively as a U.S. American might be a way to divorce herself from a history of extreme prejudice (that she personally has experienced), or she presented an identity to me that she felt I wanted to see and struggled to maintain that presentation. Her self-reflection in this area, prior to studying abroad, appeared under-developed and/or conflicted.

Being abroad offered Taylor an opportunity to examine her identity as a U.S. American when placed in relief against other nationalities. While abroad, Taylor felt she did not really experience any negativity from others about her U.S. American identity. Her friends might observe when she made a particularly American comment: “I would complain about walking; they would say, ‘That’s such an American thing.’” But mostly she discovered that they found it amusing about her. Taylor also learned about how problems can differ across cultures. “Other people’s problems: they aren’t anything like mine. Other people’s cultures.... What we in America would consider weird is just normal for them.” She began to see how her U.S. identity shaped how she understood

the world. “So there are good things and there are bad things that I noticed.” Like Mia and Vanessa, Taylor could acknowledge the privilege that her U.S. American identity gives her, such as being able to have certain things that others might not.

Taylor had an objective while in Italy of having “authentic” Venetian food, but she stated that she was never really able to find any outside of her friend Alessio’s home (discussed later). Food that she could have in the United States did not seem to count to her: pasta or pizza. Even though these are common food staples in Italy, Taylor did not seem to recognise them as being authentic.

Taylor witnessed the pride that Venetians take in their city. “The people there are really proud of their past and its ancestry. And with good reason; they should be.” She remarked in her first letter while abroad, “Venice is a dying city but for now it is full of life.” Venetians preserve the history and lifestyle of the past, watching people pass by while they read newspapers. When pressed as to why Venetians might prefer newspapers to e-readers, Taylor said she did not know why they would continue to read newspapers. Here Taylor does not seem to realise that a preference for “out-dated” media might simply further reflect a culture that prides itself on not being in a hurry. So while Taylor gained some ability to analyse what being U.S. American means in relation to privilege, she appeared to have some difficulty in being able to analyse beyond her own cultural lens in other aspects.

As for her understanding of her racial identity in the context of being U.S. American, Taylor did show some growth in understanding her Blackness. When she saw other people with Black skin in Italy, Taylor found them peculiar: “I found it strange that all the Black people there: none of them spoke English.... They were strange to me.” She stated that she only saw a few every month, and she assumed most of them came from Africa. Here were people who looked like her, but were beyond her realm of experience. Being abroad allowed her to start acknowledging that differences exist for people of various races, even if those differences are just societal constructions. Taylor stated in her repatriation interview,

“My identity as a Black person in America: people are going to discriminate against me. I’m OK with that but it’s not going to stop me from being who I am. It’s not going to stop me from being what I want to be, despite what people think when they look at me.”

Before Italy, she was unable to see herself as a Black woman, but now can acknowledge that it is a part of her experience.

Yet she went on to state, “I think being around so many different people helped me realise that it’s okay to be different because it’s actually our differences are what bring us together.” When asked to delve into what about her experience abroad made her realise these parts of her identity, or the similarities people share, she could not state why beyond simply being around a lot of different people. Again, Taylor demonstrated some personal growth in her self-concept in relation to her race and nationality. Studying abroad has initiated a deeper understanding for Taylor into who she is as a Black U.S. American and some of the oppressions she will face, even if she wants to turn a blind eye.

1.3 Race and Friendship

Taylor stated in her initial interview that she is not one to make a lot of friends: “I don’t tend to have a lot of friends only because I don’t really trust a lot of people.... You can’t really trust people, especially females. So I avoid having that -- this is unnecessary drama that I avoid.” While Taylor stated that most of her friends are male because she cannot deal with the drama of females, when asked to talk about her friends, she mentioned her four closest friends as being female, and rarely mentioned male friends. Again she appeared to present a self she wanted me to see, while later giving me paradoxical information.

When she was younger, the majority of Taylor’s friends were White, given her time spent in mostly White schools. “I guess I identified better with White girls when I was younger. As opposed to now, I just have all Black friends.” Given her family’s motility, Taylor’s initial friendships with White children make sense as that community was to what she was exposed. When her family settled in an area with more Black people, she found more commonalities with other African Americans, as well as more physical acceptance which will be discussed later in the chapter.

In her pre-departure interview, Taylor acknowledged that she has a short temper. With her self-reported abrasive attitude and general mistrust of people (which does not embrace the Africentric collective spirit), she preferred to focus on shaping strong relationships with a few individuals. Yet for those with whom Taylor has forged a friendship, she is exceedingly loyal. She will take up the mantle of financial caretaker and big sister. Her closest friend is her baby sister who helped Taylor transition into the life of her last high school. Taylor stated in her initial interview that because of that kindness, Taylor needed to help her friend in whatever way she could. She stated that this idea of

reciprocation came from her parents, “If you do something for me, I’m going to pay you back, one way or the other.” This give-and-take arrangement is slightly outside of Africentric theory’s view of friendships (Belgrave & Allison, 2010). Given the collective focus on Africentrism, reciprocity is not as clear-cut as Taylor regards it. Taylor seemed to display more U.S. American individualist tendencies about the expectations in friendships.

While abroad, Taylor noted that she amazingly got along with everyone, which she said is not normal for her. Taylor found the diversity of her classmates refreshing, as her home university has a large African American population. “I liked how there was no one who looked like me. As strange as that sounds, you like to surround yourself with other people that look like you, but that didn’t bug me.” She noted of her other abroad classmates, “We’re not so different – Really, we’re different.” Taylor displayed an understanding of seeing the biological similarities that all human beings share, but that there are still differences that make us unique. “I now know the world is not as big as you think, we are different cultures. We speak different languages; we come from different places but we’re really the same.” Taylor did feel she could “communicate better with different types of people and cultures around the world” as there were people from five different continents in her programme. The diversity allowed her to see others’ perspectives about the world that she had not previously considered. However, Taylor also stated that she was able to communicate with all of her friends in her own language, not having to adjust in any way to them (whereas they automatically had to adjust to using English). To her, cultural differences seemed trivial, on the level of cuisine eaten or media preferences. So while she may have been exposed to and started to gain an understanding of the vast differences that exist among the world’s citizens, she did not articulate to me any complexities beyond these superficialities.

Taylor’s experience with friends in Italy paralleled her observations about friendship while younger. Her first letter from Venice talked about the various friends she had met from around the globe, yet her attention shifted to one friend from Italy. As she stated, “I would be his best friend forever if we had time.... Not surprising, I am spending all my spare time with Alessio.” While she might go out occasionally with others from her programme, she found herself drawn to Alessio, a 35-year-old Italian man she met at a party. He became her cultural informant on Italy, taking her to places that tourists rarely visited, and sharing the history of the Veneto region. She remarked in her follow-up interview, “He became my best friend, really.... I miss him. Sorely.”

Alessio became one of those friends with whom Taylor forms deeper, stronger relationships. He offered Taylor insight into Italian culture she might not have normally received because of her personality that makes her want to focus on a few choice friends.

Yet Taylor's understanding of how culture can have an impact on how individuals understand themselves appeared distorted. When asked in her follow-up interview about what being a U.S. American means to her personally, she stated that it meant that she lived in America: "Really. If I was born in Europe, I would probably speak a different language, I'd probably look a little different, but I'd be European and that's because I was born in Europe." Taylor appeared not to think that her nationality impacts her view on the world or herself. Her understanding of herself in relation to being a Black American woman appears to focus more on mere geography and not the impact that her culture has on her world view.

2. Gender

Taylor, like Vanessa and Mia, considers her race and her gender to be intertwined, which (as stated earlier) is very common for many Black women (Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996). Her feeling on being a woman, particularly an African American woman, is:

"This stress of trying to be perfect.... I feel like females have to work harder, to break that glass ceiling. But the fact that I'm a Black and I'm a female is a double whammy, you know what I mean? And I feel like I have to work but we got to twice as hard to get where you want to be. And so I'm not actually prepared for that actually."

Taylor appears keenly aware of the intersecting oppressions of her race and gender, and how this affects how she must behave if she wants to succeed. This section looks at Taylor's understanding of her racial identity in relation to her gender, specifically sexualised images of being Black, her physical appearance, and her relationship with her hair.

2.1 *Sexualised Images*

Taylor's parents encouraged her to respect herself when it comes to being a woman. For her that manifests itself in terms of sexual behaviour. In her pre-departure interview, she revealed,

"I am still a virgin right now and I've had boyfriends but they didn't feel right so I'm not just going to sleep with someone because they've

pressured me to or because I feel obligated because you're my boyfriend."

She found strength in this decision because she saw the pressure women are placed under to behave a certain way. She reported that the media holds a lot of responsibility for the sexualised images of women, not just African Americans. "All the [TV] shows tend to show not how women *should* act but how women *are* acting and how women there tend to be more loose.... they sexualise women a lot: Black and White, Asians often." As Banks (2000) noted, women are given constructed ideals not only of beauty, but also the behaviours expected of them as those behaviours 'add' to the beauty of a woman for being a 'woman'.

Taylor found while in Italy, "It is usually the males that are kind or helpful and the females that are rude to me... for obvious reasons." When asked in her repatriation interview what these obvious reasons were, she said, "A lot of the men were helpful because I am beautiful and they want to help me." But she felt that the Italian women were cold to her because she was a non-Italian woman who did not belong (though her beauty might have been another unnamed factor). Taylor stated in a journal entry that she felt U.S. American women are more submissive than Italian women, who are often domineering and the head of the household. She found it fascinating that women must impress Italian men's mothers because men respect their mother's opinions so much. She stated that she felt that what it means to be a woman depends on the country you are in. That Taylor can make this observation, but not see how her nationality might play into her cultural identity is interesting, and somewhat paradoxical. She can observe the respect that familial women command in Italian culture, but cannot see how her own U.S. American identity might shape her views of herself as a woman. Collins (2000) noted, "Because American citizenship is so often taken for granted among U.S. Black women, [they] often have difficulty seeing how deeply nationalistic U.S. society is, but how nationalisms affect us" (p. 230). While Collins made this observation in the context of oppression of Black women in mainstream U.S. society, the implications of this statement in Taylor's abroad experience take a different context. In the next section, I look at Taylor's self-concept in regards to her physical appearance. The idea of nationalism in this regard and how it hinders Taylor's self-understanding will become apparent.

2.2 *Physical Appearance*

Taylor showed in her initial interview insecurities about her appearance as when she was younger she often felt that others were prettier than she, and she was in direct competition with them for men's attention. She admitted that as a teenager, "I definitely had a period where I was obsessed with trying to be skinny." In fact, when asked about the effect of being Black on her life, she stated that she felt, "The only time that bothered me about the media when I was younger was just my weight.... It's more like that image I put out to people that bugs me more than my Blackness." Taylor was bullied for being smaller when she was a young child. However, she went through a growth spurt when she was ten and grew to be over 180 centimetres by the time she was fifteen. These issues with bullying and media messages shaped Taylor's struggles to accept her physical appearance into young adulthood.

Prior to her departure, Taylor stated, "Physically? I look all right. I'll rock a two-piece in Florida. I mean I'm not thin or anything." She asserted that her height has allowed her to get away with having more weight. She showed acceptance, even though it appeared to be an ongoing struggle as she stated that the biggest challenge in her life has been accepting who she is, particularly, since she's "not going to be a size seven ever again." Throughout the preliminary interview, Taylor made continuous allusions to losing weight, even though by most people's standards, they would not view her as overweight. She blamed media for distorting women's ideas of attractiveness, something which Fordham (2000) asserted is particularly difficult for African American women who often have different body types from White women.

Molloy and Herzberger (1998) discussed White and Black women's varying definitions of beauty where Black women would outline differing body shapes as beautiful. Fordham (2000) stated, "The academy's penchant for universalizing and normalizing white middle-class women's lives compels black women and other women of color to seek to appropriate the image and attempt to consume the lives of the female 'Other.'" Taylor mirrored these comments in her second interview, "In my race we've been taught to hate everything about... You know, back in slavery. Hate our hair, our skin tone, hate our facial features, our thick bodies." Black women struggle with these messages that they receive from mainstream media about what is beautiful and what is not, and often find that they (Black women) do not measure up to that standard; they must continually navigate the double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) of being Black and

being U.S. American in this context, and the intersecting power dynamics that accompany it.

For Taylor, her time in Italy helped her make some peace with the contradictory messages she received as a child. She received a lot of attention in Venice to which she was not accustomed initially. In a journal entry, she noted, “People stare at me a lot. Of course I get stares at home but not long drawn out stares or double takes.... And the fact that I am so tall makes me feel like I am part of a zoo attraction. I do not blend in at all, no matter how much I try. I usually just ignore it: what else can I do?” While this attention caused Taylor dissonance, upon her return she was able to put that attention into a different light,

“People started to recognise me. ‘Aren’t you the girl that I see everyday walking. Do you live here?’ Kind of. But mostly the locals that began to notice that I was there because I stood out so much and I understand why and that’s okay with me. I’m okay with that.... I understood why, I can understand why they were staring at me. But I think it might be an Italian thing, they’re just observing you, what you’ve got on, how you’re groomed. I don’t think it’s considered rude like how it is in America. I think it’s just a cultural thing.”

Being exposed to this cultural norm of intense observation allowed Taylor to become more comfortable with how she thought others perceived her, but also how she perceived herself.

Whereas before departure she “look[ed] all right,” Taylor showed up to her follow-up interview wearing a stunning red dress carrying herself with confidence. She asserted in that interview,

“I feel like nowadays more [Black] people are embracing it and I’m proud of who we are naturally. I guess going to Italy made me realise that I’m different but it depends on where you are but it shouldn’t really matter at all and it didn’t. It didn’t matter while I was over there.”

She received positive attention for her appearance while in Venice (especially from men), and she saw that women were given positive attention even if they may not have been classified as beautiful by mainstream definitions. She used those messages to shift how she understood her physical appearance as a Black woman in the United States.

2.3 Hair

Taylor’s relationship with her hair indicates some of the binary ties she possesses with both the White mainstream ideals of beauty and Black standards. When she attended a predominantly White high school, she said the (White) boys found her hair

unattractive in its braids and not flowing down her back like the White girls' hair. She was made to feel that her hair was inferior to the White standards. Yet when she transferred to a school with more Black students, the (Black) boys told her how pretty she was, and she began to feel more attractive. Her hair was not abnormal in her new environment: "When I got to [the other high school], I felt beautiful." She was not ostracized for having different hair. "Because hair is attached to physical *and* social bodies, it is given meaning... because of its very relationship to self" (Banks, 2000, p. 25). Black women create meaning with their hair, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Given the strong reactions to hair in the Black female community, the socially constructed meanings have a powerful impact in both the Black community and wider society. Individuals respond to how others react to them, and the reaction of others to one's hair impacts one's self-understanding within the societal context. As mentioned in Mia's chapter, Black women's hair can reflect how someone feels about herself in the social body (Banks, 2000). Taylor's early childhood experiences made her feel inferior about her hair because the people she was around indicated to her that it was undesirable. With these messages, Taylor's self-understanding vied with itself and may have linked into the self-esteem issues she had with her physical appearance, as discussed earlier. It was not until she was in a community with other African Americans that Taylor began to feel positive about her hair because others responded positively to it.

Before her departure for Venice, Taylor reported,

"I like my hair but... the only time that I feel like I'm really free... is when I have braids. But I just wished it would grow any longer.... I got it permed and then every year it would just get shorter and shorter, and shorter.... But overall, I have to say it could be worst. I do have thick hair [compared] to most Black people, my hair is healthier than most Black people because I don't use a flat iron. I do braid out some of my hair. I actually decided to stop perming it. I'm going to get braids on my hair when I'm going to Italy. When I get back, I'm not going to perm it out. I want to see how long it can get. And maybe about 6 years, I'll take another look at it."

Perhaps most interesting is Taylor's long term plans for her hair. She knows the effects of different treatments, and has a desired state for her hair, with it being long and flowing down her back, since at the interview she stated that it "just tickles [her] shoulders." This view about her hair did not shift while she was abroad, "I wish my hair was longer. I wish my hair was natural. I wish my hair was all natural." As stated previously, Black women may seek social acceptance by conforming to the hair norms of White American (Banks, 2000). Taylor believed, and still seems to believe, that having

her hair a certain way (long and flowing) makes her more attractive to others, as well as herself, and is an important facet of her self-assessment.

Hair acts as a personal statement where individuals have the opportunity to look their best (Banks, 2000). For Taylor her best means having more “White” hair in terms of length, even though she also chooses not to perm her hair straight for aesthetic reason (though she also noted that she has ‘better’ hair than many African Americans, in that it is thicker and not as coiled). Our personal control over our hair and how we choose to display it can be a telling marker of how we understand ourselves and how we wish others to perceive us.

“Men and women in specific kinds of society at specific periods are using their own physical raw material in terms of the social norms to provide indices to their personality and make statements about their conception of their role, their social position and changes in these” (Firth, 2011, p. 298).

Taylor’s time abroad did not change her attitude about her hair in relationship to her self-concept. Before and after her journey, her hair helped her to portray a beautiful, confident woman. Though her personal standards might be considered outside Africentric norms and more in conformity with mainstream White beauty standards, Taylor has considered her relationship with her hair and the message she sends with it.

3. Academic Achievement

Taylor indicated in her initial interview that she has always been proud that she was able to maintain high grades so that she could go to college. Interestingly she noted herself that she would put very little effort into her schoolwork, but still benefitted from good grades. “I do take real pride on my school work. I do like making good grades. It makes me feel good to make good grades. And so I definitely do care a lot about school.” Her attitude is interesting as she likes the benefits that her high grade point average has afforded her, even though she did not have to work hard for them, making her unsure if she is a “lazy smart person.” Taylor knows that she possesses the intellect necessary to achieve academically, which Parham et al. (1999) and Cokley (2003) state is an important factor for Black youth’s achievement: self-perception of their abilities. Taylor’s abroad experience challenged her academic identity by helping her to better understand it, on personal and professional levels.

3.1 Personal Advancement

Taylor appears to get her drive to excel from her parents' standards. She noted that her father barely finished high school, and her mother struggled for several years to finish her undergraduate degree. Her father's struggle with education made him a proponent for his children to do well in school. Taylor said her father's relentless mantra to her and her brothers was, "Do what you gotta do now so you can do what you wanna do later." She learned to prioritise and not procrastinate so that she can meet her different obligations.

Additionally, Taylor's parents' drive for financial success for themselves, and their children, meant that she received the notion that she should 'do what she needed to do' in the framework of White society, which rewards a certain type of learning. As discussed earlier, Fordham (2000) mentioned the issue of gender "passing" where Black women's experience with education should be a particular way. By taking on a White male role as a student, Black women can find societal and economic success. Messages received from parents indicate that this White role that should be adopted in their academic journey is superior and should be part of their self-concept. Her desire (and her parents' desire) for her personal advancement means taking on a mainstream White mindset for her academic identity to thrive in the U.S. educational system.

