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Racism and the Wellbeing of Black Students Studying Abroad

Master's Thesis
By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in International Higher Education

April 14, 2020

Racism and the Wellbeing of Black Students Studying Abroad

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Race plays a significant role in shaping the experiences of Black students who study abroad. Unlike their White peers, Black students are likely to encounter racism abroad, which a small body of research has documented. However, these studies say little about the short- and long-term effects of these experiences. This study is located in this gap in the research and examines how racism experienced while studying abroad can affect the wellbeing of Black students.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 8 participants. Results revealed that the racism Black students encounter abroad can cause significant stress. When Black students lack adequate resources to cope with this stress, their wellbeing is threatened. Recommendations for study abroad offices and administrators for reducing and limiting the incidences and impact of racism experienced by Black students studying abroad are made.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Betty Leask, for her support throughout this entire process. Even more than her intellectual guidance, which was abundant, Dr. Leask offered me her grace, kindness, and understanding. I am so thankful for her persistent encouragement and her willingness to talk me off of the many proverbial ledges I found myself standing on during this journey. Dr. Leask, thank you for being there.

I would also like to thank my parents for their unrelenting support and faith in me. Their love makes me whole and their confidence in me makes me believe that I am capable of anything and everything.

My friends helped me get through this thesis journey and my entire master's journey. I would especially like to thank San Tran, who reminded me that I should be proud of myself and this work, no matter what. My oldest and dearest friends Eunice Polanco and Claudele Pierre always seemed to be there when I was at my lowest, reminding me how deeply and well-loved I am. I am grateful to the ladies of the Aletheia Church Brighton Community Group, who kept me in their prayers, even though I skipped out on so many our meetings to do homework and work on my thesis.

Last, but not least, I would like to express my deep appreciation to all of the participants of this study. Time is a very precious thing and they chose to spend some of that with me in service to this research. Even more than this, they shared their stories, their anxieties, and sometimes their pain. Thank you for trusting me with all of it.

Racism and the Wellbeing of Black Students Studying Abroad

In the 2017-2018 academic year, only 6.1% of United States (U.S.) study abroad students were Black or African American (NAFSA, n.d.), representing approximately 21,000 of the 342,000 total. In contrast, 70% of study abroad participants during the same term were White, about 239,000 students, despite White students being only 56% of postsecondary student population. For a long time, scholars and practitioners alike have looked at these numbers and sought to solve the "diversity problem" in study abroad. Yet focus on this particular "problem" has allowed an equally, if not more, concerning problem to be overlooked. Black students are vulnerable targets of racism when they go abroad and these experiences are hurting them.

In their work examining how race and gender can shape the experience of study abroad, Talburt and Stewart (1999) offered one of the earliest glimpses into how Black students can experience race and racism abroad. Talburt and Stewart (1999) documented the experience of "Misheila," the only Black participant of a 5-week language and culture program in Spain. "I'm not comfortable going out," (p. 169) she declared during the last week of the program, having for weeks been subjected to regular racialized sexual harassment whenever she left her dorm. Frustrated and afraid for her safety, she doubted that she would ever voluntarily return to Spain. In 2018, almost 20 years after Talburt and Stewart's (1999) seminal work, a *New York Times* article documented another Black woman's experience of racial abuse while studying abroad, including a violent attack by a local man on an Italian beach (Phillips, 2018). The entire trip, shared the woman, "left a deep scar" on her heart. Though decades apart, the stories feel similar, as does each woman's pain. There are many more stories like these, scattered across other academic writings, articles, and blogs. They suggest that encountering racism abroad is not an isolated experience of the unlucky few, but common to this population of students.

There is good reason to be concerned. While Black students may be able to deal with racism in the U.S., dealing with racism abroad presents new challenges. Students are far from the comforts and security of home and unlikely to have the same resources they have at home to adequately cope. Without this support, Black students are likely to have more difficulty coping with racism abroad, which has the potential to negatively affect their wellbeing.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how the experience of racism while studying abroad impacts the wellbeing of Black students enrolled in U.S. institutions. This supplements a small body of research that explores the experiences of Black students abroad, and by looking specifically at wellbeing as an outcome, adds new dimension to the discourse on Black students and their experiences studying abroad. To explore the impact of encountering racism abroad on Black students' wellbeing, interviews were conducted with 8 Black study abroad alums.

The research questions were:

- How do Black students' encounters of racism during study abroad impact their sense of wellbeing?
- Do Black students feel well prepared for their experiences of racism abroad?

Research on this topic has the potential to assist institutions with understanding how they can prevent or reduce the harm that Black students are exposed to when they experience racism abroad.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

No previous works have specifically examined Black student wellbeing abroad. However, literature from various scholarships suggests that an assortment of factors might be in play in regards to this specific subject. This review draws from a variety of scholarship in multiple academic fields, specifically: race and study abroad, current research on the experiences of Black students abroad, theories of wellbeing and their significance to study abroad, and Critical Race Theory.

Race & Study Abroad

Much of the scholarship on Black students and study abroad has been dedicated to understanding the group's low participation rates. Black students have similar levels of interest in study abroad as their White peers (Salisbury et al., 2009), yet their levels of participation have long been disproportional to their population at the post-secondary level. This has raised concerns that Black students are being left out of what many consider to be an important educational opportunity, and all of its academic, social, and economic benefits (Sutton & Rubin, 2004; Picard et al., 2009).

Yet, the myopic focus on participation, and the preoccupation with achieving proportional representation, in study abroad is problematic in itself. On the problematization of racial/ethnic representation in study abroad, Thomas (2013) argues that the excessive focus on race and ethnicity has had the effect of: (1) presenting under-participation in study abroad as unique only to racial minorities even though the overall participation rate, as a percentage of total post-secondary enrollment, is low. Participation data is usually displayed in a fashion that presents the participation of White students as the norm and highlights their overrepresentation,

thus creating the impression that racial and ethnic minorities participate at drastically lower levels. The reality is that only 1.7% of students enrolled in the 2017-2018 academic year studied abroad (NAFSA, n.d.). The second (2) issue, says Thomas (2013), is the tendency to treat ethnic/racial minorities as a single block, without recognizing the "socioeconomic, historical and political variability across and within racial/ethnic groups" (p. 375). Other factors, like socio-economic status, first generation status, and gender are not given the same attention in the research, despite evidence that these are also major indicators of participation or lack thereof. The third (3) and final issue with the problematization of racial/ethnic minority participation is the discourse that emerged around defining and solving the "problem" of underrepresentation, which employ deficit narratives of "lack," "constraints," and "barriers" (Thomas, 2013, p. 366, 377). Other reasons that racial/ethnic minority students might, by their own agency, choose whether or not to study abroad, including how study abroad fits into their academic or career goals, are rarely explored. Overall, the prevailing discourses on racial/ethnic minority students and study abroad, including Black U.S. students, mimics popular paradigms in education that connect racial minorities with disparity and lack, further contributing to the deficit narratives that attribute these disparities to unique features of certain ethnic and racial groups. This victim-blaming orientation chides marginalized people for their own marginalization, ignoring the structural and institutional obstacles in place that prevent these students from pursuing study abroad. Moving away from these deficit narratives will allow for new and more complex insights about this population. One such area of significant potential is how Black students experience study abroad.

Outside of a small number of unpublished doctoral dissertations, few studies have centered on Black U.S students' experiences of study abroad. What does exist suggests that the

experiences of Black students who study abroad are defined by three major elements: personal development and growth, negotiation and reconceptualization of identity when abroad and after returning, and the experience of race and racism in an unfamiliar context.

Black Students Abroad – What's Known

Personal Development And Growth

Not unlike other groups, Black students may feel that their experiences abroad contribute to their personal growth. Just halfway through their study abroad experiences, participants in Jackson's 2006 study on African American students taking part in California State University international programs already reported feeling transformed. These feelings are common among study abroad participants, regardless of race, for whom study abroad might be their first time being physically distant and independent from their families and who find themselves free from the usual obligations of home (Jackson, 2006; Wick, 2011). Students are simultaneously challenged and empowered by new responsibilities they might have to take on, like cooking or cleaning for themselves for the first time, and the newfound freedom to make some decisions completely autonomously, like deciding when or where to travel. Students report coming to know themselves better during their study abroad experiences as a natural effect of interacting with the host culture and peoples, spending more time being alone than usual, and attempting to make friends with study abroad peers and locals. According to Wick (2011), time abroad can act as a "third space" for students to "reconsider and reinvent themselves" (p. 4). Being in an environment different from home gives students the impression of beginning a new life, one in which they see themselves being responsible, independent, and self-directed.