Perry (2004) and Mickelson (1990) commented that educational attainment is a cornerstone of Africentric thinking. Taylor always knew that she would go to university. "I couldn't imagine what I would be doing if I hadn't gone to college." This decision was a natural choice for her, because she knew her parents would want nothing less: "I would have disappointed my parents if I wasn't in college. They didn't care what college I was in, as long as I was in college." As Noble (1988) noted, Black parents want their children to be able to better themselves (financially, socially, etc.) and they see a university education as key. The message Taylor received about education was so engrained that when she was asked why she decided to go to university, she stated ardently, "I really never saw myself *not* going to college."

While abroad, Taylor did not have the best experience with her academic programme. "It's too small and it's so isolated, being on an island. I miss school, how big and exciting it was." Taylor was accustomed to the large metropolitan aspects of her home university. Taylor found the assessment methods at her Italian university to be outside of her comfort zone. "You need to write so many papers: papers really long and really specific. I prefer testing, which is why I found it harder.... I'd rather do tests; I

don't like papers. It's not my thing. It's not my niche." However, she wrote that the increased workload that she experienced at her host university allowed her to feel more accomplished academically, and prepared to face future academic challenges with ease.

While she struggled with the format, Taylor seemed able to learn more about her own academic attitudes and learning style. As Graham (1994) reported that the motivation of African Americans academically comes from a variety of factors, including perceived self-consistency (p. 104), meaning that Taylor did not have a previous standard for herself (self-consistency) when being assessed with essays instead of exams. However, she adapted, achieving good grades for her semester abroad.

Prior to being abroad, Taylor stated she was looking forward to learning a new language, yet upon her arrival in Italy, she "became lazy. I completely gave up on using Italian when I went to stores because they never understood me anyway." She stated she was unable to learn the language because her teacher had a style of complete immersion into the language that did not work for Taylor. Again, Graham's (1994) argument for African American educational motivation comes forward, as she found that Black students often evaluate future success on current performance (p. 105). In the case of Taylor learning Italian, she felt "daily humiliation" when she attempted to use her Italian in public. She probably used that information to tell herself that it would continue like that, and that is when she gave up learning it.

While Taylor earned a respectable grade for her Italian class in the end, she found her failure at speaking Italian frustrating: "Anytime I suffered it was because of the language barrier. I just couldn't get my point across; I would try to say something in Italian and it would be completely wrong." This barrier stopped Taylor from immersing into different aspects of Italian life simply because those individuals were unreachable in her eyes. One of the aspects of her friendship with Alessio allowed her to experience parts of Italian life that many do not get to see. "That was the best part of it, being just submerged completely into Italian culture. It was really intense and I really enjoyed it." For Taylor, this was just as much an education for her as anything she learned in her courses. Yet her submersion was itself superficial, as she often stated herself that she could not communicate in Italian, presenting again dual selves to me. While Alessio may have been able to show her parts of Italy she might not have normally seen, she was not able to immerse herself independently.

Belgrave and Allison (2010) discussed the social aspects of learning in Africentric thinking. For Taylor, this aspect was an area with which she aligned: "Education is

important but at the end of the day it's how you live your life." She did what her father had taught her to do and prioritised her learning and also her desire to travel with others and see Europe. She got her assignments done so that she could explore, indicating her dedication to being a good student as Graham (1994) indicated an already-motivated African American student would. Oftentimes, Black students must learn to balance these dual urges of being a good student academically and respecting the need to see beyond the scholastic. From being abroad, Taylor found a way in which to strike that balance by working hard when she needed to and enjoying herself afterward.

3.2 Professional Advancement

Taylor obtained her first job when she was sixteen. Her early job experiences revolved mostly around Taylor earning enough money to purchase specific items (like an iPod or a laptop). She stated she quit several jobs because she did not like the people. The jobs allowed her the opportunity to fill up her summer. Before going to university, Taylor knew she did not want to graduate with any debt. She worked hard to ensure that she covered her finances so that she did not owe money to anyone upon obtaining her bachelor's degree. This was a decision she made herself, stating she wanted to concentrate on herself after graduating. Taylor's practicality with her finances from her first jobs and funding her university education may stem from the struggle that her parents had in acquiring financial security. Collins (2000) explained, "Persistent racial discrimination means that Black middle-class women and men are less economically secure than White middle-class individuals" (p. 64). Taylor's parents had to work for professional advancement with a more limited education, and Taylor's thoughts about money could possibly be from seeing those efforts. She was clear that her parents never really talked to her about finances, but that she learned these aspects on her own and it was her decision not to take out loans to pay for school.

Even before her departure for Italy, Taylor noted that she spent her time preparing for her future by thinking about internships and the like that might help her career path. Taylor stated that her desire by the time she is 30 is to have a successful career, and to have started a family with a husband. She strongly felt before she studied abroad that she would live abroad, and even upon her return to her home institution she was very clear that she would return to Europe, hopefully to work and live. "Studying abroad made me realise that I really do want to get a job internationally." As Fry et al. (2009) and Carlson et al. (1990) found, study abroad students are more likely to want and

to pursue internationally focused careers, and Taylor seems to be no exception, talking about her desire to return to Europe or try working in the Far East. She noted that the idea of an international career does not faze her because she was able to navigate a study abroad experience.

Taylor's reason for choosing Venice was not only because of the beauty she had heard about the city, but the practical part of it being a city of commerce. With her reading for an Economics degree, she appreciated that she could get hands-on experience in this commercial city. She found the decision to be in line with her long-term career goals. Again, her parents' practical approach to life and employment fueled by an entrepreneurial drive appears to have affected Taylor's decision-making process. Before leaving for Italy, Taylor commented that her life is a journey and she does not have to possess all of the answers now. "I still have long way to go and there're still a lot of roads I haven't taken, but I plan on getting there the best way I know how." Her individualistic drive to excel and the opportunity to have fun along the way reveals a woman who can identify what she wants and the path that she would most like to take to get there.

Consider Taylor's professional advancement under the scope of Fordham (2000) observation: "Nurturing a black female for success – as defined by larger society – is far more disruptive of indigenous cultural conventions and practices than previously thought" (p. 332). According to her, Black women take on a mainstream White role and deny part of their Black cultural identity. Taylor's reluctance to classify herself as Black because she feels that "it shouldn't matter" could indicate a Black woman driven to obtain mainstream success, and feeling that to attain that success she cannot acknowledge her racial identity as being a part of who she is.

3.3 Racial Contribution

When Taylor reflected on her primary and secondary school experiences, she had a lot of memories from which to draw. Because she moved around so much as a child, she saw the different kinds of schools offered within the same state, and often the racial differences among them. Her schools were never really very diverse, being either very White or very Black. When at one predominantly Black school, she observed, "There were so many kids on my bus – kids had to sit on the aisle. Three to a seat and we had to sit in the aisle and so -- that was mostly, 'cause that's how they do Black kids. They don't really give them enough buses." Taylor is able to see educational inequalities in the U.S.

(which she denied during parts of her initial interview) with merely the transportation offered to get to and from school.

However, Taylor does not seem to consider how educating herself and excelling in her career might contribute to the Black community. Fordham (2000) claimed, “Child-rearing practices of the parents and teachers of the high-achieving female unwittingly cremate these young African-American women’s efforts to flee the African-American community and, in the process, paradoxically, enhance their affiliation with the large American society” (p.329). Taylor’s parents have always been focused on climbing the socioeconomic ladder. They went from being a lower-middle class family when Taylor was small to being able to possibly purchase their children a second home to use. Her father’s constant refrain of, “Do what you gotta do now so you can do what you wanna do later,” has instilled a drive to succeed, even if that success is only personally. With her natural intelligence, she appears not only be following that mantra, but also linking more closely with mainstream White American society, as Fordham (2000) suggested as a consequence.

Taylor’s experience in Venice, according to her, helped her to better understand herself and her place in the world: “I feel more confident.” Taylor never thought she would be able to visit Europe, let alone live there, indicating an upward mobility in her socioeconomic class experience. While her experience abroad does appear to have helped enhance certain aspects of her gender and academic identities, repeated contradictions arose throughout her reporting on her experience and understanding of them. These contradictions might suggest an inability to self-reflect or articulate her feelings. Taylor has been exposed to more of the world and showed a rudimentary appreciation of cultural difference; she is beginning a long process of discovering herself within the context of her and others’ culture, to which studying abroad may be the impetus.

Chapter X. Tasha: Tokyo, Japan

"I'm a big Black girl going to an Asian country."

Tasha is a multi-generation Black American woman who lives outside a major city in the southern United States. She studied Linguistics at a large urban research university 15 miles from her hometown. A petite woman with a large build, Tasha was twenty when she traveled abroad. Tasha spent a year studying abroad in Tokyo at Sophia University. She evolved in how she understands herself in certain aspects of her self-concept, while she did not see a change in herself in other areas. However, it should be noted that due to scheduling, Tasha's repatriation interview occurred only a few weeks after her return from Japan. She admitted, "I feel like I still may have a little bit of a Japanese filter on right now." Thus the analysis in this chapter must take into account her limited time to reintegrate into U.S. society before reflecting on her experiences in Japan. This chapter examines how her racial, gender, and academic identities developed during her time studying abroad in Japan with that caveat.

1. Race

Race appears to play only a minor part in how Tasha understands herself. In this section, I explore the impact that studying in Japan had on her racial identity in the context of her family, nationality, and friends.

1.1 Race and Family

Though her family is originally from the South, Tasha was born and raised in New York City, spending most of her childhood there with her single mother, Grace, as well as her grandparents, aunt, and cousin. She moved to the South with her mom when she started high school because her mother did not want her attending school in New York. Moving around a lot as a child, extended family was an important part of Tasha's life. "My grandmother tries to emphasise the whole family unit." As discussed with Mia, the extended family can play an integral part in African American children's lives (Parham et al., 1999). Tasha found that even when Grace moved for a time to Tennessee when Tasha was about six, they relied on extended family (great uncles and distant cousins) to help them through it. She always had more than just her mother to help raise her and instill values in her. When she discussed growing up, Tasha always mentioned these other family members in her childhood. In the Black community, these collectivist

tendencies have allowed families to survive because others ensured that no one would be left alone and uncared for.

Tasha knows her father (who lives in a neighbouring state with his wife and their children), but is not close with him. “It’s kind of awkward and we’re both a bit scared of trying to connect.” Grace was always honest about her father’s situation (he went to prison for a time when Tasha was little), and never tried to keep them apart. Tasha stated that she wished she had a better relationship with her father, “But I’ve learned life is never that easy and families are always made up of different types of people.” Africentric theory suggests that families may not always be those with whom you share blood (Scott & Black, 1989; Belgrave & Allison, 2010); Tasha had to learn to appreciate this fact because of the absence of her father from her childhood. Interestingly, Tasha’s travels to Japan seemed to have an impact on her relationship with her father. She visited him and his family before her departure, which she found overwhelming because he has a large family and she had grown accustomed to a household with just her mother and her. She also began relying on him before she repatriated, with him agreeing to care for her dog for a time. Currently, they are trying to build a relationship, and Tasha stated upon returning, “I kind of wish I could talk to him more but I feel that it’s just awkward on both parts.... Right now it’s just a horrible icky feeling.” Her time in Japan allowed her to see the importance of this relationship, but she also recognised that the type of relationship she wishes for them will take time to develop.

Tasha’s relationship with Grace has always been one of love and respect: “She’s awesome; I love her. She tried her best to give me what I needed and what I wanted.” Africentric researchers have identified that the profound relationship between Black mothers and their daughters has allowed women to be empowered through the belief in their own self-worth (Collins, 2000, p. 102). Grace was no exception. Having had Tasha when she was just a teenager, Grace worked hard to provide for her daughter, even forgoing some of her own dreams. Tasha feels she was firmly raised in the middle class, knowing that she did not have the higher disposable income of the wealthy, but still not really wanting for anything. “I’m living great. We get to go shopping every other week. I have a car.” Her experiences in Japan did not shift her views on the socioeconomic aspect of her identity, as she did not have any experiences that exposed her to different ways of thinking about it.

While Collins (2000) described African American mothers as often being overprotective and strict, Grace appeared to be the opposite. “She gave me freedom....

I don't take that for granted at all." Tasha appreciated the autonomy afforded to her, and was a well-behaved child because of it. Belgrave and Allison (2010) explained this good behaviour may manifest because a child identifies with her parents, and thus does not need to seek approval from disobedient friends much as Vanessa also described how she never had a desire to rebel against her mother. Belgrave and Allison went on to state that Black parents are more likely to underscore independence than White parents. For Grace and Tasha, the good conduct came from a relationship based on the trust Grace gave her daughter through independence.

Tasha's family (Grace, Grace's boyfriend, grandparents, a great-uncle and great-aunt) came to visit her for a week in Tokyo. This holiday brought into perspective the differences in familial relationships between the U.S. and Japan:

"Me and my mom are kind of affectionate; we're touchy-feely but I didn't realise how much until she was in Japan.... Even to me because I would probably be used to this in America and I wouldn't even think about it. But when I was on the train [in Tokyo] I thought, "What is she doing [touching me]? You're not supposed to do that."

In this vignette, we see not only the powerful relationship between a Black woman and her daughter (Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996; Collins, 2000; Belgrave & Allison, 2010), but we also begin to see an evolution in Tasha's self-understanding about familial differences. She noted that in Japan public displays of affection might be okay for a parent with a small child, but not for adult children. Che et al. (2009) described how study abroad allows students to perceive their own and other's culture more clearly. Here, Tasha can appreciate her cultural norms and those of her host country in this particular aspect.

Before her return to the States, Tasha received the news that her mother had decided to move out of state. During her repatriation interview, Tasha explained:

"[My mom] wanted to give me space... She planned that by the time I came back she would be gone, because she knew I had been independent for a year and how awkward to be back with Mom.... She needs to find herself... We're both at that point where we need to find ourselves. So I'm doing it here while she's doing it in [another state]."

Collins (2000) noted that Black women want to instill in their daughters assertiveness and self-reliance. Grace considered how best to do this given her daughter's yearlong experience in Tokyo, and knew the answer was to give Tasha the freedom she had been giving her all of her life to make her own choices. Gmelch (1997) stated that one of the biggest takeaways for abroad students is the feeling of self-reliance. Tasha demonstrated

this feeling: “I feel like in certain situations I might react differently, probably better at more independent type situations because I had to do things, mostly by myself.” She felt that she gained the confidence to be independent because she had navigated her life in a foreign country for such a long time. And while her own understanding as a Black woman might not be as apparent (as will be discussed later), Grace’s influence and a year abroad gave Tasha more insight into her place within the family unit and how she wants that to evolve into the future.

1.2 Race and Nationality

Tasha struggled somewhat in understanding how her nationality and her race fit into her self-concept. When asked how she defined herself culturally, Tasha said she has always defined herself as American. Yet when asked specifically about being U.S. American and what those values mean to her, Tasha stated she did not know: “I just went with ‘American’ because that’s just the default, because I don't know anything else.” Tasha knows that her national identity informs who she is, but she does not seem to reflect in what ways it has done so. She believed that being U.S. American is about “enjoying your life the best way you possibly can.” This enjoyment, according to her, differs among people because of the diverse make-up of the country’s population.

Tasha acknowledged the role that being U.S. American plays in her identity and how she views the world. In fact, she claimed one of the main reasons she looked forward to studying in Japan was because, “It’s just looking at people not in America, just experiencing how they live their lives outside of a major city not in America.” She was ready to understand the world from a non-U.S. perspective, indicating her own open-mindedness toward differing viewpoints (Carlson et al., 1990; McCormack, 2000; Schroth & McCormack, 2000).

Tasha went to Japan through a third-party study abroad provider, which supplied an in-depth orientation to ensure the students were well prepared for the new culture into which they were entering. “I was mindful of others while I was out in public which is basically what you do when you’re in Japan.” While abroad she took as many opportunities as she could to experience Japanese traditions, such as gathering with 3000 other people at a Shinto temple on New Year’s to pray for good blessings. Through her extracurricular travels around Asia (Taiwan, South Korea, and other parts of Japan), she came to understand the differences and uniqueness of those cultures. All of these experiences helped Tasha to realise her own U.S.-centric perspective was not necessarily

superior to these cultures.

While in Tokyo, certain parts of Tasha's U.S. identity came forward. Like Mia in Florence, she and the other Americans on the programme celebrated Thanksgiving with their international friends because, "We couldn't miss out on Thanksgiving." Because the end-of-year holidays are ubiquitous in the United States, it is unsurprising that Tasha and her friends felt their absence abroad. These holidays were obviously important to Tasha because of her identification as a U.S. American, and their lack of presence in Japanese everyday life.

Her identity as a U.S. American by her host country was also apparent. One episode that frustrated Tasha occurred when she and some of her other non-Japanese friends were stopped by police on a night out and were told to produce their papers. "At the time, it was shocking, embarrassing and insulting that they would stop us to check us without any warrant. Something like that has never happened to me before in America, so I certainly didn't expect it in Japan." Graham (2011) wrote how these anti-American (or in this case, anti-foreigner) sentiments can hinder a person's experience abroad: "Those without a thick skin will not enjoy a true overseas experience, because they will be too self-conscious to gain cultural insights beyond the uninformed or negative comments" (p. 80). This incident also showcases a new oppression which Tasha had never personally experienced. Her and her friends' ages and appearance as foreign nationals shifted power out of their hands and into the police's.

Additionally Tasha's experiences with the Tokyo elderly left her annoyed: "They are pushy and grumpy and just all around rude. It's like everyone else is just trying to be polite and I think they have this thing where they think because they are old, they can just do whatever they want and people should respect them." Luckily, Tasha did not let these occurrences obstruct her ability to learn from her time abroad. Reflecting on her host country, she commented, "Japan is like any other country; it has groups of people with different personalities to shape the nation. It is unfair to say that Japan acts one way or another. Japan has different traits, whether good or bad." Even her ability to reflect on why the Tokyo elderly were rude (respect for the elderly is an important Japanese value) indicates that Tasha can comprehend the cultural reasoning, even if she did not agree with the behaviour itself. Like Mia and Vanessa, Tasha has been able to appreciate the positive and negative aspects of her host country, neither romanticising nor denigrating it, indicating meaningful cultural adaptation (Bennett & Bennett, 2004).

Her own understanding of being U.S. American reveals only subtle shifts. When

asked in her repatriation interview what being U.S. American meant to her, she again stated she was not sure because she found the question hard, as she has either never really considered it or does not place her nationality high in her self-understanding. Yet when asked if she had felt American at all while she was in Japan, she immediately stated, “Of course!” When asked why, she was able to talk about the differences in ideals and gave an excellent example of “With [Americans] it’s get more for less; with [the Japaense] it’s pay for only what you need.” She commented on how difficult it was for her to think that you might pay the same amount of money for different quantities of the same product; obtaining the best deal was a U.S. cultural value to her. So while she is able to see those distinctions, Tasha had troubles vocalising them in terms of her own self-concept.