Negotiation And Reconceptualization Of Identity

The literature on identity (Sussman 2001; Sussman 2002) suggests that moving to a new country is one among several life events that can result in identity change. The research specific to Black students studying abroad substantiates Sussman's conclusions, with several studies showing that Black students discover new or different dimensions of their national, global, and racial identity when they go abroad.

National Identity. Participants in Jackson's (2006) study were surprised to be identified by their "Americanness" before being identified by their race when abroad, having expected their Black identity to be the most important during their experience. In standing out because of nationality, students were afforded unexpected privileges and social capital (Jackson, 2006; Sweeney, 2014), but were also frequently called upon to answer for negative stereotypes about the U.S., which made them uncomfortable and defensive. In Jackson's (2006) study, students eventually found themselves pulling closer to their American identity, despite many of them having reported not strongly relating to their American identity prior to going abroad.

Global Identity. Wick (2011) found evidence that students of color, including Black students, can develop a "global identity," after going abroad. Participants in his study expressed confidence that they would, as a result of studying abroad, be able to adapt to new and unfamiliar environments, that they could "live anywhere" and that "anything is possible" with respect to their agency in the world (Wick, 2011, p. 153). This sentiment was shared by the students in Sweeney's (2014) study. Two participants expressed confidence that they could "overcome any obstacles in order to achieve their dreams" (Sweeney, 2014, p. 131).

Racial Identity. Being defined primarily by race in the U.S., it can be a welcome change and relief for Black students to not be always defined by race, or at least in the same way,

abroad. According to Jackson (2006), Black students can feel that they are liberated from " U.S. style racism" while abroad, allowing for a "reimagining of identity and a new reconceptualization of self" (p. 164). One of Jackson's (2006) participants claimed that one of the happy consequences of studying abroad and moving outside of the U.S. was the realization that all of the negative things she had been made to internalize about herself about her own race were false. In a study that followed the journeys of 24 Black students on a short-term study abroad trip to China (Lu et al., 2015), two Black male participants were able to see themselves outside of the U.S. stereotype of "the dangerous Black man" for the first time. The two young men were returning home after a night out when they encountered an older Chinese woman on a dark street. They expected her to fear them in the same way a woman in the U.S. might, but were surprised to be met instead with a friendly wave and smile. Another participant in the same study, a young Black woman, began to imagine that there might be a place in high fashion for women like her after seeing a Black mannequin in a high-end store for the first time while abroad. She shared that it was the first time she felt seen and represented in high fashion, and that it had inspired her to start her own cosmetics line for Black women (Lu et al., 2015).

Another factor that moves Black students to reconceptualize their identity is the different ways in which race and racism are constructed in their host countries. Black students sometimes report witnessing discrimination against other racial or ethnic group in their host country, while they are protected from it (Jackson, 2016; Sweeney, 2014). This is, for many, their first experience of racial/ethnic privilege, especially in contrast to being at or near the bottom of the racial hierarchy in the U.S. Jackson (2006) found that in this position of privilege, Black students are often caught off guard by the discrimination they see and are unsure of how to react.

Encounters with Black students of other nationalities can also affect how Black American students think about their own identity, and the impact can be both negative and positive. A Nigerian-American might feel elation meeting Nigerians elsewhere, but for U.S. descendants of slavery, meeting Black people with closer ties to their ancestral home might conjure melancholy thoughts of lost heritage (Jackson, 2006). Black U.S. students who pursue heritage experiences in Africa may be shocked to find that they are not accepted or welcomed by Africans, or that they are thought of primarily as "Americans," and not displaced Africans returning home (Jackson, 2006; Wick, 2011).

Race & Racism

Although Black students may find themselves free from the U.S.-style racism they are familiar with at home, study abroad is not a racism-free paradise. Rather, Black students contend with the *style* of racism distinct to the host country. These may include the deeply rooted cultural traditions of the host country that appear racist to students. A participant in the Jackson study (2006), Michelle, reported feeling "shaken" when she first encountered the Black Pete character (which involves people in blackface) in the Netherlands. The racism can also be very passive. Another participant in the same study, who studied in Canada, expressed concern about the prevalence of "colorblindness" in her host country, which she felt had the effect of denying and downplaying racism in the country.

And despite claims of freedom from "U.S.-style racism", some of the racism students experienced abroad from host country locals was near identical to the "everyday racism" (Barnes, 2001, as cited in Jackson, 2006) they would experience at home. A participant in Bruce's (2012) study noticed that locals often refused to sit next to her on the bus and women seemed to clutch their purses when she walked by. Yet, some student maintained that racist

feeling or actions by those in the host country didn't matter to them if they couldn't directly see or feel it, whereas in the U.S., racism felt like a constant presence.

In the literature, racism is perpetrated by both host nation locals and study abroad peers (usually White U.S. students), and sometimes both groups at the same time. This was the reality of the only Black woman (and the only Black student) on a study abroad trip to Spain in Talburt & Stewart's (1999) ethnographic study on race and gender in cultural learning, referenced earlier. Not only was the student subject to constant "sexualized racial harassment" (Jackson, 2006, p. 188) by local men, but was further victimized when, as she attempted to explain her experiences to her classmates, all of whom were White, she was gaslighted and her feelings dismissed. Black students' struggles with White students appeared consistently in the literature on the experiences of Black students. Interacting with White students, Black students were reunited with the familiar "U.S.-style racism" they thought they left at home. They recalled White students denying the existence of racism in the U.S. (Sweeney, 2014), making insensitive comments and using stereotyping language (Jackson, 2006), or asking Black students to do the labor of educating them (the White students) about racism and discrimination (Bruce, 2012).

The gender imbalance in study abroad participation means that examples of Black students and their encounters of racism abroad are often gendered. Women are more likely to study abroad than men (Salisbury et al., 2010), which naturally means that the majority of the voices speaking about racism during study abroad are Black women. Consequently, the type of racism that appears in the literature is largely gendered, usually involving verbal, physical and/or sexual assaults on Black women by local men. Even in studies with male participants (Bruce, 2012; Sweeney, 2014), women were the victims of the most obvious and violent acts of racism. Agatha, a participant in Sweeney's (2014) study, was verbally accosted by immigration officials

upon her arrival to her host country and falsely accused of bringing firearms and pornography with her. Following that ordeal, she was physically attacked with sticks by a group of local teenagers when making her way to her host institution's campus for the first time. Later during her stay, she was denied entry into a nightclub due to her race. Michelle, a young Black woman in Bruce's (2012) study, was suddenly and inexplicably grabbed and physically assaulted by a stranger during a night out with friends. Sierra, another participant in the same study was sexually and physically assaulted by a group of local men at a festival.

Not surprisingly, participants in these studies were deeply affected by the racism they encountered abroad. Sierra was completely traumatized her assault and suffered from "depression, insomnia, loss of appetite, and an inability to keep food down" (Bruce, 2012, p. 72). She eventually made the decision to leave her host country early for the sake of her own mental health. Agatha, who had the most severe experiences of racism in Sweeney's study (2014), was able to complete her program, but just barely. When she returned home, she was proud, she shared, to have "made it out alive" (Sweeney, 2016, p. 125).

Wellbeing Abroad For Black Students

The wellbeing of students has become a more prominent issue in higher education in recent years, with greater recognition of the connection between wellbeing and better academic and life outcomes. However, the majority of the research has focused intra-nationally, looking only at the wellbeing of non-mobile students. What does it mean to achieve wellbeing when abroad, and how is it different for Black students?

Defining Wellbeing

What is wellbeing? The most current research proposes that wellbeing is a state of equilibrium that changes according to the positive and negative challenges an individual faces. A

recent definition (Dodge et al., 2012) conceptualizes wellbeing as a seesaw in which equilibrium is achieved when individuals have the appropriate resources to meet their physical, social and/or psychological challenges. An imbalance of challenges to resources then either results in negative wellbeing, *illbeing*, or high wellbeing, or a state of thriving/prosperity. Equilibrium is subjective, meaning that it can depend on an individual's various characteristics, including personality, networks, and social background (Center for Disease Control, n.d.; Headey & Wearing, 1991; as cited in Dodge et al., 2012). Social background includes personal markers like age, race, sex, class, religion, socioeconomic class, and many others. Individual experiences of wellbeing are determined by social background, the challenges faced (some based on identity), and how an individual responds to them, determined both by their personality and the resources they have available. However, wellbeing in the general population is commonly understood to be a set of characteristics related to prosperity: happiness, health, high self-esteem, positive social and emotional relationships, and other "good" things. An equilibrium understanding of wellbeing asserts that an individual who maintains wellbeing equilibrium may not exhibit some or any of these characteristics.