Africentric theory discusses the co-mingling of an African identity with a U.S. American one (Parham et al., 1999). As mentioned, these identities might come into conflict with one another (Du Bois, 1903), or they may find a way to co-exist more amicably for an individual (Pilkington, 2003). For Tasha, her Blackness does not appear to play a major conscious role in understanding herself, as she does not articulate her racial identity throughout the entire data collection period. When asked, she stated that she preferred the term Black: “It just seems like African American seems like you’re trying to appease somebody.... I think ‘Black’ works perfectly fine.” Tasha reflected a bit on the use of the term Negro as a racial identifier and its re-introduction into the U.S. Census in 2010. She noted that people from different generations often put different meanings onto words. Yet when asked about what being Black does mean to her, Tasha repeatedly stated that she did not know. Phoenix (2010) explained, “Individuals will have a range of possible ways of describing themselves extending from group identities to more idiosyncratic senses of identity” (p. 302). Tasha does not seem to consider her race an imperative self-descriptor.

Yet Tasha does realise that her race was a factor in how others identified her. She found herself drawn to anime (Japanese animation) and Japanese when she was in middle school. When the opportunity arose in high school to learn the language, she jumped at the chance. This interest, however, created a dynamic where Tasha had to deal with other people’s assumptions about where her interests lay:

“I took interest in things that people may not consider being Black. I just had to grow up with [hearing], “Well, that’s not what Black people do. Why do you listen to White people music and why are you interested in Japan? Black people don’t go to Japan.”

Her desire to take a non-traditional language could indicate her U.S. individualism or her own personality choices. People from all cultures have a tendency to stereotype (Schneider, 2005; Marsh, Mendoza-Denton, & Smith, 2010). Others placed Tasha outside what was ‘normal’ for someone of her race:

“People just started pointing out ways that I wasn’t Black. And it raises the questions: Are we looking at just the skin colour or are we looking at the culture of Black people? Are we going to have commonalities? How does one consider themselves Black?”

Despite her ability to reflect on these issues, Tasha herself had not really considered herself within this context. She did not verbalise if being Black was more than just skin colour for her, or a mindset determined by that particular population. She knows she is Black, but does not seem to consider what that means for her personally. When asked again during her repatriation interview, Tasha again struggled with answering what being Black meant to her. When she talked it out a bit, she decided that she related most to the more materialistic identifiers of Blackness, such as music and hairstyles. Her own inability to verbalise this part of her self-concept might be due to the tendency of caretakers to push Black girls into more mainstream U.S. society and shun aspects of their Black identity to ensure broader community success (Fordham, 2000; Swanson et al., 2009). However, this conclusion is difficult definitively to draw without further investigation into an area that Tasha had trouble elucidating.

The study abroad experience affects students differently depending on the individual (Engle & Engle, 2003). Though Tasha may not have come to a clearer understanding of how her race and nationality inform her self-concept, her time in Japan did make her more self-reliant and confident. Wetherell (2010) described how an individual’s personality can determine how that person identifies with a particular social group to which he or she belongs. Tasha is someone who had not spent a lot of time considering her race and nationality in relation to her identity. She grasps that they play some role, but her personality has largely helped her understand herself. A large factor of that personality is the relationship she has built with friends, which the next section examines further.

1.3 Race and Friendship

As a child, Tasha had a difficult time making friends and did not enjoy elementary school. It was not until middle school that she felt she was able to connect with people on a friendship level. She described herself as being very reserved, which at

times hindered her making connections. But in high school, Tasha found her core group of friends with whom she is still connected. “I don’t have a lot of friends but I know they’re really good.... It’s more about quality over quantity.” They are a very diverse group with backgrounds ranging from Black, White, Filipino, Japanese, and Indian. Belgrave and Allison (2010) described the importance of a Black adolescent female’s peer group in helping her to develop her sense of self-worth and identity. For Tasha, she had found a group of friends with whom she could relate and share common interests. She described her closeness with her circle of friends as being a bit creepy because of how easily they understand each other and finish one another’s thoughts. The relationships that Tasha built with her friends are an integral aspect of her self-concept. Even after two years at her university, Tasha had not made new friends at college, but kept close to those friends from high school, despite them going to different schools.

In Japan, Tasha connected mostly with the other students in her study abroad programme. “A few of my new friends are very sarcastic, humorous and witty, which I love to see in people as it shows intelligence and quick thinking.” While they did go out into some of Tokyo’s more famous neighbourhoods for clubbing and meals, she reported that they also spent a lot of time in their residence hall simply talking. While Tasha stated she did not make as many Japanese friends as she thought she would, she reflected in her field notes on something she had said during her initial interview: “But maybe it doesn’t matter how many Japanese friends I have. Perhaps it’s quality over quantity?”

She also found that she had to adapt to new ways of mingling: “Japan is very serious about social gatherings and usually it involves a large amount of alcohol, so I’ve found myself attending many *nomibodai* (all-you-can-drink) parties.” For the Japanese, drinking was about socialising, whereas for Tasha and her other U.S. American friends, it was about getting drunk. When asked if these two ever came into conflict, Tasha explained that some adaptation occurred on both sides. “The Japanese would probably drink a little faster while we drink a little slower because we are socialising with the socialising people while they are drinking to get on our level.” This simultaneous adaptation is what Bhabha (1994) called the ‘third space’ in which two different cultures create a new ‘culture’ where they can meet and relate to one another. The reciprocal shift of drinking patterns during the *nomibodai* shows Tasha’s and her friends’ ability to generate a third space for better intercultural relations in the context of relationship building.

If anything, Tasha noticed how being in a foreign environment made her become more outgoing in order to make connections with others. Joining an exchange student club and the university's baseball team in her second term allowed her to interact with Japanese students in structured activities. Here she discovered that the best way to engage her Japanese acquaintances was to practice effective listening, as they appreciated her effort to engage in the conversation even if she was not fluent in the language. By thrusting herself into situations that in the United States would have made her uncomfortable, Tasha discovered new parts of herself; she was able to be outgoing and connect with people beyond her immediate circle of friends back home.

Upon her return to the U.S., Tasha initially found her interactions with her old friends awkward. She admitted, "Honestly in my mind I was comparing the two." Those friends who had seen her through adolescence suddenly seemed different to her, because she knew her own perspective had shifted and affected her interactions with them, while they expected her to be the way she had been before spending a year in Japan. She was hesitant to share her experiences abroad, because "I didn't want to bombard them with [my stories]," but instead wanted to listen to their stories and concerns. Tasha said, "I guess I'm reintroducing myself to my friends again." Due to the short timeframe that Tasha had been home when discussing her friendships, this initial disorientation seems understandable. Tasha knew her time abroad had changed her, but was still figuring out who that was, and how that related to her friendships.

Tasha never seriously dated, usually only talking casually with men she might be interested in. She reflected in her initial interview, "I think I have sort of a fear of commitment to men, only because of the type of men that I've seen in my life." With an absent father and her mother's boyfriend not committing to marriage, Tasha admitted to being scared to exposing herself to that type of vulnerability. Just six weeks before her return to the United States, Tasha reported that she had fallen in love.

"There is a (Japanese) guy that lives in the dorm that I've grown very attached to. He has become honestly, one of the best friends that I have ever had, and I began to really like him. I told him just recently how I felt, but in the end we decided to remain friends. It was awkward at first, but now, we've gone back to feeling comfortable with each other again. I say that this is memorable because, since I have entered adulthood, I have never felt any romantic feelings towards anyone before. So for it to happen while I was away studying abroad seems like a thing I will remember forever. I now cherish every limited moment I have with him."

When discussing him during her repatriation interview, she described how she was able

to connect with him because he too grew up with a single mother. Because that circumstance (of single motherhood) is rarer in Japan, she felt a bond with him she had not experienced before. The changes in Tasha's understanding of her identity appears to have shifted due to her experiencing different manifestations of friendship and relationships while studying abroad. Seeing new ways of relating to others while abroad allowed her to appreciate how she makes her own connections with those around her.

2. Gender

Tasha's understanding of her gender changed minimally during her time abroad. Prior to studying abroad she had not considered how her gender informed her identity, and even after her repatriation she struggled with expressing her identity as a woman. As mentioned, Shorter-Gooden and Washington (1996) discussed how Black women often tie their Black identity with their female identity, but Tasha strained to articulate both of these parts of her self-concept, which does not mean they were not present. Seeing another culture's beliefs about gender differences did help her to somewhat appreciate her own gender identity, including in the context of sexualised images, physical appearance, and hair.

2.1 *Sexualised Images*

When asked what being female meant to her, Tasha stated she did not know: "I feel like I should have an answer to it but I guess some questions just don't have any answer." When asked the same question during her repatriation interview, she stated she did not know. Like with race, she felt that reflection on such matters required too much to be considered, whether personality, behaviours, or cultural norms. Yet, even when asked for her personal definition, she could not answer. Tasha struggled with self-reflection and expressing how gender plays a role in her identity.

However, Tasha was able to reflect on how cultural differences can impact her own future. Tasha stated that she was disappointed in some of Japan's views on women, particularly in business. She noted in her repatriation interview: "Women aren't expected to have a high position in the company only because they are expected to quit after maybe 30 or so, to raise children and stuff. And [the companies'] idea is why invest in this person if she's going to become a housewife. So it makes women not even want to try and have a high position."

She observed the norms in Japan toward career-oriented businesswomen and found the positioning of women by Japanese culture makes it difficult to excel professionally. (I examine this impact on Tasha's professional development later in the chapter.) To Tasha, women are sexualised in terms of their ability to bear children, and she was able to appreciate how these intersections of gender and nationality manifest in relation to power structures in Japan as compared to the United States. Harris-Perry (2011) noted, "Black women are no longer enslaved, and they enjoy the constitutional assurance of full citizenship. Centuries of struggle, sacrifice, and achievement have altered basic economic, political, and social realities for black women in vast and meaningful ways" (p. 44). While gender equality in the business context is still disproportionate in the United States, Tasha observed an even greater inequality in Japan.

Beyond the stares (whether covert or overt), Tasha did not experience any stereotypes from being a Black woman. This might be attributed to the Japanese penchant of being mindful of others' space. It might also be from Tasha's difficulty in reflecting about her gender in relation to her identity or the interactions she shared with others regarding this issue.

2.2 Physical Appearance

Tasha is a heavy-set woman with darker skin than the other research participants and a broad face. The pressures that Black women feel from White women can be daunting to contend with. As quoted earlier, "African-American women are compelled to consume the universalized images of white American women, including body image, linguistic patterns, style of interacting, and so forth" (Firth, 2000, p. 330). Tasha responded when asked how she felt about herself physically:

"I could use some improvements. I've always been a heavier-set-kind-of girl.... I still get kind of depressed when I look at myself in the mirror at times. Especially with my friends; I think they're so pretty and gorgeous, and I am just there."

Tasha stated that at times she does feel sexy, but being teased throughout school made her insecure about the size of her body, especially in high school when she developed large breasts which became a target for ridicule. Trepagnier (1994) explained, "Very few women can satisfy the requirements of 'beauty' perpetrated in western societies; however, since the standard of beauty portrayed in the mass media designates whiteness, black women are presumably at a disadvantage" (p. 199). Tasha appeared to internalise these messages of beauty, as she struggled with finding self-acceptance of her body while

comparing her appearance to that of her White and Asian friends. The power that others, whether bullies or media imaging, control over how she understands herself are intense.

Having been to Japan once before during high school, Tasha knew that her appearance would be a point of interest for her host country. “I’m just so completely different from everyone else that’s going to be around me.” She knew beforehand that stares and comments would be standard. After a month in Japan, she found this presumption to be true: “I’ve often seen people staring at me, both with side-glances and full-blown staring.” Tasha found this attention off-putting, as she reported, “I usually just want to remain another face in the crowd, but in Japan, it is much harder to do so.” After a few weeks, Tasha started to adjust to the constant scrutiny as she realised (like Vanessa and Taylor did) that most of them were not negative but simply curious, and she cannot do anything about it. Tasha reported that she felt most at home in Japan when she was at her university because she did not get the stares there, as there are so many foreign nationals attending Sophia that she was not a point of interest.

Upon returning to the States, Tasha said she felt “plain” again, since she no longer stood out in a crowd. She commented how odd it was to see so many faces like hers and how while in Japan she had created a way of understanding herself in relation to others. Schlenker (1980) described how everyone creates social identities to define their interactions with others. For African Americans this might mean restructuring one’s identity in regards to the social circumstances (Mama, 1995; Belgrave & Allison, 2010). Tasha had to shift her identity in Japan to one where she had to cope with being conspicuous and the reactions she would garner from that; while in the United States she could again meld into the crowd and thus her identity was not as defined by her skin colour.

A physical change also occurred during Tasha’s year abroad that affected how she understood herself in regards to her physical appearance. She lost twenty pounds (over 9 kilograms) when she and some of her dorm mates started *Insanity*, an intense home workout. Tasha said that the weight loss added to her confidence in interacting with others. With the intense scrutiny of the Japanese on her and her own corporeal evolution, studying abroad allowed Tasha to understand how she relates her physical appearance to her identity. While she still might hold more Westernised views of beauty, she found how she can best incorporate her beliefs about appearance into her self-concept because of the curiosity she received while abroad.

2.3 Hair

Tasha has a tumultuous relationship with her hair. “I hate [my hair].... I just feel like I have the worst hair ever.... It’s such an effort to try to take care of it and it’s so expensive.” She indicated to a White friend once that she wished she could have her hair, which was long and flowing. Banks (2000) indicated that these feelings are quite common among some Black women, explaining that hair is often tied into self-esteem. She went on to explain that some Black women may experience self-hatred because they have internalised Eurocentric ideals of what beauty is and not Africentric ideals of beauty. That Tasha declared that she hated her hair indicates the power that it (and White cultural norms) holds over her.

Tasha started perming her hair when she was twelve. For a while she had braiding done but that became cost-prohibitive and she returned to perming. As noted earlier, Banks (2000) remarked on Black women conforming to White norms to gain social reward. For Tasha, this norm meant more Westernised hairstyles. She never considered wearing it natural because she said she did not like how it looked; she found it personally unattractive and thus felt others would find it unattractive. Hair in the Black community is a way of making both personal and social statements (Cooper, 1971; Synott, 1987; Firth, 2011). Perms and braids were Tasha’s way of portraying herself in the best physical light where her hair was concerned.

When Tasha first learned that she would be studying abroad, one of her main concerns was figuring out how she would maintain her hair. Because of the expense of styling in Japan, she decided that she would braid it before departure so that it would last her a few months, and then perm it herself afterward for the remainder of her year abroad. While abroad, Tasha’s braids were a novelty for the Japanese: “I looked more exotic as opposed to all my White friends.” People would come up and ask to touch them, which Banks (2000) reported as being common when Black women cross borders where their hair becomes a curiosity. Tasha said she found the attention off-putting at first but knew she had no choice but to adapt.

Interestingly, after Tasha changed her braids to a perm, the interest diminished, as the Japanese were more accustomed to it. Tasha also preferred the perm more; she felt more able to integrate as the style did not call as much attention to her as her braids did. Our personal control over our hair and how we choose to display it can be a telling marker of how we understand ourselves and how we wish others to perceive us. Firth (2011) explained that people use their hair as an indicator of their self-understanding of

their role in a society at any given time. Tasha wanted to be just another face in the crowd. Her uneasiness with her natural hair made its maintenance in Japan not just about expense, but also the attention it drew to her because of its uniqueness. She took the cues from how society treated her to find her own comfort levels with her hair.

Upon repatriation, Tasha admitted to feeling further like an outsider because of her hair. Hair has complex meaning for Black women, and Tasha's self-esteem was already fragile from being under scrutiny because of her skin colour. Synott (1987) explained, "Hair is perhaps our most powerful symbol of individual and group identity powerful first because it is physical and therefore extremely personal, and second because, although personal, it is also public rather than private" (p. 381). Tasha's hair was an aspect that she could control, whereas she could not with her colouring. By taking on a more mainstream style, Tasha felt empowered about the (nonverbal) dialogue she created with her hair, making a personal and public statement about how she wanted to be viewed as a woman of colour, which was not as an anomaly to be gawked at by strangers. Her time in Japan reinforced her belief that her hair has a certain declaration to make about how she perceives herself and how she would like others to perceive her.

3. Academic Achievement

African Americans value academic achievement through personal, racial, and professional advancement as well as wider contribution to the African American community (Perry, 2004). This section examines Tasha's academic progress through these particular aspects, and how her experiences in Japan affected her self-concept in these areas.

3.1 Personal Advancement

Ever since she was a child, Tasha loved learning. "I like to question things. I'm not satisfied with just one answer because it's never that easy." Although she did not particularly like the work required of school she enjoyed going to school and questioning things. Tasha stated that her family never really pressured her to do well in school. "I made the connection early on in life that if I do good, I get stuff. So that was a bit of my motivation for a while, until I actually started liking doing well." This statement indicates that while she might not have felt pressure from her mother and grandparents, they did influence her scholastic achievement with rewards like money and gifts. Black families do put a high value on education (Lewis, 1997; Collins, 2000; Fordham, 2000; Perry,

2004; Freeman, 2005), and Tasha's family took an approach of incentives when she did well to reinforce this value. The one time she received a lower grade for an Arabic class at university, Tasha relayed that she was extremely distraught. By that point, her intrinsic motivation became a bigger drive for her than any academic values her family might force on her (Parham et al, 1999). "I already know it in my head [that I need to excel academically]. There's no need for them to pressure me." She did not struggle with the Eurocentricity of academic work hypothesised by Africentric theorists (Fordham and Ogbu; 1986, Harris & Nettles, 1991; Delpit, 1995; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Ogbu, 1997; Nieto, 2000; Steele, 2003; Perry, 2004). This may be due to her lack of awareness of her Black identity's influence on her overall self-concept.

However, as mentioned earlier, Tasha's mother was a teenager when Tasha was born. Grace did not get to pursue the dreams she wanted, but instead looked to obtain training that allowed her to provide for her young child. Tasha said that because of her mom feeling that she missed out on her chances, the refrain Tasha heard growing up was, "You can do whatever you want to do as long as you apply yourself to it." Hard work would allow Tasha to reap benefits, whether financial or personal.

According to Thomas and Quinn (2007), Grace's lack of higher education statistically worked against Tasha attending university. And while Tasha's mother told her that she did not have to attend university, Tasha knew that college was a part of her education. "It just seemed natural. Once I finished high school, I'd go into college." When asked why, Tasha said, "I was just hoping it would help figure out what my goals would be in the future." She felt that with her love of learning, university would give her the opportunity to explore her interests and then decide on future goals. Collins (2000) explained that Black daughters are often taught they must learn self-sufficiency (particularly through academics) in order to excel in their lives. While Tasha may have been told that university was not expected, she had figured that for her this route was the best for her self-sufficiency, perhaps from seeing Grace's struggles.

Tasha reported that her main challenge was finding an area in which she truly excelled instead of settling for mediocrity in another area. When she discovered her knack for learning languages, Tasha decided to read for a degree in Linguistics. Studying abroad in Japan seemed a natural choice for her because she realised her learning style would benefit from immersion in the country. "[I will] get experience for what I'm trying to do. I felt the first time I went to Japan, I picked up on the Japanese a lot easier than I did just sitting in the classroom and learning it." As mentioned, knowledge acquisition

from the Africentric perspective is not merely about learning facts, but being able to put the information within social contexts (Belgrave & Allison, 2010). Additionally, Collins (2000) defined aggressive measures as essential for self-empowerment among Black women. Tasha decided to push herself academically (and immersion was a novel avenue for her), because she saw the edge that a broader knowledge of Japan in context will give her.

One of her biggest hopes while in Japan was becoming more confident in her use of the language. However, she struggled with her confidence while abroad: “Socially, I get uncomfortable talking to people in Japanese. It is probably the only way for me to become better at the language, but I am constantly doubting my capabilities and conscious of making mistakes.” These instances were made more difficult when Japanese people would presume she did not speak the language: “It brings back the fact that here, I am a *gaijin* [a foreigner].” However, Tasha became adept at finding patterns in conversation and using those patterns to increase her confidence. Parham (1993) discussed how Africentric theory suggests that for African people, language is more about the spoken word than the written, and the interactions that occur between the speaker and the listener. Tasha used her ability to find information in new ways to succeed in her contact with her host nationals. While some might have felt disempowered by host nationals’ insistence on speaking English to them, Tasha chose to conquer the presumption about her inability to speak Japanese because of her nationality.

While in Japan, Tasha attended Sophia University, allowing her to take classes conducted in English. She noted that because of the large number of exchange students at the university, she and other study abroad students did not feel outnumbered by Japanese students. This backdrop allowed her a certain amount of comfort in the education setting, as other foreigners surrounded her. Tasha, however, did have difficulty adjusting to the teaching style in Japan:

“The Japanese academic system has not been my favorite method of learning.... I undoubtedly think this has been my hardest semester ever only because of the extreme difference in the method of teaching. With classes back home, I felt I interacted, even in larger classes. In [these] classes, that is not the case.”

As noted earlier, Tasha knows that she is a critical learner who loves to question information and discuss the various perspectives about a topic. With Japan’s emphasis on rote learning, like Vanessa in Korea, Tasha felt challenged in a different way intellectually. She found herself rarely talking during her classes, and she was unable to take many of

the courses she wanted, and thus ended up in classes that did not engage her. “It made me just not really want to go to school.”

When reflecting on her academic experience after repatriating, Tasha reiterated, “I hated it but I sort of had to get used to it because that was the only way I was going to get credit for it.” She found Sophia to be at times archaic with chalkboards, wooden benches, and a lack of air conditioning. She stated, “[They] need to catch up with the rest of the world. I felt they were so far behind, and not education-wise, just the method; they are behind.” Tasha struggled with embracing a different style of teaching and learning. She liked being able to explore ideas through conversation, a very Africentric ideal for learning (Parham et al., 1999), which was not encouraged in her Japanese classrooms. Tasha adapted to ensure she could succeed academically, but like Vanessa, she was unable to appreciate the teaching methods used at Sophia because they did not coincide with her own learning styles.

Overall, Tasha’s academic experience in Japan allowed her to advance personally in regards to more practical and interpersonal knowledge. She did not have a great university experience at Sophia, but she gained the ability to navigate different situations and different contexts. As Parham et al. (1999) explained, education is not just about the academics, but also the personal transformation on intrapersonal and interpersonal levels. Because she immersed herself in an alien culture, Tasha acquired skills that may have taken her longer to develop had she never studied abroad.

3.2 Professional Advancement

According to Fordham (2000) and Collins (2000), Black women must often strive harder to reach the same levels of professional success as other groups. For Tasha, she has taken a more relaxed view about her professional development compared to some of the other research participants. Grace always told her that as long as she was in school, Tasha did not have to worry about getting a job. So Tasha spent high school spending time with her friends at each other’s homes or the local mall; her mother provided her with a car and paid her bills. She did not need to worry about money.

Tasha did not obtain her first job until she was a sophomore at university, working as a research assistant for an Economics professor. When asked why she sought this particular work, Tasha stated that it was a job. She enjoyed the people with whom she worked, but it was not a position to offer her any career development. When Tasha returned from Japan, she was not able to return directly to her university, because her

transcripts from Japan had not yet been submitted, making her unable to register for classes. She stated she was looking for work in an office somewhere to fill her hours and bring a paycheck home, since she was no longer living with her mother. Her independence abroad contributed to her feeling she could now be the self-sufficient woman her mother had encouraged (Collins, 2000).

Before her year in Japan, Tasha asserted that with her degree in Linguistics she hoped to perhaps work as a translator in the U.S. State Department. With her ability to pick up languages and her interest in different cultures, she figured this ambition fit with her talents. However, upon her repatriation, she reported, “I started doubting myself after a while.” She still wanted to obtain a Masters in Linguistics and work with languages, but she felt she had limited herself by only considering one career. “You have this idea in mind but your one true calling – you’re pushing it aside because you still focused on one thing.” Meeting people in Japan opened her to other possibilities, including a conversation with someone who translates video games. She decided, “Maybe I should just experiment to see what makes me the most happy.”

Freeman (2005) suggested, “[African Americans] have generally voiced more interest in making money and bettering their position in society than in a particular occupation” (p. 47). While Tasha clearly has ambitions to be financially secure, she also indicated that she wants to enjoy the work she does. She is not scared of trying a job and if she does not like it (even if it pays well) moving to something that would capture her attention more. Her mother’s and grandparents’ insistence that she could do whatever she wants but that she would have to work hard for it has enabled her keep open minded about her future. As mentioned earlier, Tasha had hoped that attending university would help her define her goals. Her experience abroad became an important component of that; interacting with people in Japan told to her that she did not have to follow one set path. Two parts of her identity, her familial influence and an open mind, allowed her to see different professional opportunities that will hopefully lead to her “one true calling.”

3.3 Racial Contribution

As mentioned before, contributing to the Black community is often a part of an African American’s education (Noble, 1988; Belgrave et al., 1992) and can have an impact on an individual’s self-concept. However, for Tasha, her understanding of how her education could have an impact on the wider Black community is negligible. This may be due to the tendency of parents and teachers to push Black females to high

achievement, which pushes them away from the African American community and more into the larger American society (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Scott-Jones & Clark, 1986; Fordham, 1988; Fordham, 2000; Evans-Winters, 2011). Tasha received the message from her mother and grandparents to work hard to get what you want, and she figured out that meant applying herself academically.

Yet while she might not be consciously aware of how her academic excellence benefits the rest of the Black community, it does not mean that it will not. She benefits the entire U.S. (and global) community with the contributions she will make, but she also is taken to represent her race, even if unknowing or unwilling. Collins (2000) explained:

“By persisting in the journey toward self-definition... we are changed. When linked to group action, our individual struggles gain a new meaning. Because our actions as individuals change the world from one in which we merely exist to one over which we have control, they enable us to see everyday life as being in process and therefore amenable to change” (p. 121).

Tasha has a specific voice within her community. She is a Black woman who enjoys Asian cultures, different languages, and has certain views on religion, politics, and seeing the world. Like Vanessa, Tasha is breaking moulds before considered insurmountable. And while electing to study abroad might indicate more individualism, her achievements and discourses benefit other Black people even if she cannot see that advantage.

Collins (2000) noted, “Based on their personal histories, individuals experience and resist domination differently. Each individual has a unique and continually evolving personal biography made up of concrete experiences, values, motivations, and emotions” (p. 285). This chapter examined Tasha’s unique understanding of herself and her experiences. While she appears to lack or does not wish to express some self-reflection, particularly in regards to her race and gender and their intersection, Tasha does show growth in her self-understanding, particularly in the areas of her relationships, nationality, and academic achievement. Her sojourn in Japan allowed her to gain confidence in her decision-making and her ability to connect with others.

Chapter XI. Rhonda: Paris, France

“I’m happily overwhelmed.”

Rhonda is a first-generation Nigerian American woman from a major city in the northeastern United States. She read for a degree in French at an Ivy League university about an hour from her hometown. Twenty years old at the time she went abroad, Rhonda is a petite woman who wears glasses. Rhonda is a very self-aware woman who used the opportunity to study abroad as a chance to better understand herself. The academic year that Rhonda spent in France at Université Paris X Nanterre and Université Paris 8 St Denis allowed for an evolution of her understanding of her self-concept. In this chapter I explore how her racial, gender, and academic identities evolved from her time as a student in France.

1. Race

Rhonda’s understanding of her race has experienced an evolution over time. While a teenager she thought of herself as Nigerian American, upon entering university she began to categorise herself as Black, and later decided to not label herself at all in relation to her race or ethnicity. However, as this section shows, Rhonda’s racial background does impact her identity, and she recognises that influence. By examining Rhonda’s understanding of her race in relation to her family, nationality, spirituality, and friendships, I consider what sway study abroad had on these areas of her self-concept.

1.1 Race and Family

Rhonda is a first-generation U.S. American who has spent the majority of her life in a large U.S. city in the Northeast. Her parents, originally from Nigeria, immigrated to United States with her older brother in the late 1980s. She and her younger brother were born in the city where she grew up. When her parents divorced when she was eight, Rhonda stated in her initial interview that she experienced a shift in herself: “It is strange because I think I was not shy until after my parents divorced. I think my personality changed a lot after that.” As she worked to process the shift in her family dynamics (with her father living hundreds of miles away), she had to navigate a new home and school situation.

Rhonda’s father is a doctor, and her mother a nurse, and she described both as being very generous and reserved, which she thinks is why they both have careers

helping others. Rhonda has an acute awareness of how her parents helped to shape her educational experience. When asked what the best thing was about her parents she immediately responded, “They both are very smart and they both emphasise education a lot, which helped us.” She sees the gift that this emphasis has done for her brothers and her. Her older brother works in finance, her younger brother attends a prestigious university, and she herself attends one of the top Ivy League schools. As the literature has previously demonstrated (Fordham, 1988; Perry, 2004), the African American community’s stress on academic achievement has been foundational in Africentric theory. I shall examine this aspect of Rhonda’s self-concept later in this chapter.

Yet despite the seemingly inevitable monetary success for Rhonda and her brothers given their educations and career, Rhonda indicated that her parents instilled in her the value to follow her passions that make her happy, and not what society might want her to do. Additionally, Rhonda’s mother told her that Rhonda needed to keep the collective in mind: “You have to give back so you have to help people. It can’t just be all about you.” Belgrave and Allison (2010) noted this importance of the community in one’s vocation. Rhonda’s parents have embedded in their children to be passionate about their purposeful work, and realise that the work they do should in some way give back to the larger community. For this reason, Collins (2000) noted that Black daughters are taught the importance of education (as Rhonda was) not only so that they can support themselves, but so that they can also shoulder the responsibilities of caring for others, within the family and the larger community. Rhonda’s Ivy League education is not only for her betterment, but also for her family and for those whom she will help through her career.

With the polygamous culture of some religious groups in Nigeria, Rhonda has an extensive network of aunts, uncles, and cousins, spread across the United States, the United Kingdom, and Nigeria. However, aside from one or two uncles, Rhonda stated prior to departing for France that she was not particularly close with any of them. Interestingly, she did note that this extended family is one that she planned to take advantage of while in Paris. In fact, when her father and stepmother came to visit, they traveled around Europe visiting some of Rhonda’s extended family in England and Germany:

“I never realized how cosmopolitan my family was until this trip.... Family has taken on a different meaning for me, because I’ve been living with a French family for a couple of months now, and recently I’ve met more members of my blood family that I haven’t seen before. I feel like I have family all over Europe now!”

Rhonda's concept of family expanded as she realised that her extended family could offer support networks that she had not previously utilised. Her nuclear family, though fragmented by divorce, had been her foundation growing up. Parham et al. (1999) had commented on these shifts of understanding one's family. While in Paris, Rhonda realised that her life course will hopefully include work in Europe, and she has people there with whom she can find the support she always found with her nuclear family (Scott & Black, 1989; Belgrave & Allison, 2010).

Rhonda's relationship with her mother has followed traditional Africentric and Black feminist theory, stating, "I'm closer to my mom than I like to say but we are very close." Her mother provided her care, love, and guidance while trying to shield Rhonda and her brothers from some of the harsher truths of the world. Indeed, Rhonda noticed that her family has been incapable of seeing her as an adult, as she is the one girl in the family. Their protectiveness included strict curfews and rules to follow, which she attributed to her Nigerian background: "Young people are treated differently. [Parents] have you grow up slower." Rhonda stated she and her brothers struggled with this: "My mom wants to treat us like that and it's hard for us because we're in this [U.S.] environment where everything happens so fast." These conflicting mindsets also create an interesting intersection of Rhonda's citizenship and her status as a first-generation U.S. American. Balancing the Nigerian mindset with the U.S. one at times frustrated Rhonda, but she realised these frustrations are almost universal among first-generation children of African immigrants.

Yet this protective tendency is not limited to African immigrant parents. Collins (2000) explained, "U.S. black mothers are often described as strong disciplinarians and overly protective; yet these same women manage to raise daughters who are self-reliant and assertive" (p. 185). Black mothers often feel the need to provide firm structure for their children to give them a clear path to success, usually through education and personal growth. While this structure often helps build the self-reliant assertive adults that Black mothers want, the shielding can have some setbacks for personal growth.

In Paris, Rhonda did a home-stay instead of doing university or private accommodation. Rhonda initially reported to me that the first family with whom she lived for three months was not living up to the contract agreed upon, and after talking with her study abroad programme it was agreed that she should move to another home-stay. Her second family was the polar opposite in providing more than they needed to and making Rhonda feel welcome and comfortable: "They are always concerned about

me in ways that I never felt at my former host stay.” She attributed this to their African Caribbean background. However, upon repatriation, Rhonda revealed that the host father in her second family had behaved inappropriately toward Rhonda, making suggestive comments and often making physical contact which made her uncomfortable. She did not make any fuss about it at first, because she said she was not sure if it was a cultural norm in France for someone to behave like that. She commented:

“I’ve been sheltered. I mean here we’re *so sheltered*. You don’t know that there are people out there like this. It’s unfortunate that this happened to me, but it wasn’t so traumatic.... I do understand that I can’t just think that everyone’s gonna be nice... or that I should just trust them.”

Rhonda understood that because of the careful protection of her parents and even of her university, she had never really considered darker sides to human beings.

She said that after the distance of time, she did not feel the need to seek any professional help about the matter, even though some friends and family had suggested it to her. However, Rhonda stated that she was able to process the experience with the help of those close to her and time to reflect. “I don’t know if I have a distrust of older men because of it.... I didn’t know there were people out there like that.” The Nigerian protectiveness of children had allowed Rhonda to grow intellectually, spiritually, and personally. However, because of that protectiveness, she was never exposed to people with less than honourable intentions until she had this occurrence in Paris. Rhonda commented that she hoped the experience allows her to better understand others and their motives. While this might not seem like an evolution in self-understanding, but more understanding of others, the underlying oppressions within this situation afforded Rhonda an opportunity to reflect on who she is within the context of her race and gender, which I examine in Section 2 of this chapter.

Overall Rhonda’s experience in France shifted how she functioned within the family. Her mother acknowledged pride that Rhonda was able to independently navigate through her entire year abroad. Yet mostly Rhonda was better able to understand herself within her family: “I see family differently.” She stated that she functions as part of a whole and that everyone impacts on another, for good or ill. Being far away from her nuclear family, connecting with extended family in Europe, having host families that challenged her in new ways, she had to readjust her understanding of how families can function, and she within them. With collective Africentric thinking, Rhonda saw the interconnectedness that Parham et al. (1999) and Belgrave and Allison (2010) stated lay the foundation of Black families.

1.2 Race and Nationality

Rhonda's understanding of her race and nationality has been evolving since her adolescence. In her pre-departure interview, when asked how she would describe herself culturally she stated, "I have no idea." She went on to describe an evolution of her cultural self-understanding from Nigerian American to Black American to simply American. She explained:

"I realised that I didn't really have to say I'm a Black American. I can just say that I'm an American.... When you're identified as Black, you expect people to treat you slightly differently (whatever that means), but you just expect to stick out because you identify as someone that sticks out."

Yet Rhonda, unlike Taylor or Tasha, also recognises that no matter how she might label herself within the context of her race and nationality, her race and her ethnic background as a first-generation Nigerian American have greatly affected her self-concept. It is difficult to decipher whether these participants all aspire to resist discourses of prejudice associated with African American culture, or whether some may struggle to articulate that part of their identity.

Rhonda has spent a lot of time reflecting on the complexity of all of these interactive parts of her identity. "I don't know if the way I act – I can't really say if it's because of my Nigerian upbringing or because of my American environment. I can't really pull the parts distinctly." Her various identities mirror aspects of Du Bois's (1903) double consciousness discussed earlier. Rhonda indicated understanding that she straddles two worlds that do not necessarily coincide with one another, but they both play an integral part in who she is.

While she feels that African American culture gives people a rich history from which to draw, whether through music or the strength gained from slavery, the mainstream power paradigm of the United States has created two problems: 1) the co-option, diffusion, and commercialisation of African American innovations (e.g. break-dancing, music like jazz and rock-and-roll), and 2) the treatment of Black people by mainstream U.S. culture through disenfranchisement:

"They don't have a culture to draw from because they feel like they can't claim a part of Africa for themselves but then it's hard to claim the United States for yourself when the United States treats you the way it treats Black people."

For Rhonda, understanding the disempowerment from different perspectives is essential to overcoming it.

She stated in her initial interview, “People [have] an obviously subconscious association of Blackness and this concept of Blackness.” Her motive behind identifying as simply American is that she did not want to give people a reason to pigeonhole her into a set of preconceived expectations.

“[We] have a lot of stereotypes to deal with... And you have to deal with these psychological effects of assuming that you’re going to be discriminated [against] because a lot of times people aren’t discriminating against you but you come in feeling like you’re going to be treated differently, so you kind of are treated differently because you already have this shield up.”

For her, taking away the label allowed her to get rid of those expectations for herself, and thus others could follow suit, which ties back to my earlier comment that perhaps Rhonda seeks to remove herself from the prejudicial discourse. “People have preconceived notions about... how Black people will act. If you just act like yourself then people can’t generalise.”