Study Abroad & Wellbeing

Little has been written specifically about wellbeing (how it is commonly understood or the equilibrium model) and study abroad explicitly, although researchers have explored the social and psychological challenges that students can face when abroad. Their findings provide useful context. Common issues that study abroad students face include "culture shock," homesickness, and loneliness (Hunley, 2009). These are often attributed to the students' struggle to adapt to the environment and culture of the host country and initial loneliness students may feel being away from their homes and usual support networks. Despite the known prevalence of

such challenges, student wellbeing during study abroad has not been a research priority in the field of international education. Rather, research has mainly focused on the mental health concerns of inbound international students in the U.S. and other western nations (Bathke & Kim, 2016), who, though mobile, are a distinct group from those that study abroad.

The research on international student wellbeing is substantial, and may be valuable for understanding wellbeing for U.S. students who study abroad. International students and study abroad students have common struggles: difficulty communicating with locals due to language barriers, loneliness and isolation being away from friends and family, and various financial issues related to funding their experiences in the host country (Sümer et al., 2008). The literature shows that a significant number of international students struggle with symptoms of poor mental health, including depression, stress, and anxiety (Han et al., 2013; Hyun et al., 2007;Sam & Eide, 1991). However, it would be incorrect to infer that study abroad students struggle in exactly the same way as international students or suffer the same mental health issues. Study abroad students usually don't face several additional challenges international students are likely to encounter, such as difficulty with academic, linguistic, and social integration and substantial pressure from family to achieve academically abroad. As "normal" full-time, degree-seeking students, international students are usually provided minimal institutional support or oversight. In contrast, study abroad students (see also: exchange students) participate in closely managed short-term programs that usually includes a built-in cohorts of peers they can access for support. However, the stressors that the two groups have in common have been shown to prominently factor in the poor mental health outcomes of international students (Chen et. al., 2015).

The skeletal amount of literature that specifically explores U.S. study abroad students and wellbeing has focused on the prevalence of the challenges students face abroad (loneliness,

culture shock) that may cause them psychological distress (Bathke & Kim, 2016), and the impact of dealing with mental health issues abroad on student functioning (Hunley, 2009). Hunley (2009) makes the compelling argument that what is commonly described as 'culture shock' might be better understood as the experience of stress, as students attempt to familiarize themselves with the language, people, and culture of their host country rapidly. Race and discrimination were not included as factors that might affect a student's experiences in these studies.

Discrimination & Stress Abroad

Understanding the intricacies of stress, discrimination, and the relationship between the two on individual functioning can offer more insight into Black student wellbeing abroad. Thoits' (2010) review of over 40 years of research summarizes major dimensions of stress relevant to this study: the causes of stress, the impact of stress, and who is most affected by stress. Stress can be caused by either major negative life events like divorce, "chronic strains or ongoing difficulties" such as sustained joblessness and financial instability (Brown and Harris 1978; Pearlin et al. 1981, quoted in Thoits, 2010, p. 42), or "extreme threats to a person's physical or psychological wellbeing" like a physical or sexual assault (Thoits, 2010, p. 43) called trauma. Particularly relevant to this study is that evidence shows that traditionally marginalized groups, women, racial and ethnic minorities, and sexual minorities, are disproportionally affected by stress due to their endurance of unique stressors tied to the discrimination they face (Thoits, 2010). This added "discrimination stress," means that disadvantaged groups often experience more stress than their counterparts (Thoits, 2010, p. 54), making them even more vulnerable to the deleterious physical and psychological health effects of stress. The impact of stress over time has been linked to a high risk of psychological distress resulting in anxiety disorders, major depression, alcohol and substance abuse disorders, and others. If racism is a regular part of Black

students' experiences abroad, then it is likely that they might also develop "discrimination stress," in addition to the other stressors they might experience abroad. If so, this means that Black students are also at greater risk of the negative mental health affects related to stress.

Coping with Stress Abroad

The experience of stress does not necessarily guarantee harm. There is evidence that when managed correctly stress can, at best, be good for personal development, or at minimum, do little to no harm. Lazarus & Folkman (1984; as cited in Ryan & Twibell, 2000), theorize that stressful situations can either be challenging, threatening, or harmful. What differentiates the three outcomes is the individual's capacity to manage the situation with the resources that they possess. In a challenging situation, individuals have sufficient resources to deal with the stressful event. In a threatening situation, an individual's resources may be stretched or depleted, which has the *potential* to cause harm. In a harmful situation, the individual does not have sufficient resources, and harm is inevitable. Note that this theory shares a similar resources to challenges equilibrium framework as the equilibrium model definition described earlier (Dodge et al., 2012): fundamental to both concepts is that harm can be avoided if individuals have the appropriate resources to meet their challenges.

What kind of resources have the potential to help Black students cope with stress abroad? Thoits'(2010) review of the research suggests that stress is best managed when individuals have "a sense of control or mastery over life, high self-esteem, and social support" (p. 46). Social support "refers to emotional, informational, and physical assistance" (Thoits, 2010, p. 46) from social networks. In the literature, social support appeared to be the coping strategy that Black students most often utilized to deal with their stress abroad. Students often gravitated, when they could, to those with whom they shared their racial/ethnic or cultural identity, or those who they perceived to have a similar backgrounds or shared values. This is, according to Bruce (2012),

one of the ways in which Black students 'find home abroad' (p. 91), an important coping mechanism when they are faced with unfamiliar and sometimes hostile climates. In Jackson's (2006) study, meeting others with the same racial/ethnic backgrounds helped students to overcome the isolation they sometimes felt in their predominantly White environments. With people like them, the students had the space, an outlet, to talk about their encounters of racism to a sympathetic and understanding ear, which helped them to make sense of their experiences and validated their feelings and the value of their identities (Bruce, 2012; Jackson, 2006; Sweeney, 2014).

The literature suggests that sense of control/mastery and high self-esteem, the two stress-buffers that enable individuals to solve the problems behind their stressors, may be more difficult to achieve for Black students when abroad. Sense of control/mastery is the feeling of confidence that one is capable of handling life circumstances. High self-esteem is tied to one's belief in their own goodness, value, and competence (Thoits, 2010). The main obstacle to sense of control/masterly of life and high self-esteem abroad appears to be students' complete unfamiliarity with their new environments, which leads them to feel they are less in control and/or less competent than usual. Several students in Sweeney's (2014) study shared that they did not know how to behave when they encountered racism abroad, whereas at home they would have definitely pushed back. When arrested by doubt abroad, the students are unlikely to think to activate their usual coping mechanisms, which may allow the problems to persist for much longer than necessary.

A CRT Analysis of Black Student Wellbeing Abroad

The literature shows that race can shape the experiences that Black students have abroad. It is therefore necessary that a race-conscious approach for examining the experiences of Black

students be adopted. This lens has unfortunately been largely missing from study abroad literature in general. A critical race analysis of study abroad can help with better understanding the experiences of Black students who study abroad and the impact of their experiences on their wellbeing.

What is Critical Race Theory?

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that centers race and racism in the analysis of the conditions of the lived experiences of people of color. Established in the discipline of legal studies, it originated as a justice-oriented response to slow racial progress "for helping investigators remain attentive to equity while carrying out research, scholarship, and practice" (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010, p. 31). Its utility as an analytical tool and framework for critical studies has been recognized in several fields including sociology, psychology, politics, and relevant to this study specifically, education and wellbeing. CRT is founded on the following premises: (1) racism is embedded in the structure of the U.S. and its institutions; (2) racism serves as a tool for maintaining a tiered racial class system; (3) race and racism are products of social thought and relation and can change over time; (4) race overlaps with other identities, and the intersectionality of identities can define one's experience of racism; and (5) storytelling can disrupt dominant paradigms that rely on deficit narratives to explain the experiences of people of color (Tate, 1997).

In the sphere of education, CRT scholars have analyzed how curriculum, instruction, assessment, and funding have been used to maintain a single version of history that upholds the domination of those who are white, upper-class, and male, to perpetuate deficit theories about students of color and their struggles with high academic achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995). CRT scholars of higher education have criticized the color-blindness or "racelessness" of

approaches to scholarship in major areas of interest in higher education, including engagement, student development, and completion, which also perpetuate damaging deficit paradigms (Baber, 2017; Patton, 2016).

Critical Race Theory and Wellbeing

CRT and race-conscious studies in the field of health have connected the experience of racism with negative physical and psychological wellbeing. The experience of racism, which can include "a wide range of acts including social exclusion, workplace discrimination, stigmatization, and physical threat and harassment" (Brondolo et al., 2012, p.3), has been linked to physical ailments like high blood pressure and hypertension, and psychological issues like anger, paranoia, helplessness, delusion, anti-self issues, and others (Brown, 2003; Clark et al., 1999). Studies that have specifically looked at the health of Black U.S. Americans have shown that discrimination is a major contributor to stress, which then causes short and long-term physical and psychological health issues (Brown, 2003; Jackson et al., 1996; Okazaki, 2009). A public health CRT perspective recognizes the impact of institutionalized and structural racism in the areas of housing, employment and healthcare access on the health outcomes of people of color (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010).

Critical Race Theory and Study Abroad.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a useful tool for understanding the role race plays in study abroad. Although it was developed in the U.S. as a tool to understand the experiences of Black people in the United States and has since been primarily used to understand racism within that context, scholars in other parts of the world, like the United Kingdom and Canada, have drawn from CRT to understand how individuals are affected by racism in their national contexts (Gillborn, 2016; Housee, 2012; Schroeter & James, 2014). According to Gillborn (2016), CRT

offers a "clear and accessible conceptual map" (Gillborn, 2016, p. 96) to guide antiracism and social justice activism for post-industrial societies like the UK, Europe, and Australia. It is worth noting that these areas happen to be the amongst the most popular study abroad destinations for U.S. students. The basic foundation of CRT, race-consciousness rather than color-blindness, is relevant for understanding the experiences of racial minorities in any context. In fact, it is fair to assume that anywhere in which Black students experience racism, the premises of CRT apply in that context.

CRT can also support better understanding of how Black students may react or cope with their experiences abroad. One aspect of this is that the experiences of racism that Black students have at home in the U.S. will to some extent shape their expectations of what they may experience abroad. They may anticipate that their experiences of race abroad will be similar or different, or better or worse, to what they encounter at home, which may affect how they prepare for their experiences abroad. In addition, students' social backgrounds and identity are defined in the home context. Experience and familiarity with "U.S.-style racism" (Jackson, 2006) is likely to influence identity and sense of self, perceptions of reality and the world, and behavior. Students inevitably bring these ways of being and doing with them abroad. For example, in Jackson's (2006) study, one participant noted that regularly encountering "everyday racism" (Barnes, 2001, as cited in Jackson, 2006) in the U.S. helped her to cope when she encountered racism while abroad. By shaping the students themselves, race as it is socially constructed in the U.S. also shapes how students behave and interact with others in their new context abroad.

CRT is also a useful tool for understanding the role institutions play in the experiences of Black students who study abroad. Critical race theorists have argued that higher education institutions, much like other U.S. institutions, are steeped in racism and White supremacy, and

act as a vehicle for reproducing dominant racial paradigms (Baber, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2017; Patton, 2016). This is most frequently achieved by the use of deficit narratives of people of color that aim to dismiss the structural barriers that contribute to underachievement or attrition. With study abroad, this appears to be at the root of the problematization of Black student participation, which was explored earlier in this review.

Often, institutions are attempting to prepare students for racism abroad without first recognizing the racism that Black students experience in the U.S. or at their home institutions. This not only serves to deny and neutralize racism and white supremacy in U.S. institutions (Baber, 2017; Sweeney, 2014), it also likely affects how institutions prepare Black students to go abroad. If study abroad offices are not consciously thinking about race in their own context, then they are unlikely to prepare students for experiences related to race that they might have abroad. For example, race and ethnicity do not appear as relevant factors in the existing studies on mental health and study abroad (Ryan & Twibell; Hunley, 2009; Bathke & Kim, 2016), which is concerning. Racism is presented as an anomaly, both at home and abroad. By failing to consider racism as a systemic problem, institutions relieve themselves of their obligation to create systemic solutions for their Black students.

Conclusion

Race matters in study abroad, but not just as an indicator of participation. Constructs of self and identity developed in the U.S., and the structures and system of the U.S. institutions that send students abroad—all of these will impact the experience of study abroad for Black students. Because racism is pervasive, and strongly linked to stress and negative physical and mental health, it is possible that the experience of racism abroad can threaten the individual wellbeing of Black students who participate. No studies have explored this topic in detail, or explored how

institutions might better prepare and support Black students who experience racism during a study abroad experience.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design. A qualitative approach was most appropriate for utilizing the CRT lens. The purpose of CRT is challenging dominant ideologies that, through denial of racism, perpetuate deficit paradigms (McGee & Stovall, 2015). CRT urges the use of storytelling to create counternarratives that expose the everyday prejudices people of color face as they navigate institutions and environments. Qualitative methods were necessary because they empower participants to tell their own stories through focus on the participant's own "perspectives and views on values, actions, processes, and events" (Fairbrother, 2007, p. 43). The race-consciousness stressed by CRT informed how interview questions (See Appendix A) were crafted and the data interpretation process. Data was collected through semi-structured one-on-one virtual and in-person interviews.

The narrative data was transcribed, coded, and categorized thematically in order to provide answers to the following questions:

- How do Black students' encounters of racism during study abroad impact their sense of wellbeing?
- Do Black students feel well prepared for their experiences of racism abroad?

Sample Population

This study utilized purposeful sampling to select participants who would meet the criteria of the study. The criteria for participation in the study were the following:

- Identify as African-American and/or Black

- Studied abroad as an undergraduate student enrolled in a U.S. institution between 2014-2019
- Completed a study abroad program that was at least a semester-long
- Are a U.S. citizen or permanent resident

The decision to include participants who studied abroad between 2014-2019 was made in anticipation that a limited number of individuals might meet the criteria if it only focused on the current year or was limited to the last two or three years. In addition, it was deduced that 2014, the limit representing the earliest time a participant could have studied abroad to meet the criteria of the study, was an appropriate time-frame in which participants would have adequate recollection of their study abroad experiences. Also, the goal of the study was to examine both the short- and long- term effects of encountering racism during study abroad on well-being. Thus, it was important for participants to have had some time to reflect on their experiences, and how their experiences may have continued to affect them in the present. It was also important that participants had spent a significant amount of time in their host country, enough to engage meaningfully with others, both their peers, and the locals. To this end, participants were required to have completed a semester-long program (Spring, Summer, or Fall) or longer to qualify. While it is possible that meaningful engagement with others can occur in short-term (1- 4 week) programs, a longer time-frame of study signifies more opportunity to do so—to *live* in a place rather than just visit. The study aimed to specifically examine the experience of Black U.S. students studying abroad in locations outside of the U.S.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited using a variety of methods. I reached out to several bodies in the institution in which I work and study, the international programs office and several other institutional offices to which I had a connection, and sought their cooperation in forwarding a

recruitment email (see Appendix B) to the students on their respective mailing lists. For unknown reasons, there was no response from the institutional offices that I contacted. The international programs office was responsive, but communicated that it would be difficult recruiting from its population of students given the low overall number of Black students who study abroad at the institution. This sample population was made even smaller because students are most likely to go abroad in their junior year, meaning that only senior students, one-fourth of the undergraduate population, would be eligible for this study. The institution could not engage alumni as a rule. Although the office did offer to proceed with helping with recruitment, I declined in order to remain on schedule for data collection.

A request to share the recruitment email was also made to several student groups that were carefully selected because their main membership demographic was Black/African American students, which was the target population for this study. I received a response from one of these groups: a student-led club for graduate students of color that shared my recruiting message with its members. Several people responded to that invitation to participate or asked if they could share the recruitment email with others. I recruited most participants through a call to participate in a Facebook group that I have belonged to for several years. It is a private Facebook group that "focuses on the Black experience in Korea." I have a personal connection to Korea. I studied abroad in Korea between 2012-2013. This was the most successful recruitment method: outreach in this group helped to source six of the eight participants in this study. All participants received the recruitment email, which included the criteria for participation. I relied on participants to opt-out if they did not meet all the participation criteria.

IRB approval for this study was sought and granted in advance of recruitment. Participants were not paid. A small token of gratitude for their participation, a $10 Starbucks gift card, was provided after interviews were conducted.