Rhonda said, prior to her departure for France, that she made the conscious decision to “put the Black aside for a year” and just label herself as American. She also considered how being abroad might affect her views on race in the United States: “If you are outside America and you are in the place where your race doesn’t matter, then you have to kind of identify with something else -- because you don’t really have to fight that fight anymore.” And interestingly Rhonda discovered while in France that defending her race would not be a focus for her, instead it would be defending her nation.

Her position as a U.S. American in Paris was a constant reminder to Rhonda as an outsider, as “People like[d] to generously give me their opinions about [U.S. Americans].” She found that often Parisians delighted in telling her how they found Americans “arrogant, impolite, loud, etc. etc.” While her host mother attributed this to the U.S. being a powerful country, and thus people having an opinion about it, Rhonda interpreted it differently:

“I feel like people are trying to prove some sort of moral superiority over American culture [to make themselves feel better], and they need to express it to me because I’m American.... I must have ‘AMERICA IS PERFECT!!!!’ written on my forehead.”

During her repatriation interview, Rhonda continued to express exasperation over this aspect of her abroad experience, “I didn’t come to France for that – to defend my country or defend myself.” Graham (2011) noted:

“The tendency to put down Americans very casually, to their faces, is not uncommon. Much of this tendency has to do with perceiving the United

States and Americans in a different category altogether when we would prefer to be seen as normal” (p. 107).

Rhonda had to navigate these unexpected and unsolicited attacks on her country. Despite knowing of the United States’s many shortcomings, she found herself angry. Suddenly Rhonda faced a new power paradigm where her national identity allowed her host nationals to criticise her country.

Dolby (2004) noted that these internal responses are common for study abroad students, as they must negotiate their U.S. American identity within the context of another culture’s perceptions of it. For Rhonda, this negotiation occurred when people would tell her specifically what was wrong with her country, and her almost visceral response to those comments. For Black students in particular these perceptions might have even more far-reaching implications as their race becomes negligible (Martinez et al., 2009). Upon repatriation, Rhonda reflected, “America makes you think of yourself in a certain way, and then when you go to another country, that country makes you think of yourself in a certain way.” The French people with whom she interacted had preconceptions of who Rhonda was based on her nationality and race. She therefore had to understand that aspect of her self-concept from a new perspective, which Cushner & Karim (2004) labeled as role shock. The identity that others assign to us can have just as much impact on how we understand ourselves (Sen, 2006), as Rhonda discovered.

The divisions in French society along racial and cultural lines also became apparent to Rhonda during her time in Paris:

“I feel like it’s harder to be different in French society than in American society. In American society, at least we have a dialogue. Black American history starts with the birth of the United States, so the fight to be accepted already is so old, that we’ve achieved a lot, to this day. In French society, immigrants from former African and Asian colonies started to come in the 60s, so the presence of people of different races and religions is still quite new. And consequently, there’s no dialogue – French society claims ‘equality’ as its founding tradition, much as the U.S. lays claim to ‘liberty.’ But French society is not equal, and instead of equally recognizing everyone’s differences, it seems as though French society tries to neutralize them.”

Graham (2011) observed similarly:

“For diversity to take hold, [nonimmigrant countries] have to radically alter their perception of nationality or develop and elevate a separate concept of citizenship. For hundreds of years, the dominant culture has been the cultural reference determining who was accepted, as well as when and how” (p. 88).

In her repatriation interview, Rhonda further articulated her appreciation of how U.S. culture, despite its problems, embraces the differences among its citizens. She stated she thinks this is probably because France's idea of equality is homogeny, even if people come from different backgrounds. "In France you have one uniform culture and everybody is expected to get with it [no matter their country of origin]... whereas in America, even if you have the Black population, you have different cultures and you can tell the difference."

As discussed earlier in this section, Rhonda was able to acknowledge prior to leaving for France that her various identities as a first-generation Nigerian American had an impact on her overall identity. She can appreciate in-group differences and how these differences create a richness in the U.S. cultural milieu. Interestingly she still preferred a generic label of 'American' for herself even after seeing how the French expect their national label to create conformity among its citizens. Yet Rhonda does not desire or expect conformity for people who may be designated 'American' as the French do for themselves. Her self-labeling as American as a strategy, for her, suggests exactly the opposite of conformity, but instead proposes a diverse cultural composition that interacts in interesting ways unique to her. Even though this self-understanding did not work out as she expected it to, Rhonda's time abroad altered her self-concept because of her encounters with the French, their assumptions about her because of her nationality and race, and the meaning they attach to their own national identity.

1.3 Race and Spirituality

Rhonda attended Catholic school throughout her primary and secondary educations. However, she was raised in the Anglican church since she was a baby. There are not many Anglican churches in the United States, so her family went to a local Lutheran church. God has been an important part of her life since she can remember. When asked in her pre-departure interview about what role religion played in her life at that point, Rhonda responded, "I think I'm still trying to understand my spirituality. I consider myself a Christian but I don't believe in a lot of things that the Bible says or that my pastor says necessarily." In fact, she appeared to have spent time thinking about how organised religion can be a hindrance to leading a good life. "I don't think it's fair to say that one religion is right and that Buddhism and Islam and Judaism or other things are wrong."

A few months after settling in Paris, Rhonda started to attend a local church with a large African Caribbean base. “It’s important for me to go [to church] because it’s a time and space for me to clear my head and reflect on what I’m doing with my life, from a spiritual and moral point of view.” As a self-identified introvert, she explained how she needed time to herself to quiet her mind from everything happening around her, and focus on her own thoughts. “Spirituality [is] an influential factor in helping African Americans cope with problems and stressful life events” (Belgrave & Allison, 2010, p. 284).

When asked during her repatriation interview about attending the French church, Rhonda pointed out that even though she does not agree with everything the church stated, it was important for her to feel part of a community. As I mentioned in Chapter 5, Black individuals often use religion to connect with others, as well as themselves. The collectivism of African psychology suggests here that Rhonda used her Parisian church for the dual purpose of connecting to herself and to others. With the large change of being in a new country by herself, Rhonda sought comfort for coping with her stressful situation of being abroad as well as connecting with others so that she might not feel as alone.

Prior to her departure, Rhonda had declared that her main goal for herself while abroad was self-improvement. She hoped that this personal growth would help not only her, but also the relationships she has with others. Her spirituality helped her to reflect on her abroad experiences so that she could reach that goal of self-understanding.

1.4 Race and Friendship

Before entering middle school, Rhonda had attended school with predominantly Black and Hispanic populations. Transferring to a Catholic school with mostly White students shifted her perspective, as she started to get bullied for her skin colour:

“It’s just a different culture and you can’t relate to people all on the same things.... There are a lot of White students that I didn’t just automatically clicked with them; I had to figure out their culture first in a sense.”

Rhonda found herself more drawn to the other students who also had immigrant parents; her closest friends were the other three Black girls in her class, even though she was friendly with everyone. As Belgrave and Allison (2010) noted:

“Relationships are central to females and to people of African descent, so positive and fulfilling relationships are especially critical to African American girls’ identity and self-worth.... During the adolescent years,

relationships become more salient and important to girls' growth and development" (p. 216).

Rhonda sought out relationships that would help her build up a positive self-understanding. Those bullies did not give Rhonda that support, so she found it in others similar to her.

When Rhonda matriculated at her university, she initially found it difficult to find her social circles, as the culture of her school revolved around drinking, which did not interest her. She joined a yoga club and her school's association for Black women. What she appreciated most about the friendship circle that she eventually formed was that even if her friends did not agree with her values, they supported her in them. But the struggles she had in forming that group during her first year at university made her reflect on how she crafted friendships:

"And that's how I acted in college and I think that's why most of my friends are Black and Hispanic. Not necessarily because that's who I can identify the most, but that's who I assumed I can identify most so I would invest more of those relationships.... You know when you see someone and you estimate the potential to develop a relationship with them? I always estimate higher for people with the same skin colour as me, even though we didn't necessarily have the same interests."

Perhaps Rhonda's initial experiences of White children taunting her about her skin colour made her consider to whom she should look for friendship. Her support network as a child and adolescent came from other minority ethnic children so (according to her) that was where she looked upon entering university.

While in Paris, Rhonda noticed the differences in the concept of friendship for the French, stating how making friends was more difficult:

"The French are like coconuts: hard on the outside but soft and sweet on the inside. Their conception of friendship is very different from Americans. If they let you in, I think they expect a lot more from the relationship than Americans do."

Graham (2011) explained, "Many people from more reserved cultures actually see American friendliness as a front" (p. 195). Rhonda discovered that her method for making connections with people had to shift in order to be successful in building relationships. With her continued persistence, Rhonda was able to start developing closer friendships with French students, and not just the other U.S. Americans on her programme. Her experience in France allowed her to understand herself in relation to her interpersonal contacts:

“I think that if I was more outgoing, I would have been friends with all of them already. That’s to say, they’re curious enough to know me, but too reserved to act on it. I feel like I have more ‘social potential’ than I thought, but I didn’t act on it that much because it’s not so evident.”

Rhonda has gained insight through her French relationships about how she perceives and goes about making friends, and will continue to shape her future interactions. Not only is she able to contrast the U.S. American versus French perspectives on friendships, but also she can place herself within her cultural context and see how her own personality fits within these different casts.

As for dating, Rhonda stated that it was not a part of her teenaged years. “I didn’t do it because my family – we don’t talk about that at all. That was just a moot point and my mom was very strict about everything.” Rhonda also thinks that her gender also played a role in this decision not to date. As the only female child, the expectations from her family were different for her than for her brothers. And, as mentioned earlier, the Nigerian expectation is that young people do not become adults until later in life, and thus do not date until later. While she did casually date upon entering university, she stated it was always secretive and nothing in which she invested a lot of energy. After being in Paris, Rhonda noted a shift in her perspective on relationships. “In France they’re so open. They have PDA [public displays of affection] all the time. That used to disturb me, but now it seems like something normal.” Again, Rhonda’s exposure to a different cultural perspective, here where expressions of love are commonplace, allowed her to reconsider engrained paradigms from growing up in a strict Nigerian household where she had been expected to be a chaste studious child, which she adhered to. The growth in her self-understanding from these observations shows even how mundane occurrences in a culture (French public displays of affection) can have a powerful impact on studying in a different country.

2. Gender

Collins (2000) wrote, “Black women intellectuals from all walks of life must aggressively push the theme of self-definition because speaking for oneself and crafting one’s own agenda is essential to empowerment” (p. 36). Upon initial observation of Rhonda’s interviews and field texts, one might presume that gender does not play a significant role in her self-concept. Before leaving for France, Rhonda’s superficial understanding of her gender meant she rarely considered how it interacted with and impacted her experiences and relationships with others. Indeed she stated in her pre-

departure interview, “I never felt treated differently because I was Black or female.” Yet after seven months in Paris, Rhonda commented, “Everyday I see something about myself that I’ve been blind to all my life like... how the African culture that I’ve grown up in was actually quite sexist.” While her saliency of how gender impacted her self-concept may have been minimal prior to departure, it does not mean it did not affect her self-concept.

Rhonda’s time abroad allowed for increased saliency about how she recognises her gender’s influence on her self-concept. “Change can... occur in the private, personal space of an individual woman’s consciousness. Equally fundamental, this type of change is also personally empowering” (Collins, 2000, p. 118). This section examines how Rhonda’s understanding of her gender, race and identity, particularly in relation to sexualised images, physical appearance, and hair, shifted through her experience in Paris and allowed her to feel more empowered about her gender because of this time abroad.

2.1 *Sexualised Images*

Despite initially stating that she did not feel that her gender ever held her back, Rhonda acknowledged:

“I do feel like I may have to work harder than males to get to a position that I want to be at. But I do feel like I could get to that position and when I get to that position, I’ll make it easier for females behind me. So there are still a lot of precedence that females need to set.”

She is able to see that certain obstacles are in place that might hinder her progress to whatever path she chooses for herself. One way that Rhonda seemed to cope with these obstacles is to take on what Fordham (2000) described as gender-passing, where she has chosen to not identify as a Black female. While she attributed this decision as coming from deep reflection about racial labeling (as mentioned earlier in this chapter), part of it might also come from a desire not to be labeled differently in hopes that it might help her not come across racial or gender bias in her career path. “Nurturing a black female for success – as defined by larger society – is far more disruptive of indigenous cultural conventions and practices than previously thought” (Fordham, 2000, p. 332). Black women take on a White role and deny part of their Black cultural identity. While part of her still acknowledged that her gender could cause problems for achievement, Rhonda desexualised herself as a way of hopefully overcoming that prejudice.

While in Paris, Rhonda wrote, “I’ve seen sexism in action in France, but not directly – I have never felt treated differently because of my gender.” However, this

initial report is altered when taking into account the issues that arose with Rhonda's second host family. Suddenly, someone sexualised Rhonda in an unwelcome way. Her host father took Rhonda out of the sheltered experience she had with strict Nigerian parents and limited dating, and created a power dynamic regarding her gender that she had not before experienced. Collins (2000) commented, "Efforts to control Black women's sexuality lie at the heart of Black women's oppression" (p. 81). First Rhonda's sexuality was controlled by her cultural norms, which she herself acknowledged when observing the sexism she saw within her African upbringing. Next her host father tried to control the notions of her sexuality through inappropriate behaviour in the context of their relationship.

"The individual agency of any one U.S. Black woman emerges in the context of larger institutional structures and particular group histories that affect many others. For individual Black women, the struggle lies in rejecting externally defined areas and practices, and claiming the erotic as a mechanism for empowerment" (Collins, 2000, p. 131).

Rhonda's time in France, whether witnessing subvert sexism within the culture which allowed her to see the sexism within her own culture, or whether experiencing a overt sexism from a trusted male in a position of power, brought about profound new ways that Rhonda understood herself as a sexual being.

2.2 Physical Appearance

Rhonda is a petite woman with a soft voice, who only occasionally wears make-up, preferring her natural appearance. As an adolescent and into young adulthood, Rhonda constantly heard that she was skinny and flat-chested. Yet she insisted that the labels never bothered her, and she was always comfortable with the way she looked. However, Rhonda acknowledged the "sticky topic" of physical appearance for women, and stated that while she has some dislikes about her appearance, she feels women need to work beyond the messages they hear about beauty. Yet as many scholars have revealed, the mainstream messages of beauty can hinder positive body acceptance (Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996; Molloy & Herzberger, 1998; Banks, 2000; Fordham, 2000; Collins, 2000). While she told me at both her pre-departure and repatriation interviews that she was "okay" with how she looked physically, she still stated that she had some insecurities about her appearance.

When it comes to alteration of physical appearance, Rhonda always took a superficial approach. Prior to leaving for France, she stated: "I think it's fun when you

treat beauty as something that's more -- not a hobby but something that's fun and not imperative to feel good about yourself." She described how she liked playing with make-up and trying novel approaches to changing her looks.

Her experience in Paris showed her differing perspectives on beauty for Black women, writing in a field text:

"I've noticed... that Black people here seem to accept themselves less-- they wear a lot more weave, they bleach their skin, etc. In reaction to what I've been witnessing in French society, I appreciate the U.S. more, because we accept more easily the fact that we are different."

After her year in France, where she noticed aesthetics were more important than she placed on them, Rhonda felt that her own self-image did not shift too much. The high fashion, expensive prices, and copious amounts of time that she saw Parisians spending shopping actually made her less likely to focus on that aspect of her appearance: "I've learned how to dress the basics, and then I just work with that." Entwistle (2000) described how dress is used as a statement of identity that one can use to articulate gender and personality. Rhonda acknowledged the emphasis that Parisians put on this expression, but for her that importance is not essential for how she understands herself. A person may make a thoughtful observation about her host culture (here, Parisians' devotion to fashion) but she does not necessarily have to alter a part of her self-understanding to it; in fact the observation may reaffirm a part of choices she has made for herself.

2.3 Hair

Of all of my research participants, Rhonda had the least to say about her hair. She has always worn her hair naturally or in braids. With her mother's strong influence, Rhonda never felt the need to alter her hair with weaves or relaxing. Six months into her abroad experience, Rhonda wrote in a journal entry:

"This past month I've also cut my hair really short, like a boy's hair cut. I did that as a way of expressing how much I've changed since September. Everyday I see something about myself that I've been blind to all my life -- like how I'm always extremely afraid of the future, or how the African culture that I've grown up in was actually quite sexist, etc. Each time I see a fault or flaw in my personality, I get really upset, because I hate thinking that there's something about myself that I need to change, but then I feel so relieved at the same time, because I see that I'm not limited by my flaws -- that I can always change who I am, or the way I think."

As mentioned previously, Banks (2000) explained, “For black women, hair matters embody one’s identity, beauty, power, and consciousness” (p. 38), and the self-definition of one’s hair “renders power” (p. 70). Our personal control over our hair and how we choose to display it can be a telling marker of how we understand ourselves and how we wish others to perceive us.

“Men and women in specific kinds of society at specific periods are using their own physical raw material in terms of the social norms to provide indices to their personality and make statements about their conception of their role, their social position and changes in these” (Firth, 2011, p. 298).

Through the data, we can conjecture that Rhonda chose to make a statement to herself and to others about the control she has not only over her own hair (which others do not have) to portray the control she has over her life and the decisions she makes for it.

As mentioned earlier, Rhonda noted while in Paris that Black women seemed more concerned with conforming to a more Western view of hair with weaves. She attributed this to the French belief that equality equals conformity. The meaning that these Black French women she observed might have attributed to their hair is outside of the scope of this research, but her opinions about these observations allow insight into how she does view hair as a way of expressing one’s self-concept. Banks (2000) commented, “Black hair and hair-styling practices can never escape political readings. The motivation of the person sporting the hairdo is irrelevant. Black hair and hair-styling practices are politicized” (p. 17). Rhonda read into these women’s hair-styling decisions as less self-acceptance, displaying the power that Black women’s hair conveys to others, especially other Black women. Rhonda’s estimation, while perhaps accurate, does not allow for the possibility of how these women view their hair choices, given their own national and ethnic understanding of themselves; instead Rhonda has used her own cultural evaluations to assess these women’s identity.

3. Academic Achievement

That academic achievement of African Americans manifests itself through personal, racial, and professional advancement (Perry, 2004). Rhonda has always been a high-achieving student with lofty ambitions, and this section examines how her academic achievement has affected her self-concept.

3.1 Personal Advancement

As mentioned earlier, Rhonda's parents put a lot of emphasis on her to excel academically. This emphasis led to a lot of pressure: "My parents [said], "You know, you have to study. You are supposed to be at the best college. [We're] spending all this money on your Catholic education. You have to go somewhere." Her parents invested a lot in her primary and secondary educations with private schooling and always imparted to her that she could excel. Rhonda took these words to heart, standing out academically as she pursued her education. Belgrave et al. (1992), Parham et al. (1999), and Hudley (2009) stated that while parental encouragement does impact whether a student will succeed, it often amounts to the student's own self-motivation, which Rhonda turned out to have in abundance.