Data Collection

Data was collected through one-time, semi-structured interviews with each participant. Interviews were estimated to last between 60-90 minutes, but actually ranged from 45 minutes at the shortest to 118 minutes at the longest. All but one interview was conducted via Skype due to the spatial distance between myself and the study's participants (dispersed nationally and globally), and my inability to travel to meet participants. Two-way video was used in all but one of the total seven Skype interviews, in which case only audio was recorded. Interviews conducted via Skype were recorded and converted to audio files. Video and audio files were stored in an encrypted personal folder on a secure institutional server. The one in-person interview took place in a private on-campus location at my institution, a private Jesuit university on the eastern coast of Massachusetts. The interview audio was recorded on my personal MacBook laptop and stored in an encrypted personal folder on a secure institutional server. Participants were interviewed only once both due to time-zone differences, which created difficulties with scheduling, and out of respect for their time. However, the interviews were sufficiently long and thorough. After the interviews were transcribed and edited, I shared the edited interview-transcript with each participant, inviting them to confirm that it matched with their recollection of our conversation, to edit or clarify meaning in things they said, and/or to share any additional information they believed would be relevant to the study. One participant emailed a story she believed reinforced one of the themes we discussed during the interview.

Others participants reviewed the transcript of their interview and confirmed that the information contained within was accurate, but added no significant new information.

Interviews were conducted with broad, open-ended questions that were intended to discern: overall experience and satisfaction with study abroad, participants' experiences of race and racism, the impact of their encounters of racism on their wellbeing, and their preparation and resources for dealing with encounters of racism abroad. The interview questions (see Appendix A) served as a guide, and each participant was asked the same question in order to make each episode of data collection as uniform and systematic as possible. However, a conversational style was utilized for interviews so that participants would have the space to communicate their thoughts and reflections freely. At the beginning of each interview, participants were explicitly told that although I had a list of questions to guide the discussion, flexibility was allowed and encouraged. Also, I often asked clarifying questions in order to gather more context around situations, experiences, or feelings described by the participant, and in moments when I did not understand what the participant was attempting to communicate. Eventually, a pattern emerged in the type of follow-up questions that I asked, largely because I was able to recognize that participant responses were fitting into themes that emerged from earlier interviews. The intent of these questions was to gain a better understanding of the context of the participant's *individual* experience.

Data Analysis

The audio data was transcribed using Otter.ai, an audio to text transcription service. Interview transcripts were stored in an encrypted personal folder on a secure institutional server. I began to engage with the data soon after each interview by reading the interview transcripts and

taking brief analytic memos. According to Maxwell (2004), memos are a powerful tool for reflection and may help to stimulate insights on data. After all the interviews, I immersed myself in the data by listening to the audio recordings multiple times and rereading the transcripts. I edited the interview transcripts where there were errors and added notes where participants added visual cues or emphasis on words that Otter.ai was unable to recognize. Thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) was used as a tool for data analysis. Codes were generated from the raw data and the literature and the data was coded using the ATLAS.ti qualitative analysis software. Recurring themes were identified and refined, grouped, then arranged successively into basic themes, then organizing themes, and lastly, global themes. This process resulted in several thematic networks that were used as tools to analyze the raw data. Preliminary results were shared in a presentation to a group of student affairs practitioners. Their input was useful for crafting the recommendations for practice for study abroad administrators that appears later in this paper.

Self as Researcher

As the researcher, I am the primary tool for data collection and analysis (Fairbrother, 2007). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge how my identity and my position as an "insider" may have impacted the study, and specifically how it framed the data collection and analysis processes (Savvides et al., 2014). An "insider" conducts research with participants with whom they share certain characteristics, including identity or experiences (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Savvides et al., 2014). In this case, the two obvious characteristics I shared in common with all participants is that I am Black and that I experienced racism during my study abroad experience, which was partly the inspiration for this study. My status as an insider gave me legitimacy with my target population, which allowed me greater access to participants and data.

In regards to the former, when I contacted groups or clubs for Black people or other people of color for the purposes of recruiting for this study, I was met with an immediate response that was overwhelmingly positive and supportive. During data collection, I was able to quickly build a rapport with participants. Research has shown that participants are more likely to open up to researchers with insider status, giving the researcher access to richer data (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Sweeney (2014) writes that one of her limitations was her identity as a White woman, which might have prevented students from speaking about racism as they may have if Sweeney was a Black researcher. My participants were incredibly friendly; the conversations felt like I was speaking with personal acquaintances. I was also surprised by the level of vulnerability participants showed, sharing what seemed to be some of their most challenging and disorienting life moments. Consistent with Jackson's (2006) experience as an insider researching the same population, participants seemed to assume that we, I and them, have a shared experience and the same understanding of the world based on our shared Black identity. In addition to using words like "us," "we," and "our" to refer to a "our" collective experience, participants also frequently used African American Vernacular English (AAVE), assuming I would understand likely both due to my race and my presumed age. Despite the positives of being an insider, there were also some challenges. It was often what Jackson (2006) calls a "balancing act" of affirming participants' experiences and confirming that I had experienced something similar when asked, while also keeping their experiences, not mine, as the focal point of the interviews. However, I felt it important not to distance myself from participants in the name of "professionalism", choosing instead to act "'with genuineness'" (Glesne 1999, as cited in Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

However, my status as an insider does not imply sameness with my participants. Several participants inhabit identities to which I have very little context. I occupy "the space between," a

third-space continuum in which the researcher and participant are positioned relationally based on their multiple and fluid identities (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Savvides et al., 2014). It is likely that my gender, age, level of education, sexuality, nationality, and other characteristics affected data collection in significant yet unobservable ways.

Several other factors might have also affected the data collection process. In other studies that have examined race and study abroad, the researchers are active administrators in the institution from which they source their participants. This may potentially introduce bias within the sample, and may influence participants to say what they believe the researcher, who is in a position of power relative to the participant, wants to hear. Participants understood that I had no affiliation with their sending institutions and that during the time of the interviews I was a student myself. As Jackson (2006) also realized in her study, interactions with participants can sometimes lead to painful self-discovery. The majority of my participants were women, and almost all of them described being sexually harassed or assaulted to a degree when abroad. Three of the female participants traveled to the same study abroad location that I did and recounted stories that were not my own, but sounded too familiar. Following the interviews, as I reflected on my research, I recalled the moments that I had also been harassed or assaulted abroad. It was shocking to realize how much of it I had forgotten or had not realized was problematic at the time. It was also a realization that in many ways my experience was not unique.

Participants

Participants were graduates of 4-year U.S. institutions who studied abroad as undergraduates between the years of 2014-2018. Of the total eight participants, two studied at institutions in the Midwest, two on the West Coast (at the same institution), two in the South, and

two on the East Coast. Seven attended predominantly white institutions (PWIs)[1] and one studied at a historically Black public university (HBCU). Three participants studied abroad in the same country (South Korea); the remaining participants studied in Argentina, Costa Rica, France and Spain, Italy, and South Africa. Participants studied abroad directly through programs administered by their home institutions or through affiliate third-party organizations like CIEE, ACCENT (the 2 West Coast students), and another unnamed program.

All participants identified as African American (AA) or Black, which they understood was one of the criteria to participate. African American and Black are not interchangeable identifiers. One participant, Avery, chooses to identify as a Black American because she believes the "African" in African American has been used as a tool to deny her full citizenship or full American-ness. In addition to AA, participants also identified as biracial or by their family's national original. One participant identified as a Trinidadian-American, and another as African (by the way of Nigeria and Ghana). Participants were diverse in terms of socioeconomic status, family background, and sexuality. Two men and six women participated in this study.

At the time of data collection, it had been at least one year, and up to five years, since participants completed their study abroad experience. While the temporal distance from the time participants studied abroad may have affected what and how much they remembered, it also allowed participants space to reflect and consider the long-term impact of their experiences.

Introducing the Participants

The following section introduces the eight participants in this study, their personal pathways to study abroad, and their expectations of studying abroad. The summaries shared

[1] PWIs are classified as institutions in which 50% of students are white, but the label also refers to institutions that are historically white. 3 participants attended institutions in which minoritized students comprised the majority of the student body population. However, these institutions would still be considered PWIs.

below are a compilation of information shared by participants during interviews and my own impressions of the participants during our conversations. Because participants were diverse in their paths to study abroad, the decisions they made in the process of preparing to study abroad were incredibly personal and unique, which is notable. In 2006, when the rate of participation in study abroad for Black students was just 3.5%, as opposed to the 6.1% it is now, Jackson (2006) noted that all of her participants were "typical" study abroad students. Already well traveled and from educated backgrounds, the only thing differentiating them from the usual profile of the study abroad participant was their Black identity. In contrast, my group included a self-identified first generation student and several individuals for which study abroad was their first time leaving the country. Though this study's sample is small, it is encouraging to see the growing diversity in the *type* of Black student that studies abroad. This also suggests that as less "typical" students go, the narratives of study abroad might also become less typical, forcing those working in study abroad to reevaluate their usual processes for preparing and supporting Black students who study abroad.