In high school, Rhonda came across the various teaching philosophies in her state's curriculum. As a high-achieving student, Rhonda took most of her classes at the Honours level, which she described as challenging and creative. The teachers pressured the students to do their best:

"And it wasn't about being smart, it was just [the teachers saying], 'Do what I tell you and you'll do well.' That's all it was about. It wasn't about some talent of intelligence that only a few people had."

When she took a course that was not Honours, but for the annual standardised state exam, she remarked,

"It was the worst thing ever because they treat you like you're stupid.... They create this conscious difference between Honours students and [regular] students.... Everybody in the regular class would [think], 'Oh, I'm so stupid. I'm so stupid.' And then they wouldn't even try. The teachers... would only ask for the bare minimum."

Rhonda saw fault from both the teachers and the students, with the teachers perpetuating a belief that students were not intelligent enough to handle the material, while the students used others' attitudes of their intellectual inferiority to not bother to try. For Rhonda, that was unacceptable. While these two teaching paradigms are of note, Rhonda's reaction to them is the focus here. She saw that she responded more positively to teachers that engaged her and presumed that she was capable of doing the work, which Parham et al. (1999) notes enhances any intrinsic motivation for Black pupils to excel. The internal and external support factors work in tandem for Rhonda to succeed.

When asked why she decided to go to university, Rhonda incredulously asked, "To school?! It's the thing you do." For her, university was never *not* an option. With her doctor father and nurse mother, and with a constant push to excel academically, she

never envisioned a future where she did not pursue a higher education. And when it came to choosing which university, she knew that she wanted to go to the best in the country, which is why she ended up at one of the top-ranked Ivy League institutions, studying French. At her university, Rhonda indicated in her initial interview that her real achievements were not about excelling in the classroom, but in her personal development:

[At my university], it's hard to be really proud of what you do because everyone does that. You always feel like there's someone who did better at the thing that you're doing right now. So you have to have a different motivation for your achievements. You can't achieve because you want to be the best because there's always a better one. So in college, I'm really proud of how much my character improved."

Based on her words, we can presume that Rhonda chose to shift achievement from being *the* best scholastically, but being *her* best personally. As Parham et al. (1999) reported, "The education a student received was intrinsically linked to one's personal development and transformation" (p. 70). For Rhonda that meant looking beyond just acquiring new information, but also developing holistically, a key tenet in Africentric theory.

Correspondingly, Rhonda's time abroad affected her more on the personal development than academic levels. In her pre-departure interview, Rhonda stated, regarding her academic expectations in France: "I am determined to work hard." She anticipated delving into the French language so that she could become fluent, as her professional goals of working internationally would benefit from fluency. Rhonda not only wanted to study abroad to become fluent in French, but also because, "I felt to become my own person I needed [to study abroad]." She also saw it as an opportunity to see her academics beyond that offered by her university:

"It's going to be really good for me to have this perspective and to go another institution then coming back to [my school] and seeing, appreciating [my school] in a different way and also seeing that [my school] isn't all that there is."

Rhonda found the adjustment to the French university system to be challenging, stating, "The professors speak at the speed of light, and don't give you that much homework, so I don't know what they expect from me." She struggled for a few months with figuring out how best to navigate this new academic world.

"It is...NOTHING like [my home university]. Most universities in Paris are public, so the quality isn't the same as that of insanely priced American colleges. At the same time, because I'm forced to be more independent, I work a lot hard to take notes, find resources on my own, and ask more questions, because help isn't just given to me like it is at

[my school]. There's no writing center, there's no peer advisors, some times there's even no toilet paper."

However as time passed, Rhonda realised that the academic rigour at her host institution was less than that of her home university. While disappointed and at times bored, she stated, "I try to make up for that by educating myself culturally with museum visits and independent reading."

When probed, Rhonda stated that it was not just the subject, but mostly the way that the course was taught, being disorganized, hard to follow, and unstimulating. As noted earlier, Rhonda knew that she thrived on a particular type of learning, where teachers challenged her in creative ways (like Tasha and Vanessa). Upon returning to the U.S., Rhonda realised that one aspect of her Parisian education that she appreciated was the lack of competition. Whereas her home university often had high levels of competition among students, Parisian students "did the best that [they] could, and no one really cared about others' ability." She had thought the stress caused by being competitive made her more productive; she realised that it really did not, rather that genuine interest in a subject motivated her most. So while her experience at her host university might not have been as academically challenging as she hoped, Rhonda developed more insight into how she responds to different types of academic structures.

In fact, Rhonda experienced a lot of personal development while in Paris. "As convenient as [my home university] is, it didn't teach me much about how to live effectively, in terms of saving money and economizing my time." Her newfound freedom across an ocean allowed her opportunities to explore Paris and be exposed to things she knew she might never again have a chance to experience. Reflecting in her repatriation interview, Rhonda stated about her abroad experience:

"I think I'm a more mature person now. I think that I'm more capable and confident.... I had to learn to live by myself. I had to learn to be so far away from my family. I had to adapt to another culture... And I found from all that I learned so much more about myself. So I feel like I know myself more."

She saw her education beyond the lectures of Paris VIII and X. As Parham et al. (1999) and Belgrave and Allison (2010) reported, education is not always about knowledge from an Africentric perspective. Rhonda embraced this idea, looking for enrichment in all areas of her life in Paris.

The enhancement that Rhonda best achieved was within herself, and she took the lessons she learned through her experiences to heart. When asked about this after

returning to the United States, Rhonda elaborated that she felt that prior to studying abroad fear had driven a lot of her decisions, and that living abroad made her realise that she did not want fear to rule those decisions. “It’s not my main motivation anymore. I think now [it’s] curiosity and being interested in things.” She noted that this curiosity pushed her forward academically and personally. Rhonda’s ability to reflect on her experiences in France, not only shows an emotional maturity, but also a growth in her self-concept and how she understands her self-concept. Whether through a mediocre academic experience, visits to cultural sites, interactions with others, she took all outlets as a means of bettering herself. Rhonda was emphatic that she looks forward to constantly evolving as her life unfolds before her with all of its experiences.

3.2 Professional Advancement

Rhonda’s secondary school years were occupied with academics and extracurricular activities like the track team. She started working when she got to university, taking up a part-time job her first year in a dining hall, and the following year in a library on campus. When Rhonda decided to major in French, she realised that she was taking a leap of faith on whether it was the right decision. “I became a French major but I didn’t even know if I liked France, because I never went to France before.” To her fortune, she found that the country meshed well with her personality. She took a six-week internship in her first year at university at Fondation Monet in Giverny, to both improve her French and to see if her decision had been the correct one. She found that it did. And while she did not have a specific idea about her career in mind before leaving for her year abroad, she stated: “I see myself becoming international so I might still be living in the United States; I might not. But I’ll definitely be speaking French and working with international issues.”

After some time in Paris, Rhonda admitted that she had begun to consider her professional trajectory more. “I’ve been feeling really nervous lately about my studies. What am I going to do with a French studies degree? I already know that I want to study law, but I constantly think about all the opportunities that I’ve excluded from my future as a French major – a high paying job immediately out of college, a successful career in general.” Yet Rhonda returns to her parents’ assertion that financial security is not the only means to achieve a happy, fulfilling life. While her parents might have the expectation that Rhonda and her brothers provide for them in later years, that expectation does not appear to rely on copious amounts of money.

Students who study abroad are more likely to engage in internationally focused careers (Fry et al., 2009; Carlson et al., 1990), and Rhonda is no exception. She was proactive during her time in Paris in gaining more professional experience to hone her French skills and general employability. She volunteered with an independent film festival group, where she had to learn how to define expectations given her position as a volunteer, and the organisation's needs. She worked at a summer internship with the Human Rights League after her university courses ended for the year. "Now that I've been abroad and know what it's like, I definitely want to do it again. I definitely want to see other countries. And I definitely want to do work on international issues." She stated how she would love to be able to do some sort of work among the U.S., Europe, and Africa, and had begun to study for the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) to enable entry into law school. Prior to studying abroad, Rhonda had a vague idea of what she wanted to achieve professionally, but her time in France allowed her to clarify those professional goals through her work experiences.

3.3 Racial Contribution

Noble (1988) and Belgrave et al. (1992) mentioned that oftentimes the reason that Black parents push their children to excel academically is not just for the children's benefit, but also to raise Black people as a whole. Rhonda indicated in her initial interview that this emphasis on education came from her parents being immigrants: "Immigrant parents [are] all about education, everybody [being] pre-med." In her pre-departure interview, Rhonda seemed slightly conflicted about these pressures to excel: "I did really well in [high] school and I'm proud of those accomplishments but at the same time I feel like I was always trying to prove something, you know to someone." When probed she said she felt this pressure that who she was just was not enough, and that she had to be a particular way, i.e. high achieving, to be happy and relaxed. But she admitted, "Then I get there and I was not really happy and relaxed. I must need to do more." So she perpetuated this cycle of achievement because she was not where she felt she should be based on what she perceived as what others (i.e. her parents) were telling her.

Rhonda noted upon repatriation an interesting observation about her home university. When asked about what being a first-generation U.S. American of African immigrants meant to her, she stated that is meant to her that academics were paramount. She went on to note that of the other Black students she encountered at her Ivy League school, many of them were also first-generation U.S. American of immigrants. "We have

to get a good education, becoming a doctor, a lawyer, or whatever. And providing for your family afterwards.” Again the acknowledgement of the collectivist tendencies of African American families appears (Parham et al., 1999), with education being a means for younger generations to assist the older ones.

Yet Rhonda does not feel as if she has been manipulated into this life: “I want to be a lawyer, and I realise that it’s totally influenced by my upbringing. And that’s okay.... What’s wrong if your parents influence your ambitions like that?” With her abroad experience and her parents’ influence, Rhonda has ambitions of being an international lawyer. But she does not eschew these aspirations, and it appears that her time in France with her deep reflection on who she is and how she wants to live her life. Collins (2000) declared:

“Through the lived experiences gained within their extended families and communities, individual African-American women fashioned their own ideas about the meaning of Black womanhood. When these ideas found collective expression, Black women’s self-definitions enabled them to refashion African-influenced conceptions of self and community” (p. 10).

As she had stated earlier, with all of the barriers that Rhonda breaks down, not only will she be able to provide for her family, but will aid future generations of Black women by establishing norms through her achievements and hopefully breaking down some of the intersecting oppressions that U.S. power structures have created for this group.

This chapter explored Rhonda’s experience abroad in Paris and what effect this had on her self-concept. Through her academic and personal experiences abroad, Rhonda underwent shifts in how she understands herself in regards to her race through family, nationality, spirituality, friends, gender, and academic achievement.

Chapter XII. Discussion and Conclusion

My goals for this research were to understand the effects of study abroad on five African American women's self-understanding. I sought to see specifically how these experiences altered the various components of identity, using Africentric and intersectional theory as my points for analysis. With the low participation rates of Black students in study abroad during their undergraduate years and the lack of in-depth research into these students' abroad experiences, I feel it is imperative that we appreciate the experiences of those few minority ethnic students who do partake in this opportunity. In the last five chapters, I explored what occurred during five young Black women's study abroad trips and how these events affected how these women understand various aspects of their identity.

In this concluding chapter, I examine the recurring and contradictory themes that surfaced in these young women's experiences. I consider how my findings might be applied to current study abroad practices, before looking at some of the limitations of my research. I conclude by considering future directions of potential research in this area.

1. Recurring and Contradictory Themes

All five students discussed in my thesis indicated that they felt changed by studying abroad, which matches up with the other research mentioned in Chapter 4 about study abroad's impact. Additionally, all the women in this study did see shifts in certain aspects of their identity, but these shifts were not necessarily to the same degree or in the same aspect of identity as the other research participants. Feminist scholars Hurd and McIntyre (1996) warned that we cannot fall into a trap of presuming that because research participants share a common denominator (e.g. my research participants are all African American females), all of their stories will be the same. "We [must] de-privilege the historical legacy of sameness in psychology and work towards acknowledging the complexities inherent in all feminist research" (p. 89). This research has shown just how those complexities manifest in searching to understand the effects of study abroad on a group of Black American university women.

One unspoken goal of my research was to not pathologise my research participants. Hopefully reading about their lives and experiences has shown just how resilient and remarkable these young women are. They all have excelled academically throughout their lives and decided to study abroad for personal, professional, and

academic reasons. Yet they all reached that choice through different life paths, whether high mobility during childhood or trying their best to meet familial (and cultural) expectations. Each woman had to come to some awareness of how she fits within larger society. Some have spent more time on this introspection than others, but given not only their diverse experiences but also their diverse personalities, this variance is completely understandable.

One aspect of note is the events that did transpire to cause these shifts in the participants' understanding of their identities. Aside from the case of Rhonda's sexual harassment, these changes in self-concept occurred because of every day experiences. Whether Taylor interpreted the unwelcoming gazes from Italian women or Vanessa managed the curious touches of Korean children, the modifications in self-concept came not from monumental events that required deeper reflection. Instead they came from these women going about their lives as students in a foreign environment.

In considering intersectionality within these contexts, we can note that these shifts seem to occur when these women's power dynamics altered, particularly in regards to nationality, race, and gender. Both daily events and more impactful incidents (e.g. Tasha and her friends being stopped by the police or Rhonda's struggles with her host father) created oppressions whether intended or not. These instances seem to have created a self-dialogue about how these women considered themselves in certain aspects of their identity. Because of their obvious foreignness, they encountered new intersecting forms of (dis)empowerment. When Rhonda found herself defending her country to French nationals or Mia recognised the Florentines' bias toward U.S. Americans and appreciating when people saw beyond her citizenship, these moments became critical for self-reflection and identity changes.

These new intersections of identity (using the term "new" to indicate that the participants had never considered them before) bring forward deeper questions about how we treat individuals in any society that are not "normal" (i.e. Othering them). The blatant curiosity about Tasha and Vanessa in Japan and South Korea formed disempowering dynamics. Are those who become the objects of this disempowerment required to adjust, as Tasha and Vanessa did, simply because there was "nothing they could do about it?" Almost all the participants mentioned how media perpetuates the messages of what is acceptable and expected in both the United States and abroad. What responsibility does the media play in these messages?

As part of a marginalised community in the United States, these five women have had to draw on sources throughout their lives to overcome the oppressions they face. Perhaps having these tools allowed them to overcome these struggles more easily. Yet facing these new forms of oppressions while abroad also gave them further insights into who they are as individuals. Where those insights occurred really depended on each individual woman. For Rhonda, she gained more understanding of her gender, nationality, and professional self-concepts, while Vanessa and Tasha found more transformation in how they understand their professional and gender identities. Mia also learned more about her national identity and her Haitian identity by being in Italy, but to a different degree than Rhonda's understanding of her national identity.

So while we can observe a collective ability to adapt, we can also appreciate how their unique personalities played a dynamic role in how these women went about understanding some of their daily observations while abroad. Mia, my Florentine participant, took the Italian emphasis on appearance (*la bella figura*) to heart, and began putting more thought into her clothing, while Rhonda noticed the same trend in Paris, but decided it was not something which she needed to adopt. These cognizant choices show the complexity of individuals and how they may react differently to similar stimulus (here, the importance of fashion choices in a different culture). As Hurd and McIntyre (1996) pointed out, even shared backgrounds (two first-generation Black American women) do not mean similar interpretations of experience.

These choices also bring about the fascinating question of how these women reconciled some of the struggling intersections of their identity. Whether the double-consciousness struggle of race and nationality, or academics and race, or gender and professional identity, each woman drew from different parts of her identity and personality to form her overall self-concept. Each study abroad trip had an impact on the participants, but the impact differed based on the experience and the individual. Each woman took her own life story into her time abroad and used that and the new stimuli she encountered to craft a new self-concept based on the junction of those many factors. If anything, this research has shown just how intricate a person, her identities, and her experiences interact to create self-understanding.

Another recurring theme of note is the notion of collective Black consciousness. Most of the women in this study displayed an understanding of herself in relation to her collective identity. The collective was often in regards to family, which Africentricity states is an integral part of self-understanding. Rhonda's acceptance of her family's

influence on her career choice, Vanessa's determination to provide for her family, and Mia's deepened connection to her Haitian roots in terms of their self understanding shows the profound impact that collectivist thinking has on self-concept, as well as study abroad's effect on these understandings.

2. Application to Study Abroad

Unfortunately, no neat recommendations for applying my findings to study abroad practitioners exist. As shown above, the abroad experience is definitively a time for growth: personally, socially, and academically. Yet given the complexity of my five participants alone, we see that experiences can be so varied (not only because of destinations, but also because of different identities) that universal suggestions would inevitably be short-sighted and non-inclusive at some point or other, creating new or enforcing old intersecting oppressions. That said, study abroad providers can take away a few points from this research when working with students, both from the African American and the wider community. Perhaps the most important of these points is that we need to make study abroad possible for as many students that want to partake in it; the enrichment is too impactful not to do so.

Both Vanessa and Mia stated during their repatriation interview about wanting to tell other students to go abroad because of how much it changed their perspective on the world and themselves. Seeing other students of colour traveling to study can be an influential means of showing students that, yes, Black students can study abroad. Peer mentors offer a powerful method not only to increase the number of minority ethnic students who go abroad, but also to answer questions that an administrator cannot. Whether answering about finances, location-specific details, or what the racial climate is like, returning students are often in a place that practitioners are not to offer candid insights into what prospective students might expect. Mia stated one of the main reasons she went abroad was due to one of her friends sharing her experiences as an exchange student in Denmark and pushing Mia to go somewhere herself. Upon her return, Vanessa became involved with recruitment for her study abroad provider. Encouraging returning students, particularly minority ethnic students, to get involved as ambassadors for study abroad could increase applications and participation.

Yet if the percentage of Black students continues to increase (as is the current trend), should study abroad offices or third-party providers be offering a specific orientation to minority ethnic students pre-departure? Vanessa commented that only

after she asked someone about Koreans finding her a curiosity did she receive a response of, “Yes, it’ll be different for you.” No one seems to offer insight for how minority ethnic students might handle these situations. Crafting messages on how to cope might be useful for certain students. Yet we should note that the women who noted that their appearance caused people to stare (Mia, Vanessa, Taylor, and Tasha), all handled the unwanted attention, building an armour and accepting the looks as curious and non-malicious. Therefore, do we discredit minority ethnic students by implying that they cannot adapt successfully themselves, when these four young women did? And is not the adaption itself part of intercultural growth and self-understanding that we hope for our students to undergo while abroad?

I mentioned in Chapter 4, Day-Vines’s (1998) deliberate psychological intervention of students studying abroad in Ghana to help them understand their ethnic identity within the context of their experience in Africa. Pedersen (2009) found, “We need to work with [study abroad students] on the reflective process and intercultural understandings of the study abroad experience” (p. 16) as they can develop their intercultural sensitivity more when they have intentional pedagogy inserted into their study abroad experience. At the end of my data collection with her, Tasha stated about the research process, “I actually have to think about why [the events of my life] have affected me and how I became the person I am.” As educators, we have a group interested in exploring the world outside their own personal sphere. Practitioners might consider how purposeful guidance for all students (not just African Americans) could allow them to gain more from going abroad than simply sending them off, but affording them an opportunity to explore their own identities in a greater global context.