Julian. Julian was the first participant interviewed. He spent six months abroad, summer and fall, in a university-sponsored program in Argentina. Julian's interest in going abroad was both academic and personal. After taking many years of Spanish, Julian hoped that having an immersive experience would help him master the language. Julian was also intrigued by the host country itself, having learned that Argentina had a heavy European influence, making it unique in Latin America. Having grown up among a large "brown" Latino community, Julian was intrigued by a country where the people could be blond-haired and blue-eyed, but speak like the people in his community.

Pensive and careful with his words, Julian was fearful of making broad statements, noting that his experience was unique and should not be generalized. It seemed to me that though his experience was difficult at times, he did not want to discourage others from studying abroad. He often hesitated to outright call out the racism of other people that he encountered when abroad, and was quick to give the subjects of his stories the benefit of the doubt. For example, he recalled a time when a woman used the N-word in his presence, but quickly noted she likely didn't intend to use the word maliciously. Julian, in addition to being the first participant interviewed, was also the first participant to talk about the impact of class on his experience. Many other participants interviewed after him discussed their struggles with money and how it prevented them from having the same experiences as their more affluent peers.

Jameson. Speaking with Jameson felt like speaking with a friend. Outgoing and confident, jokes came easily to him, which added much levity to our conversation. A transfer student to the institution that eventually sent him abroad, Jameson planned a senior-year study abroad spanning summer to winter that would take him to Paris, Madrid, and Italy. He then planned to "study abroad" at another campus branch for the spring. His plans were thwarted when he found out a class he needed in order to graduate on time would only be held during the period he planned to be in Italy, though he did make it to Paris, Madrid, and the other campus branch.

Jameson was proud to highlight that even without making it to Italy, his plan was unprecedented in the history of his institution, so much so that he received pushback from an administrator in the study abroad office. Jameson's approach highlighted something common to most participants: that the decision to study abroad was usually well-planned. At the very least, participants were careful not to let study abroad disrupt plans of graduating on time.

Brooke. For Brooke, going abroad was about returning to her roots. Although both Black and Korean, she described her upbringing with her Korean mother as one that was distinctly Korean, in which she ate Korean food and had all the Korean house rules. Study abroad emerged as an opportunity to draw closer to her culture by learning the language, meeting the Korean side of her family, and generally being around other Koreans. Brooke's experience is what many would consider a heritage study, in which students choose to study in a country where they have ancestral links, although Brooke did not use this exact language when discussing her experience. Interestingly, the majority of Black students who pursue heritage trip usually travel to Africa (Neff, 2001). Brooke's case highlights the complexities that exist when biracial Black Americans, especially those with Black ancestors that are descendants of slavery, pursue heritage studies. Given that the legacy of slavery encompasses more than 400 years of history and that few accurate records were kept of Black families, it is likely easier for students to identify the country origin of their non-Black ancestors, which could make for an easier decision for where to study abroad.

Brooke also saw going abroad as an opportunity to widen her dating pool. She shared that as a lesbian, her dating options in her region/community at home were slim. Going abroad meant meeting new people and forming close relationships at a faster pace given how temporary their time abroad together would be. After graduating, Brooke returned to Korea as an English teacher.

Avery. Avery was sick at the time of our meeting, so we bypassed the video option of our Skype call. She revealed during the call that due to a chronic illness, she often gets sick, which did factor into her experience abroad. Chronic illness is considered to be a disability to

some and this conversation with Avery inspired a personal concern about the accessibility of study abroad for those with physical, intellectual, and/or hidden disabilities.

Avery stood out among other participants for her sheer determination to study abroad. Coming from a poor family, Avery had never had the opportunity to travel internationally ("even to Canada") and was anxious to travel outside the country. So eager was she that she didn't care much about her destination country; she only chose the program in Korea because it fit with her major and would allow her to graduate on time. Although her family opposed her decision to go abroad, Avery was steadfast. Even with a full academic scholarship, Avery had to work tirelessly to raise funds for her trip abroad and even took out some credit cards. The effort took a toll, and Avery described being in poor mental health before her trip. Even so, the moment when she was finally able to leave for her host country, Avery felt that all of her work was completely worth it. Avery's story highlights some of challenges to studying abroad that low-income students face. Even with a full academic scholarship from her home institution, Avery struggled with raising the funds she would need for food, transportation, and other incidentals while abroad. Avery also returned to Korea as an English teacher after she graduated.

Elena. Elena also studied abroad in South Korea, and like Brooke and Avery, returned to teach English after graduation. A personal interest in Korean culture and language drew her to Korea as a study abroad destination. Elena also mentioned being inspired by a jet-setting cousin, who studied abroad as an undergraduate and graduate student, who she looks up to as a role model. Having majored in International Relations, with a regional focus on East Asia, studying in Korea also felt like the "natural step".

Officially, Elena actually studied abroad twice in Korea. The first time was for a month-long program to "test out" the experience of studying abroad and see if it was a fit. She later

admitted that the month-long experience did not give her a full understanding of what it would be like to be abroad for the semester. Elena discussed how much she prepared herself to experience racism abroad, expecting the worst. With all of her preparation, even having the month-long preview, she still struggled during her semester study abroad experience.

Mahlia. Mahlia was cheerful during our conversation and spoke positively about her study abroad experience in Italy. On why she decided to study abroad, Mahlia told of how it was a big deal to leave her small town in California, where people usually stay their entire lives. For her, study abroad presented an opportunity to escape the norm and chart out a unique path for her life. Mahlia was another participant who had put an incredible amount of thought into designing her study abroad experience. Determined to graduate a year early to save money on tuition, Mahlia planned to study abroad in her Sophomore year, which was unusual as most students go abroad in their Junior year. This meant applying to study abroad almost immediately after starting her Freshman year. Mahlia had planned so far ahead in fact that the decision to study abroad early also determined the universities to which she applied. Going for a semester while at an institution using the quarter system also meant getting double the usual credits, which also helped her graduate early.

Interestingly, Mahlia also ended up as an English teacher in Korea after graduating, despite not studying abroad there like other participants in this study. Without having traveled to Italy, Mahlia would likely have not ventured as far as Korea. She mentioned that study abroad had the effect of showing her what she was capable of. Asia, which she crossed off her list as a place that was “too scary” when choosing a study abroad destination, was a challenge she felt ready to embrace after studying abroad.

Sher. Sher's home institution is well-known for its strong study abroad programs, and Sher decided to study abroad partly to take advantage of that. Sher's interest in public policy, social movements, race, and social justice led her to choose South Africa as her study abroad destination. The program also gave Sher the opportunity to study at a world renowned and prestigious institution in South Africa, which she was excited to do. Sher was the only participant who discussed the academic adjustments required during study abroad. Being accustomed to having smaller class sizes and a certain level of access to faculty in her home institution, it took some time to adjust to the large lecture halls common in the South African system.

Sher was passionate about Black students studying abroad and spoke of the value of gaining a non-western academic experience. She noted that study abroad wasn't something most Black students in her institution felt they could pursue. Sher blamed her institution that, instead of working to make study abroad accessible to Black students, put the onus on Black students to express interest and figure out how to afford the experience.

Nadine. Nadine was the only participant interviewed in person because she was the only one local to the researcher. She was soft-spoken and appeared to have a more introverted personality. The daughter of Nigerian and Ghanaian immigrants, Nadine felt that it was important to have cultural experiences and saw study abroad as an opportunity to pursue one. Outside of a short trip to Canada when she was a child, studying abroad was her first international travel experience. Nadine chose Costa Rica specifically to improve her Spanish language ability.

Nadine mentioned that one of the factors that influenced her decision to study abroad was the 2014 shooting death of Mike Brown by police in Ferguson, Missouri, and the upheaval that it precipitated. The shooting, and weeks of protests that came after, introduced a distinct period of visible racial disharmony in the U.S. and is considered one of the major events in the timeline of the Black Lives Matter movement. For Nadine, study abroad was in part an escape from that unrest and its strain on her mental health.