If anything, the findings of this thesis suggest the student development adage of “challenge and support” (Sanford, 1962). While this thesis does not necessarily focus on student development theory, the application of this research’s findings seems to advocate for study abroad providers to consider how they might further foster their students’ growth during this time. The challenge and support offered, however, would have to be unique to each individual because, as this thesis has illustrated, we are all coming from different places, even as we are all headed to different places. Like Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory (mentioned in Chapter 5), the different systems with which we uniquely interact and the specific rules and norms of those systems (whether on the microsystem level of the family or the macrosystem level of an entire culture), plays a role in our psychosocial development. These findings indicate that study abroad

practitioners will need to become increasingly adept and adaptable; designing programmes that allow for personal growth within each individual's contexts and systems could enrich the study abroad experience even more, no matter a person's background or identity.

3. Theoretical Applications: Africentricity and Intersectionality

With myriad possibilities to categorise the data I collected, my thesis could stretch into volumes of works. I chose specific intersections of identity to analyse my participants. I based these categories on what African American psychology identified as key points for Black Americans' identities, while also being critical of this discourse as a sole means of understanding an individual. McCall (2005) remarked:

“In personal narratives and single-group analyses... complexity derives from the analysis of a social location at the intersection of single dimensions of multiple categories, rather than at the intersection of the full range of dimensions of a full range of categories, and that is how complexity is managed” (p. 1781).

Researchers must make educated decisions about how they evaluate their data. I deliberately selected a theoretical framework that looked beyond the Eurocentric notions in which we as researchers often find ourselves. Another researcher may have chosen discourse analysis, quantitative identity scale measures, or a number of other positions from which to construe the data, and findings may have differed based on these points of analysis.

Using Africentricity and intersectionality as my theoretical constructs offered an innovative way to understand my participants' experience. African American psychology offers the field of psychology an opportunity to consider the complexity of an individual's 'truth' in the contexts of self-knowledge and intuition (Parham et al., 1999). While Africentricity could at times feel daunting with trying to understand these complexities, my discomfort might have come from my own unfamiliarity with the area or struggles of code-shifting into an Africentric mindset. However, this discomfort should not discourage others from attempting to try different ontologies to analyse data from novel (to them) frameworks.

African American psychology's tendency to essentialise Black individuals often created friction during my analysis of my research participants. I questioned whether the different categories that I identified limited my understanding of the five women's experiences, especially when I struggled to understand aspects of certain student's within the Africentric context. For instance, Taylor's lack of collective tendencies and Tasha's

inability to reflect on her race's impact on her self-concept highlighted that Africentricity might limit a full appreciation of individuals' self-understanding. Because these women did not fit neatly into the factors identified by African American psychological theorists as being essential to a good self-concept, they were in danger of being labelled deviant, which is the very label I sought to avoid by shunning the use of standard White psychological theory.

Intersectionality permitted a more refined understanding of identity because of its acceptance of identity's intrinsic complexity. Africentricity offered a foundation for understanding my participants in regards to their U.S. Black female identities, while intersectionality allowed for the deliberation of the interactions of even more identity components with one another. As a construct, intersectionality gives researchers the ability to look beyond any two concepts (e.g. religion and gender, race and nationality) and brings about fresh considerations of how all of these components intermingle with an individual and his or her environment to create one's self-concept. Thus my hope of using Africentricity and intersectionality in tandem was to mitigate the former's limitations with the latter's flexibility. I feel the results from my analysis demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of both theories.

The use of intersectionality can be daunting, simply because it allows so many ways of understanding an individual, but it also allows the complexity of that individual to present itself. If anything, my analysis reveals how even two different women with similar backgrounds (e.g. Rhonda and Mia, first-generation Black American women; Vanessa and Tasha, multi-generation Black women with a keen interest in Japanese culture) can have vastly different understandings of themselves. Intersectionality permits this by taking into account how the various layers of identity interact with one another, and offers complexity to some of the rigidity found in African American psychology.

With that, Africentricity gave structure for processing the vast amounts of data on each research participant. I could have allowed the voice of each woman (and thus her self-concept) to determine the style of each analysis. However with one of my research aims being to use a culturally appropriate theory, I found that Africentricity, despite its propensity to essentialise, a decent foundation from which to start my examination of my participants' identities. Used in conjunction with intersectionality, it offered a unique way to comprehend their experiences and self-reflection. Others might favour the treatment of only one theory to the analysis, given their own theoretical propensities of having a strict analysis in Africentricity or the fluidity of intersectionality.

However, I found employing the two theoretical frameworks together a preferable method of understanding the women involved in this research, as they allowed simultaneously structure and flexibility for the data analysis.

4. Limitations and Future Directions

Researchers are constantly seeking ways to ensure that they are as close to the 'truth' as possible. Given the variety within and imperfections of any given person, this goal can seem nigh impossible. Oftentimes during my research I found myself thinking, "Maybe I should have done it this way" or "Why didn't I ask that during the interviews?" Both foresight and hindsight offers us all opportunities to become better researchers. As Qin and Lykes (2006) stated, "No single self theory can possibly capture the 'truth' about all women, as every truth is incomplete, partial and culture bound" (p. 195). While I have done my best to portray my participants' realities, I recognise that this research has some limitations for revealing that entire picture. Here I look at those limitations, how they might be improved upon, and other opportunities that could take my research aims further.

The number of participants in this study, while allowing for more in-depth insights into these individuals, did not allow for as many stories to be told as initially planned. A more ideal sample would have included Black students (including Black men, an even greater underrepresented group in study abroad than Black woman) from more regions of the United States, traveling to more destinations (including Africa and South America), representing different HEIs (including HBCUs and small private colleges), and studying for a variety of degrees including sciences. Of course, there are a variety of other factors that might also be considered for the participants, but even a doubling of the sample would permit more voices and experiences to be heard allowing for a more comprehensive picture to be drawn about African American students' abroad experiences. Time limitations, however, made the identification of and data collection from more individuals difficult. Additionally, I chose a specific system to reach out to students, through universities' study abroad offices because of my professional student affairs background. I might easily have utilised other means, such as the Internet to identify potential participants.

The data collection methods that I chose (interviews and field texts) worked together to create a basis (the pre-departure interview) from which to understand the changes that occurred during (field texts) and after (the repatriation interview) studying

abroad. The field texts sought to unveil the specific occurrences while these students were abroad to hopefully identify where any shifts may be occurring. I could have employed other methods to learn more about my participants and their self-concept. Ethnographic field observations would have allowed me to see my participants outside of the interviews and written texts which they sent me. From observing them with their friends or family prior to departure and returning home to taking time to visit the students during their study abroad programmes and seeing their interactions in school, at home, and with host nationals would have offered even more rich data from which to extrapolate findings. Speaking with friends and family or encouraging visual data from photographs (which only Tasha provided) are other means to acquire more information.

Of course, with my analysis choice comes the scrutiny of whether my interpretation of my participants' experiences within Africentric framework is accurate. I am not African American, and as mentioned before, some researchers feel that understanding another's cultural experience, especially when outside that culture, is impossible. While my own perspective has undoubtedly coloured my interpretations, I endeavoured to ensure that I did justice to these five young women within the chosen framework. As mentioned in Chapter 6, I used member checking to verify my analysis with my participants. While two (Taylor and Tasha) did not get back to me, the other three found my findings interesting and accurate when put into the Africentric context.

Some study abroad programmes, like the one at UConn (mentioned in Chapter 4) that takes students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (the majority of the attendees being Black) to Liverpool, could possibly take an Africentric approach to fostering students' growth while abroad with its pre-departure orientation, on-site programming, and re-entry support. Belgrave and Allison (2010) stated, "If programs with an Africentric framework produce better results for African Americans than those that do not use this framework, then we would know that this framework is most useful for understanding the psychology of African Americans" (p. 58). The possibility of trialing such programmes could not only offer these students an even more enriching abroad experience than they might have otherwise received, but could also reveal further insight into using African American psychology as a theoretical framework with real-world applications, while keeping in mind some of the limitations of the field, especially the danger of essentialising Black students.

As mentioned earlier, Tasha felt that being a participant in this research caused her to look more closely at who she was. Obviously some individuals may see this as a

limitation of my research, as I had my participants deeply reflecting into their lives, their experiences, and how they viewed themselves. By having the women think about the various aspects of their identities, was I shifting how they viewed those aspects of their identities? While this might have been the case, I do not think this is a negative limitation to the research. One of my research aims wanted to find how these women saw themselves from the various points of their self-concept. And as I suggested before, having these sorts of conversations with students might allow them to garner more about themselves from their study abroad experiences.

5. My Journey as Researcher

This research has offered me a lot of growth both academically and personally. The evolution of this thesis has come from insights and roadblocks that required flexibility and innovation. My initial plan had flirted with doing a massive quantitative study using identity model scales to see how study abroad affected marginalised students who study abroad. But as my research developed, I realised the importance of giving each person a unique voice in order to more thoroughly understand her. While this decision lowered the number of students with whom I could work, I value that taking this more qualitative approach challenged me to think about how best I could understand those women with whom I did speak. As a committed interculturalist and as a student affairs professional, I appreciated discovering each participant's perspective on her experience, which a quantitative approach would not have offered. The richness and uniqueness of the individuals illustrates the very diverse field that intercultural education covers, even when seeming to examine just one group of people.

A student abroad myself while pursuing my doctorate, I can attest to the compelling impact that learning in another culture has on understanding one's self. All aspects of my identity have been challenged and questioned simply from my day-to-day interactions and experiences. While I am at a different life phase and in different circumstances from my research participants, their stories resonated with me as they recounted to me their challenges, marvels, and insights. I could see my struggles in their struggles, and their wonders at encountering new ways of experiencing the world. I feel that without the evolution of my research, I may have affirmed the great impact that studying abroad has on attendees, but would not have garnered how unique each study abroad trip can truly be. This understanding, I believe, can help study abroad professionals foster the better experiences for everyone.

Overall, the research process has taught me to question everything and to understand there is more than one method to understand our questions. I firmly believe that we each construct our reality. As education researchers, we can never presume that one way of looking at something is the only way. Additionally, when we do choose a path we must understand its strengths and weaknesses and how that affects our analysis in relation to other possible analyses. While this might be tedious, I find it highlights the complexity of any given individual as well as the world in which we function.

6. Summation

At its core, this thesis sought to understand how placing an individual from a specific background into a foreign environment affected how she understood the various aspects of her self-concept. More importantly, this research sought to understand those changes within a culturally appropriate theoretical framework, eschewing mainstream paradigms with engrained cultural perspectives. Researchers have proven study abroad to be a powerful event for those students who engage in it. As the number of study abroad students continues to rise and the diversity of those students increases, practitioners and researchers must consider how to best foster this powerful event for all of their students.

The five young women in this research came from vastly different backgrounds and had vastly different experiences during their time studying outside the United States. They all recognised a shift in themselves, particularly in their self-confidence. Yet most importantly, components of their identities shifted according to their destination and the self-understanding that they brought with them to those destinations. Being external of their normal environs, these women suddenly had to reevaluate who they were while being on the outside looking in.

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APPENDICES

«Title» «First» «Last»
«University»
«Location»

Dear «Title» «Last»:

My name is Niki Sol, a PhD student in Education at the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom. For my doctoral dissertation, I am investigating study abroad's effects on African Americans and their self-concept.

My hope is to have a few students who would be willing to do a long-term research study with me. My desire is to interview students before they depart for their study abroad destination for Fall 2011 or Academic Year 2011/12. I will conduct this pre-departure interview to create their life stories and to get a picture of "who they are" at that point in their lives. While abroad, they will write in journals, blog, and/or write letters about their experiences, as well as think through some guided questions regarding how they are adjusting and what they are learning about themselves by being in another culture. About 3 months after they return home, I plan to follow up with another interview to see how they see themselves now that they have gone through the experience. My viva defense was also my ethics approval, ensuring that I meet all the standards set forth by the British Educational Research Association (BERA). I am happy to go through a similar process at your university if required.

I require help in identifying potential participants in the study and would appreciate your office's help in this matter. The other universities I am currently working with have had me send a letter that they could forward to their outgoing study abroad students, and those students interested in participating could in turn contact me.

I am happy to contact you to discuss my research over the phone and talk about any questions or concerns you might have. If you respond to this e-mail, we can set up a time that would be convenient for me to contact you. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Niki Sol
PhD Candidate
[REDACTED]@cam.ac.uk
+44 [REDACTED]

Faculty of Education
184 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB2 8PQ
United Kingdom

Dear [University] Study Abroad Participant:

My name is Niki Sol, a PhD student at the University of Cambridge in the UK. For my doctoral dissertation, I am looking to follow study abroad participants as they take part in an abroad program. I am looking for students who meet the following criteria:

- 1) A U.S. American citizen between the ages of 19 and 25;
- 2) Identify as African American or Black American;
- 3) Enrolled full-time in a four-year college or university.
- 4) Participating in a study abroad or exchange program in the 2011-2012 academic year at a higher education institution outside of your home country/countries. The program must be at least one semester long, though preferably you will take part of a yearlong program.

This will be a research study that will last from one to two months before you depart for your program until two to three months after you return. I will conduct a pre-departure interview on your life story to get a picture of who you are at this point in your life. While abroad, you will be take part in recording your experience through one or two of the following mediums: journal writing, letters home, and/or blogging. Don't worry, as I will provide you with some guided questions if you don't know what you should be writing about. Two to three months upon your return home, I will follow up with another interview to debrief about your experience. All participants will be completely anonymous, and you have the freedom to withdraw at any point.

There are several benefits to taking part in this study. For one, each participant who completes the entire research project will be given \$100 at the end of the study (\$75 if you are a semester study abroad participant). If you choose, you may want to market yourself as a participant who has taken part in a long-term study. I also believe that this opportunity will give you a chance to get more out of your study abroad experience than you might normally, as you will have a chance to reflect on your experiences in more depth.

If you meet the above criteria and this project sounds like it may be of interest to you, or if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. My e-mail address is [REDACTED]@cam.ac.uk. While calling overseas might be an issue, my mobile number is +44 [REDACTED]. We can also arrange to Skype if you would like to talk that way. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Niki Sol

Faculty of Education
University of Cambridge

Childhood

- How would you describe yourself as a child?
- Tell me about your family.
 - How would you describe your parents?
 - What are some of the best/worst things about them?
- What other members of your family played a role in your upbringing? How so?
- What was growing up in your house/neighborhood like?
- What was the best part about your childhood?
 - What about your childhood you wish had been different and how?
- What are your best memories of school? Worst?
- What accomplishments in school are you most proud of?
- What was your first experience of leaving home like?

Social

- What were your friends like?
 - What friendships were most important to you during childhood and adolescence?
- What was the best part of being a teenager? Worst part?
- What did you do for fun? What clubs, organizations, or groups did you join?
- What pressures did you feel as a teenager, and where did they come from?
- What has dating been like for you?
- Who most helped you develop your current understanding of yourself? How so?
- What different roles do you play in the different aspects of your life?
 - Do you feel these roles ever conflict? How so?
- How do you think others would describe you?
 - How do you feel about how others might describe you?
- What was it like to turn 18?
- Have you had any jobs? Tell me about it/them.

Inner Life/Spiritual Awareness

- How do you feel about yourself physically?
- What primary beliefs guide your life?
 - Where did you get these beliefs?
- What values would you not want to compromise?

Culture

- How would you define yourself culturally?
- What family/cultural celebrations, traditions, or rituals were important in your life?
- What cultural values were passed on to you and by whom?
- Was religion important in your family?
- What cultural influences are still important to you today?
- How much of a factor in your life do you feel your cultural background has been?
- Was social class important in your life?
- What does being [African American/Black] mean to you?
 - When did you first see yourself as being [African American/Black]?
 - What memories do you have of your race being a factor in your life?
- What does being U.S. American mean to you?
- What does being [male/female] mean to you?
- How did you react when Obama was elected president?

Major Life Themes

- What has been the happiest time in your life?
- What has been the most important learning experience in your life?
- What has been the greatest challenge of your life so far?
- How have you overcome and learned from your difficulties?
- Are you satisfied with the life choices you have made?
 - Is there anything you would change?
- What relationships in your life have been the most significant?
 - How would you describe those relationships?
- How do you feel about yourself now?
- What matters the most to you now?
- What is the most important thing you have had to learn about yourself?
- What do you see for yourself in 10 years time?

University and Study Abroad

- What made you decide to attend university?
- Why did you choose the university that you did?
- Tell me about your university experience thus far.
- What pressures have you experienced attending university?
- Why did you decide to study abroad?
- Why did you choose the country you did?
- What are you most looking forward to about studying abroad?
- What challenges do you see for yourself?

Closure

- Is there anything that we've left out of your life story?
- Do you feel you have given a fair picture of yourself?
- What are your feelings about this interview and all that we have covered?

General Feelings

- How is it to be back in the United States?
- What do you find yourself thinking the most about your experience abroad?
- How have family and friends reacted to your return?
 - How have you reacted to being back with your friends and family?
- What do you miss most about being in your host country?
- What do you miss the least?
- What do you like most about being back in the United States?

Reflection

- Thinking back, what did you enjoy most about your abroad experience?
- What are some of the social aspects that you found most challenging?
- What do you think about the academic experience that you had?
 - Do feel you lived up to your full academic potential in Paris?

Culture

- What did you find the most challenging about your host country's culture?
- How do you think you adjusted to life in your host country?
- What do you think were host nationals' response to you in their country?
 - Tell me some specific examples where you saw this.
- How have you changed any ways that you looked at the world?
- How do you feel about your physical appearance?
- Did you think about your racial identity during your time abroad? In what ways?
- What issues, if any, did your background play in your time in your host country?
- What does being [African American/Black] mean to you?
- What does being U.S. American mean to you?
 - How did being an American play into your experience?
- What does being a woman mean to you?

Closing

- How do you think you have changed since going abroad?
 - Why?
 - What role do you think your time abroad played in these changes?
 - You mentioned in your field notes a couple of times that you feel there are parts of yourself that you need to change. How did this manifest in you?
- How has your time abroad affected your plans for the future?
- What differences have your family and friends noted in you?
- Is there anything else you want to share with me about your abroad experience that you haven't?

Month 1

Describe your arrival and adjustment to your host country.

- What initial impressions have you had?
- What have you really liked about your host country?
- What sorts of challenges have you encountered?
- How would you describe the people you interact with? What sorts of interactions have you had with them?
- What do you miss from home, if anything?
- Please include anything else you think pertinent.

Month 2

Describe how you have become involved in your host country/institution.