CHAPTER 4:
STUDY ABROAD: THE SAME BUT DIFFERENT FOR BLACK STUDENTS

In many ways, most participants had the "typical" experience of study abroad. Study abroad, according to popular perception, gives students the opportunity to "see the world," explore cultures different from their own, make new friends, and travel. It is described, and often marketed to students as, a life-changing opportunity for self-discovery and personal development that challenges students and brings them out of their "comfort zone." Students who study abroad become "grand tourists," who grow and develop through exciting adventures in "strange" lands (Adkins & Messerly, 2019). Participants' stories of study abroad appeared to fit this narrative almost perfectly. For the majority, study abroad marked their first overseas travel experience and their first opportunity to "see the world." Many expressed that the desire to travel was the primary reason that they chose to study abroad. For those that could afford it, their ability to travel to other countries other than their host country during study abroad only made the adventure greater. Jameson described his two host locations (Paris and Madrid) as places he was "stationed," a home base as he traveled across Western Europe and Northern Africa. For those unable to travel as widely, there was more than enough adventure for them within the borders of their host country, where they met new people (both locals and other sojourners) and enjoyed the local food and attractions. Brooke spoke of the joy of meeting new people from different parts of the world and the U.S., having until then only known people from where she was raised in the U.S. South. Jameson spoke of the joy of being surrounded by art in Paris, and Julian gushed about visiting the Iguazú Falls, the largest grouping of waterfalls in the world.

Another common belief about study abroad that was consistent with this group's experience is that study abroad is a break from life as usual, or what some, with derision, call a "vacation." Like the students in Jackson's (2006) study who realized time away gave them a "welcome break from social obligations" (p. 139), participants described having time to sometimes aimlessly walk around their host cities, take in art and admire architecture on a regular basis, "eat cheap pizza & pasta" daily (Mahlia), and other things they were unlikely to do in their everyday lives back at home. Some described doing things that were out of their usual comfort zones. Avery gushed about the challenging but exciting things she did during her time abroad, which included performing at a university-wide talent show and giving an end-of-term speech to an audience that included the university president and dean. Sher talked about venturing off campus to volunteer in local communities and explore different areas of Cape Town independently while in South Africa, which is something she wouldn't normally have done back at home.

Overall, impressions of the experience of study abroad were overwhelmingly positive. One participant described it as the highlight of her life while another said that it was "like a dream " in the best way possible.

Yet, participants shared stories that revealed another side to studying abroad that doesn't appear often in the discourse about study abroad. Their race, it seemed, made their experiences not so "typical." It was *almost* the same for this group of students, but their Black identity made it different.

Race Matters: Black Students Abroad

Does race matter in study abroad? This question was the focus of Sweeney's 2014 dissertation on the experiences of Black students studying abroad. Sweeney's conclusion was that yes, race very much does matter in study abroad. This was also true for the participants in this study. Race mattered. It was pervasive. For many/all, it defined their experiences from the moment they realized that study abroad was a possibility (Wick, 2011), which can happen even before they enter their freshman year, to the day they returned home from their host countries, and beyond. Race played a central role in how participants approached the experience of study abroad and the decisions they made as they prepared for the event. While abroad, race was central to how participants moved through their environments and their interactions with others in their communities. It continued to matter even after study abroad, when participants returned to their campuses and to their lives at home.

'Is it racist?': Preparing to Study Abroad

Race, and the possibility of encountering racism, was something that several participants had in mind while deciding where and how to study abroad. In addition to other important factors, the threat of experiencing racism influenced some participants' decisions of where to study abroad. Mahlia chose Italy partly because she understood Europe to have a similar racial climate to the U.S. and was aware that the location she chose was frequent host of tourists. Mahlia described her process for choosing her study abroad destination:

> Obviously like so anytime you go anywhere new, I always google like, is it racist? Is it safe for people of color? What are other people's experiences? – Mahlia

The expectation that she would be less likely to experience racism in a country comprised of other "people of color" was one of the reasons that Nadine chose Costa Rica over Spain as the place to grow her Spanish fluency, especially after learning of Spain's reputation for discriminating against Black people. While gathering information and preparing to go abroad,

some participants sought to understand how they might be treated based on their race. They used online sources, like blogs and YouTube, and personal connections, such as family and peers, to gather data. Researchers have hypothesized that the fear of discrimination and racism abroad is one of the main factors that discourages Black students from pursuing study abroad (Cole, 1991). Jackson (2006) summarizes research that concludes that what Black students actually fear is the unknown. Black students are familiar with U.S. racism and know how to deal with it, but are less sure about the racism they might face abroad. Jackson (2006) writes:

> In the home country, for better or for worse, people are usually familiar with what to expect from their society and what is expected of them. The social construction of race is different in the host environment. (p. 25).

"It was always there": Navigating Race Abroad

Once abroad, navigating racial dynamics became a routine part of participants' experiences abroad. It was unavoidable. As one participant shared, "it [race] was always there." Participants' complete experiences of navigating race occurred in three parts. The first part was navigating race within their community of peers, usually other students in the same study abroad program. The second part was having new and different experiences of race in the host country. The final part was experiencing and dealing with incidents of racism from host country locals.

"It's Really About Dealing with Other Foreigners": Navigating Race Among Peers.

> I found that…well…I think the biggest thing when you're studying abroad is dealing…It's not about dealing with Koreans. When you're studying at an international school… it's really about dealing with other foreigners, and how they look at you… because I'll be honest, I barely knew what Koreans thought of me when I was there… but I was almost acutely aware of what the other foreigners thought of me. – Avery

For several participants, race was only a significant issue when interacting with members of their program cohort, usually comprised of White (mostly) and other non-Black U.S. students. Avery was one of those participants. Having grown up in a predominantly Black neighborhood, and gone to predominantly Black schools, being one of only a handful of Black people in her cohort was vastly different from what she was accustomed to. The culture of this community was new to her as well and one, she would eventually learn, that was rife with microaggressions, stereotyping, and othering. Cohort members would assume that she could rap or dance (popular stereotypes of Black people), ask her to respond to questions as a representative for all Black people, or exclude her from their outings. Avery recalled specific instances of being gaslighted and having her intelligence doubted. Despite her frustration about how she was being treated by the group, she didn't push back until reaching a breaking point towards the end of the program, when she began to use her voice.

Several participants noted that White U.S. students were usually the architects of racial conflict in their cohorts. Sher, who studied in South Africa, recounted an incident when a group of White students in her program planned a party that appeared to be celebrating the achievements of colonizers. Sher was alarmed by the thoughtlessness of these students, who appeared to be making light of colonization in a country still suffering its tragic consequences. The incident caused such a stir that a program-wide meeting on the topic of cultural sensitivity was called. Sher shared that though she remained cordial with the group of students who planned the party, she was careful to keep a social distance from them thereafter.

Elena noticed that the White people that she encountered abroad were more likely to say or do racist things they knew would not be acceptable in the U.S.. Abroad, they felt empowered to do these things knowing that they wouldn't be challenged by locals. Elena described feeling

helpless to push back because of how difficult she imagined it would be to explain why the words or actions of her White peers were wrong in a country with a completely different understanding of race and racial dynamics.

> I have heard some really crazy stuff by White people…like just how they talk about Black Americans and this is really like… you cannot have done that in America and been okay. But at this point not only am I outnumbered by like… it's more like I can't make a big deal about it because explaining the cultural context takes so much – Elena

A few participants felt that they were navigating race and class simultaneously in their cohorts. Julian, who talked about coming from a working class neighborhood was dismayed by his frequent experiences of racialized classism with the White U.S. students in his cohort. He noted frequent run-ins with one member of his cohort in particular, a young White woman, who publicly ridiculed the working class neighborhood Julian grew-up in, and on a few occasions directed classist and racialized insults at Julian (e.g. "ghetto" & "savage"). Avery, who also talked frequently about how her socioeconomic status affected her experience, spoke about feeling "out social-classed" in her cohort, which often made her feel inferior to her peers.

Navigating "the gaze of others" in the Local Community. In their host communities, participants had encounters that forced them to examine race in new and different ways. Mainly, participants contended with onlyness, confronting and understanding global white supremacy, and engaging with questions of identity.

Onlyness. Onlyness, originally used to describe the experiences of Black students in U.S. institutions, is defined as "the psychoemotional burden of having to strategically navigate a racially politicized space occupied by few peers, role models, and guardians from one's same racial or ethnic group" (Harper et al., 2011, p. 190). Several participants described a fleeting sense of onlyness in their cohorts as the only Black student, or one of very few. Yet feelings of

onlyness abroad were most poignant to how participants felt about being in their host communities, not their cohort. Location was a significant determinant of how much onlyness participants felt. In host communities where participants encountered few Black people, they were more likely to talk about onlyness. This was especially true for participants who grew up in racially diverse communities. Julian spoke about being shocked by the lack of diversity, and the Whiteness, of his host country, Argentina. It became a persistent source of personal conflict for Julian during his time abroad:

> Just being the only person of color and then in a very White-focused country and even in the university which I was studying at…at times I felt out of place…never really felt pushed out of the groups...I just didn't really feel deep connections with everybody besides my three main people though. So, I think I just felt at times alone or judged. –Julian

The participants who studied abroad in Europe had less difficulty with onlyness, being more likely to see Black people and other people of color, among them natives, migrants, and tourists, in their communities. In contrast, the three participants who studied abroad in South Korea, a very homogenous country, referenced feelings of onlyness often. Not surprisingly, Sher, who studied abroad in the majority Black country of South Africa and was surrounded with Black people like she had never been before, did not report feeling any onlyness.