- What memorable events have occurred in the last month?
- What activities are you involved in?
- What are you doing in your free time?
- What is your university like?
- What sort of interactions do you have with people when you are outside of the classroom (e.g. in stores, at restaurants, out and about)?
- Who do you find yourself spending your time with?
- How often do you contact home? How do you contact home?
- What sort of situations have you encountered that remind you of your position as an outsider? How do you react to these situations?

Month 3

Describe your immersion into the culture.

- What memorable events have occurred in the last month?
- What are you enjoying most about your host country?
- How has the academic course load been compared to your experience in the States?
- What sorts of experiences have you had where your race/gender/nationality/age have come into play? What happened? How did you react?

Month 4 (Semester-Long Participants)

Describe your closing time in your host culture.

- What memorable events have occurred in the last month?
- Did you travel at all outside your host city? Where did you go and for how long? Who did you go with? What memorable experiences did you have?
- How do you feel you adjusted to living in your host country?
- What do you think you will miss most about leaving?
- What are you looking forward to when you return home?
- How has your view of your host country changed since you first arrived?
- What have you learned about yourself in the time you've been abroad?
- How do you feel you have changed from your time abroad? Personally? Academically? Et cetera?

Month 4 (Year-Long Participants)

Describe your first season in your host country.

- What memorable events have occurred in the last month?
- How are you spending your time?
- What sorts of issues have come up for you in regards to school? Social interactions? Day-to-day life?
- How do you think host nationals view you?
- In what ways do you feel more at home in your host country? In what ways do you still feel like a foreigner?
- What, if anything, do you miss about the United States?

Month 5

Describe your continued adjustment, academic and social life in your host country.

- What memorable events have occurred in the last month?
- How are you spending your time?
- How is university going?
- What interactions are you having with those inside and outside of the classroom?
- What challenges have you encountered?
- What have you really enjoyed in the last month?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Month 6

Describe your continued adjustment, academic and social life in your host country.

- What memorable events have occurred in the last month?
- How are you spending your time?
- How is university going?
- How have your interactions with others been going?
- What challenges have you encountered?
- What have you really enjoyed in the last month?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Month 7

Describe your continued adjustment, academic and social life in your host country.

- What memorable events have occurred in the last month?
- How are you spending your time?
- How is university going?
- How have your interactions with others been going?
- What challenges have you encountered?
- What have you really enjoyed in the last month?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Month 8

Describe your continued adjustment, academic and social life in your host country.

- What memorable events have occurred in the last month?
- How are you spending your time?
- How is university going?

- How have your interactions with others been going?
- What challenges have you encountered?
- What have you really enjoyed in the last month?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Month 9

Describe your closing time in your host culture.

- What memorable events have occurred in the last month?
- Did you travel at all outside your host city? Where did you go and for how long? Who did you go with? What memorable experiences did you have?
- How do you feel you adjusted to living in your host country?
- What do you think you will miss most about leaving?
- What are you looking forward to when you return home?
- How has your view of your host country changed since you first arrived?
- What have you learned about yourself in the time you've been abroad?
- How do you feel you have changed from your time abroad? Personally? Academically? Et cetera?

Taylor: Venice, Italy**21 October, 2011****Month 1: Describe your arrival and adjustment to your host country.**

I have been living in Venice, Italy now for only about a week and at first, I must be honest, I did not like it here at all. In fact, after the first 2 days, I wanted to turn right around, get back on a plane and go back to America. I became very sick, I discovered 10 vicious mosquito bites just on one arm and all the walking was making me sore and my back hurt beyond what I have ever felt. I honestly did not see how I would survive one month let alone three. I wanted to leave but, that was impossible and I must stay and now I'm glad I did. This city has so much to offer and the extra walking is worth it. Of course this city has its flaws, but it is different and beautiful and it gives me a chance to see how very different Venetians live. How their way of life is very unique and I doubt there is any place on earth that is like Venice.

I have met so many friends from all over the world: Noah and Dor from Israel, Ahdi from Spain, Marius and Teresa from Germany, Idiana from Japan, Tone from Vietnam, Brian from England, Jessica and Marta from Italy, and Peter who is a Venetian sailor.

I am just starting now to get use to the boat routes; it's not difficult at all, I don't even carry my map around with me anymore. The sunsets are amazing. I have never ever in my whole life seen a more perfect beautiful sunset then the ones in Venice. From its architecture, to the locals, the small shops that sell mask and pubs that sell spritz, Venice is a dying city but for now it is full of life... during the day. There is no nightlife here unfortunately. This city caters to the old and the timid. The whole city is very quiet by 12am and dead by 1:30 and does not start up again until 6. The water is as essential to the city for survival as the tourist. The water provides transportation for those that either do not have a boat or for some reason cannot drive one. You need a boat license like how teens in America need a car license.

Overall the people here are very nice. If you at least try to speak to them in Italiano they are very accommodating and helpful. Every now and then I run into a rude Italian having a bad day but I didn't expect them all to be nice. A lot of people here smoke. Or maybe a lot of young people smoke. Everywhere I turn there's someone puffing on a cigarette. Oh God I might come back with lung cancer smh [shaking my head]. Everyone reads the newspaper. Like how people on [the transport in my college's town] listen to music or play on their phone, you don't see that much here. Just everyone reading newspapers...

And I found this very interesting, I hardly see any single unmarried mothers around here. They are very family-oriented so if a couple has a child, they are married, end of story. No broken families. The fathers are very involved with their children's lives. In fact I see more fathers with their children than children with their mothers. Their mentality is different and very refreshing compared to those in [my college town]. The men here push the carriage or carry the baby in the little baby wraps that fasten around your chest. Or it's the man that takes his son or daughter to school, or feeds the baby its milk or cradles it when she cries. It's so adorable. I mean it makes sense because the woman carries the baby around for 9 months, the least he can do is burp it lol [laugh out loud].

The water levels are changing drastically. One day the water will be so high it is spilling all on the sidewalk. I use to find myself dodging small waves every other step. But now just a few days ago I noticed parts of the lagoon floor around San Servolo exposed. The water dropped a good 4-5 feet overnight. I did not realize how shallow the

lagoon is. Some parts cannot be deeper than three feet, the water is just so murky you cannot see the bottom even if it was 5 inches deep.

I am tired of eating crescent for breakfast every day. There are just sandwiches, crescents and pizza. Good food is a well-kept secret here but I will unlock it soon. I don't eat much; actually I'm realizing just how much I overate in America. I can go for hours without food and not even realize it until my stomach starts to growl. In America, I never gave my stomach a chance to start making any noises lol [laugh out loud]. The coffees are so small, not that I drink coffee but if I did I would be super pissed because the coffee cups are literally the size of the little cups from a tea set I use to play with when I was a child.

A few things I miss about America: the big cars, the clubs, my friends/family, cooked food, MY car, people who speak English, being able to go into the store and find soup, not walking, not having to steal tissue from my school, an oven, boiled water, free laundry, grocery stores that stay open pass 8pm and tall buildings.

Things I DON'T miss about America: traffic, girls who wear clothes that don't fit them, Mcdonald's, black guys (:P), big-booty hoes, girls who wear leggings for pants, the [my city's public transport and night scene] and hobos!

Rhonda: Paris, France

3 April, 2012

Month 6: Describe your continued adjustment, academic and social life in your host country.

[Note: Rhonda had moved to a new host family two months prior, just started attending a African Caribbean church, and expressed boredom with her academics at her host university.]

o How are you spending your time?

Lately I have been spending a lot of time with my host family or studying and doing homework. It's very warm and welcoming where I live, so I feel comfortable do more and more things with them, like cooking, watching movies, etc.

o You mentioned going to church. Is it in French? Why was it important for you to go? How have you found that experience?

Yes, Church is in French. It's important for me to go because it's a time and space for me to clear my head and reflect on what I'm doing with my life, from a spiritual and moral point of view. It's also a good way to meet people. I always have a fun time there because there are a lot of people my age and they're very welcoming.

o How is university going? You mentioned you were getting bored. What is boring you?

University is getting stressful right now because I have a lot of homework, but in general I've been pretty disappointed with my choice of classes. I constantly wish I chose different classes, because I feel like I'm not intellectually stimulated enough. I have a lot of work, but I'm not interested in it. A lot of times, I find myself anticipating going back to [my home university] because I miss those kinds of classes. At the same time, there is one class that I'm taking here that I really love. It's an art history course taught by a French curator, but it's through my study abroad program, not a university.

o It sounds like your relationships have evolved in your time there. How do your friendships and interactions with others differ from how they do in the States (if at all)?

- o What challenges have you encountered?

I guess interactions are different on a physical level. With my host family, we give each other a kiss on the cheek to say hello, and I do that with my French friends too. Now I actually feel uncomfortable hugging people. Also, some of my friends are from the French West Indies, so they express this Caribbean sense of personal space that is very different from our sense of space--that is, they don't really have one! My host mom is from Martinique as well, so she's very warm, she'll hug you, kiss you, and always invite you somewhere. I really like this friend atmosphere, but sometimes, I don't, because I'm not used to being that close physically to people.

- o What have you really enjoyed in the last month?

Last weekend we went to the Loire region to visit some ancient French castles. It was a lot of fun, because I got to spend time with the other study abroad students and the directors, and play around in these grand, ancient chateaux!

- o Is there anything else you'd like to share?

This past month I've also cut my hair really short, like a boy's hair cut. I did that as a way of expressing how much I've changed since September. Everyday I see something about myself that I've been blind to all my life--like how I'm always extremely afraid of the future, or how the African culture that I've grown up in was actually quite sexist, etc. Each time I see a fault or flaw in my personality, I get really upset, because I hate thinking that there's something about myself that I need to change, but then I feel so relieved at the same time, because I see that I'm not limited by my flaws--that I can always change who I am, or the way I think.

For example, I've been feeling really nervous lately about my studies. What am I going to do with a French studies degree? I already know that I want to study law, but I constantly think about all the opportunities that I've excluded from my future as a French major--a high paying job immediately out of college, a successful career in general. But wait a minute! Why can't I have a successful career in the future? Just because I didn't want to be an engineer or a microfinance manager? Why do I always think such limiting thoughts that tear away at my confidence? When I realized that this is the way I always think, I got really sad, because I realized that I've been missing a lot of opportunities because I voluntarily limited myself like that. But at the same time, now that I know that most of the limits in my life are not real but just in my head, I feel so free, because now I can aspire to achieve something and not feel so much fear about it. Being in France has helped me realize that the world and the possibilities in it are much greater than I've thought.

Tasha: Tokyo, Japan

2 May, 2012

Month 8: Describe your continued adjustment, academic and social life in your host country.

[Note: Up to this point, Tasha had almost two months off between February and April to travel around. She went with some friends to South Korea, Taiwan, and other parts of Japan. At the start of the new term, she had joined the university's women's baseball team.]

- o What were the activities you did while you traveled? What was it like going to these places you'd never been to before, particularly on a personal level?

I didn't do anything particular. In Hokkaido, I went to Niseko, which is a world famous ski resort, and went snowboarding. In Seoul and Taiwan, because the American dollar is stronger, we mostly went places where we can go shopping. Our activities included eating food and shopping at local markets. When I was in Okinawa, I didn't do anything too excited considering that I had already been there before [as a teenager in high school]. However there was one instance where my friend took me to a college graduation, so I was able to experience the difference between a Japanese graduation and an American graduation.

When I went to these different places, especially going to Korea and Taiwan, I couldn't help but see how different these places are from each other. I think many Westerners couldn't tell the difference between the different cultures of Asian countries, so going to these other places gave me any idea just how unique all these countries are. Simple differences such as eating food while walking or riding the train (In Korea, you can do both; In Taipei, one can eat while walking, but it is illegal to eat on the trains; in Japan, it is impolite to eat in either situation.), or which side to stand on while taking the escalator (Korea and Taiwan- the right side; Japan depends on what city you are in). Traveling to these other countries truly tested my adaptability considering none of the places were exactly the same, nor do they speak the same language. It was difficult to get through, but it also made me feel good that I was able to function despite so many unknowns.

o What are your friends like that you've met in the dorms? What do y'all usually do when you're together?

Many of the friends are outgoing and fun to be around. Most of them are either European or American, but I've made friends with a couple of Japanese and Korean people. For the most part, cook and eat dinner, play video games or watch movies together.

o How's baseball?

It's going fine. I have done a couple of practices with the team and they are definitely hardcore when training. I'm still sore from the last practice and sometimes my body says not to do it anymore, but I decided to continue.

o What have you really enjoyed in the last month?

I've enjoyed relaxing around Tokyo, waiting for the classes to begin again. Traveling was fun, but after doing it for almost a month, it felt good just to laze around in the dorm and hanging out with friends.

o I didn't know that uni in Japan started in April. How has it been going now that you have started up again? How are your classes and everything?

Things are getting a little confusing because of the differences in schedule. My mind is working on the Japanese college semester, which just begun, when in America, the semester is almost over. And since I am leaving within a few months, I've been trying to reprogram myself for the return trip. Knowing that I will have classes during the summer does feel a bit odd. My classes for this semester are, unfortunately, pretty useless. Sophia does not have as much class selection that I am used to at [my home institution], but I was required to take four classes. I just hope that the classes are interesting this semester.

Race	Vanessa: And so, I remember when we first started getting to know each other and we started hanging out, she's like, 'Yeah, you know when I first met you, I was really shocked, 'cause you like a lot of stuff that White people like.' And I was like, 'What does that mean?' [laughs] I just didn't know what that meant. [giggles] You know, and so, I always laugh at it now, but I was like, 'Oh, I didn't know like I stood out that much.' I guess.
Friendship	Niki: [chuckles]
Interests	Vanessa: But for me, um, I feel like I'm pretty in tune with my culture. Like I understand it, you know. 'Cause like my mom, she's um, you know, um [2.5] she- I don't even know how to describe it, but- [1] um, what is it? She's just always taught me like a lot of things. Like she's really into like- I guess, like, you know, African American culture and myself? And so that's why I know like so much from her and everything. Even through like the TV shows I used to grow up watching, you know. And then of course where I lived in Savannah. 'Cause like I said the area that I lived at was predominantly Black anyway, so I, I've never been like, you know, 'Oh, I'm, I'm not Black.' or, you know 'I, I don't like, like these type of shows 'cause their Black.' People like- I've always just accepting of it. I've learned over time, because I've been able to, you know, go to, like Georgia State, where, you know, it's a pretty diverse school.
Family	Niki: Mhmhm.
Race	Vanessa: Like we have people from 160 countries there. So I've been able to meet new people and learn about their cultures too. So that's the one thing I've been grateful for, is that, you know, I'm not like culturally ignorant of other people at this point. And- but at the same time I still know who I am and where I came from in that, you know. But at the same time, I don't let that define me, who I am as a person, is like my biggest thing. 'Cause I know some people like to, I guess like stereotype or label people, you know. And that one's thing I really [laughs] really hate. So.
Geography	Niki: So-
Race	Vanessa: [coughs]
University	Niki: Do you con- do you- if someone were to ask, 'Oh, are you Black? Are you African American?' Is there a label that you prefer? Or?
Nationality	Vanessa: Um, it was really funny, 'cause I never really thought too much about it. But I was writing like a scholarship essay for um study abroad, and I put 'African American' in my paper. And my mom, like she proofread it, and she was like, 'Why are you putting African American in your paper?' And I was like, 'Beau-' And she was like, 'But you're not African American, you're Black.' And she was like, and then she was like, 'I've never associated myself with being African American and neither should you.' Or whatever.
Race	Niki: Hmm.
Nationality	Vanessa: And so that was like the first time I ever really like thought about like the difference between it, you know. And now I'm just like I guess if I were to break it down, I really just am Black, because I am NOT from Africa, like I did not come from Africa when I was born or was born in Africa, and neither were my parents. So that really wouldn't label us as African Americans. 'Cause I know some of my friends who are African, who were born in Africa and moved here, you know. And they are really African Americans, so I think you know they're technically is a difference, but- I feel like a lot of people don't think about it, 'cause you would have to be really technical and ask like, 'Was your parents- where, where were they born?'

**University of Cambridge
Informed Consent for Participants**

Title of Project: *Outside Looking In: Case Studies of Study Abroad's Effects on African American University Students' Self-Concept*

Investigator: Nicole I. Sol, MA

I. Purpose You have been invited to participate in a study concerning identity formation of African American undergraduate students who study abroad and come from various U.S. colleges and universities. Through this study I would like to gain a greater understanding of how individuals' life histories and experiences through study abroad affect how they understand their self-concept.

II. Eligibility To be eligible to participate in this study, you must be:

- 5) A U.S. American citizen between the ages of 19 and 25;
- 6) Identify as African American or Black;
- 7) Enrolled full-time in a four-year college or university.
- 8) Participating in a study abroad or exchange program in the 2011-2012 academic year at a higher education institution outside of your home country/countries. The program must be at least one semester long, though preferably you will take part of a yearlong program.

III. Procedure To accomplish the goals of this study, you will be asked to partake in several activities over the span on a year. The activities will include:

- 1) **Pre-departure:** An *interview* of about two to three hours is planned prior to your departure for your program to be done face-to-face, regarding your personal history.
- 2) **While Abroad:** Letter writing, blogging/social media, and/or journaling of your experience abroad.
- 3) **Return:** A follow-up *interview* of about two hours approximately two to three months after your return from your program to debrief about your experience.

IV. Risks The information gathered for this study will delve into different aspects of your personal history and your thoughts on different ideas regarding race, ethnicity, and/or sexuality. If at any time during the study you wish to stop, you may choose to do so without penalty.

V. Benefits of this Project The information you provide will only be used for scientific purposes. This may include a presentation of the results at a scientific meeting and/or being published and reproduced in professional journals or books, or used for any other purpose that the University of Cambridge deems in the proper interest of education, knowledge, or research.

VI. Anonymity The results of this study will be kept confidential. The information you provide will have a pseudonym to identify you during analyses and any write-up of the research. Specific information such as your home university and other identifiers will be written of only in general terms. The information you provide will be kept in a password-protected computer and backup drive, which will only be accessed by the researcher.

VII. Expenses

Each participant who completes a yearlong or semester study abroad program will

receive \$100 or \$75, respectively, at the end of the study to pay for costs incurred from participating in this study such as the stationary, postage, journals, or Internet usage required to contact the researcher.

VIII. Freedom to Withdraw If at any time you wish to decline participation, you are free to withdraw at anytime without penalty.

IX. Participant's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities: 1) to answer questions truthfully and to the best of my knowledge; 2) to participate thoughtfully in letters, blogs, and/or my journal about my experience while abroad.

X. Participant Permission: I have read and understand the above description of the study. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project. If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of this project. Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Ms. Nicole Sol, MA
Dr. Hilary Cremin, PhD

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[REDACTED]@cam.ac.uk
[REDACTED]@cam.ac.uk

Signature

Date