What does it mean to navigate onlyness in the local community? Several participants discussed the dual stresses of being hyper-visible as the only or one of few Black people locals had encountered in their lifetimes, while also being aware of stereotypes that locals might have of Black people due to negative depictions of Black people in Western media. For some, it created the urge to be a positive representative for their race abroad.

> And I think…the main thing about study abroad was that I was way more aware of what I was doing… how am I presenting myself because people were always staring at me anyway so might as well you know, give my best face. So, when I came here both times I wore way more makeup…. every time I went out of the

> house I always looked nice because I don't want anyone to see me like not looking nice… I didn't want them to think black girls are this or not this… I don't want them to think like we just look a mess… which is not my job… it really isn't but I guess my mentality to myself it was more for like the gaze of others... which really had a negative effect like towards the end…during the holiday I kind of broke down. – Elena

Mahlia saw it as being a "cultural ambassador," and talked about feeling the need to be mindful of her behavior and how she carried herself abroad. She shared that she felt fine playing this role, but that it was sometimes stressful for her to have to represent an entire race of people.

White supremacy abroad. As a group, participants shared that one of their biggest realizations abroad was that white supremacy and racism are global. Prior to going abroad, they could only speculate, but to see and experience it abroad gave them the confirmation. How each participants saw white supremacy in action while abroad was different. White supremacy in the host location appeared most obvious to the two participants who studied abroad in South America. Nadine recalled being able to directly witness and feel how differently she was treated by locals compared to the White students. One incident that stayed with her was when a local dance instructor appeared unhappy when briefly partnered with her during a lesson and seemed to rush to quickly trade her for a White partner. She was also often on the receiving end of comments from locals that showed their disdain for her Blackness. In Argentina, Julian was bewildered by the degree to which Whiteness (or "European-ness") was valued and centered. Even the food, to Julian's disdain, was more European than he had expected. Julian shared that it only started making sense to him later when he learn about "blanqueamiento" in Argentina. Blanqueamiento amounted to the intentional and systematic genocide of Black people in Argentina for the purpose of "whitening" the country. Even when white supremacy wasn't as obvious or overt, participants could still sense its presence. Mahlia shared that while she was

never on the receiving end of any explicit racism in her host community, she knew that " Italians like White people" and might have been harboring some hidden contempt. When asked about the role that race played in his experience, Jameson remarked that "it was always there," suggesting that he was always aware that he occupied a marginalized identity as a Black person in his host countries. Even in South Africa, a majority Black country, Sher was able to witness white supremacy in action. Her Black South African friends often perpetuated white supremacy by engaging in colorism: the belief that lighter skin is more attractive or that it indicates an elevated social status. While most participants seemed resigned to the disappointing reality of global white supremacy, Nadine verbalized that she was conflicted by the realization that there might never be a place or time where she wouldn't have to "persevere and show resilience" in the face of racism.

Race & Identity Abroad. Wick (2011) suggests that study abroad presents a "third space" for reimaging identity. Through their interactions with locals, participants found themselves reevaluating their understanding of race and identity.

In being abroad, a few participants realized that their identity had been defined in ways unique to the U.S., and could be different in other contexts. Julian was often mistaken for Brazilian in Argentina, probably because most of the Black people Argentinians are likely to encounter come from their regional neighbor. While he enjoyed being able to dissociate from his American identity, he was confused at the time as he had imagined Brazilians to have a more "Latino" or indigenous look. Jameson shared that during his travels to Egypt, he was often mistaken for an Arab or a person of Middle Eastern decent. He remarked that the only thing that seemed to visibly differentiate him from the locals was the language and how he dressed. The

experience allowed Jameson to consider his racial identity from a new and different perspective. It was a revelation:

> this is the first time I was able to see I'm not just black. I am black. I love my Blackness, you know, but I'm not *just* Black you know? –Jameson

In the U.S., the confines of Blackness and Black identity are so narrow and so burdensome, shared Jameson, that they hardly leave room for Black people to be anything else. Abroad, he could be something else. According to Jameson, this might be the true value of study abroad/travel for Black people.

> there's just something beautiful about that…about traveling that you get to create a whole, like a new identity if you want it …a lot of black people don't have the privilege of doing [that] because of the barriers of "you're this, you know, and you need to stick in being this…this thing that we've created for you." –Jameson.

Other ways that participants were stirred to reimagine their racial identity was by learning about the dimensions of Blackness, either by the example set by others or through academic learning. Related to the former, Avery shared the profound impact that one of her professors, a Black woman from the U.S., had on her life. This professor, in addition to being smart and accomplished, really impressed Avery in her ability to be "authentically herself and authentically Black." Having then felt that she had to reject her Black identity in order to be successful, this encounter inspired the revelation that she had been hiding important parts of herself in pursuit of success. Sher and Jameson spoke about how much they learned about Blackness abroad through their studies, and the impact it had on their understanding of race, and their racial and cultural pride. Sher discussed the experience of learning Black history from African scholars, and how it changed her understanding of Blackness, structural racism, power, and much more. Jameson shared that learning about the immense contributions of Africans to European society helped him

realize the degree to which Black people have shaped the world, which gave him a great sense of pride.

As the only participant studying in a country in which they were the racial majority, Sher's experience of identity abroad was especially dynamic. While being in the majority put her in a space where she didn't feel like she had to hide her Blackness, unlike when at home on her PWI campus, she struggled with understanding what it meant to be a third-culture Black American of Trinidadian decent studying in Africa. She frequently wrestled with how to explain what it means to be a Black American (from the U.S) to the curious people she encountered abroad. Her attempts to answer this question led her to realize that Black people in the U.S. are equally as diverse and varied as the people of the many tribes and tongues of Africa.

Interactions with locals forced some participants to examine their own personal racial identity. Julian, who is biracial, recalled his discomfort at being asked (frequently) about his ethnic ancestry. This was a question he had never been asked in the U.S., and one he often struggled to answer. At the time, he had no knowledge of his White ancestry, while also being acutely aware that the legacy of slavery means that it would be almost impossible for him to talk about his African ancestry. He remarked that the questions surrounding ancestry revealed the differences in racial attitudes between people in Argentina and the U.S. It appeared to him that while Argentinians were more invested in their European-ness, and its connection to Whiteness, White people in the U.S. are prouder "of being White American in itself," of both their whiteness and their national identity.

Brooke's experience of navigating identity abroad was complex. Growing up with her Korean mother, Brooke had imagined that studying abroad in Korea would be something of a homecoming. She expected the locals to recognize her Korean-ness and welcome her into the

community. However, what she experienced was the exact opposite. Because of her Black identity, she was not recognized as also being Korean. She recounted a specific incident when she told a local acquaintance about her Korean heritage and he adamantly refused to believe her, even after she showed him a picture of her Korean family members. Brooke found it especially frustrating as she noticed that biracial White/Korean people were always believed when they claimed to be Korean. The implication there seemed to be that while Whiteness was compatible with being Korean, Blackness was not. As being Korean was a big part of her identity at home, Brooke struggled with being "just Black," especially among the people she thought would have recognized her Korean-ness the most.

> So, I've always, in America, like just been a mixed person or biracial person or something like that. In Korea though, I was either just American. Or just Black. Or just a foreigner. – Brooke

Dejected, Brooke eventually stopped telling people that she was Korean and put less effort into studying the language. Looking back, she remembered feeling that if she didn't fit in with Koreans, it would be best to focus on her Black side where she was recognized and accepted. Ironically, Brooke's experience is not very different from the documented experiences of Black students who pursue heritage studies in Africa. Their expectations of belonging also aren't met, although not because of race, as it appears was Brooke's case, but because of the lack of shared nationality, history, and culture with locals (Neff, 2011).

Racism & the local community. Specific incidents of racism with locals stood out to participants as defining their experiences of race abroad. Participants discussed encounters of stereotyping, xenophobia, and blatant discrimination and exclusion abroad. Julian and Elena, in Argentina and South Korea respectively, recalled instances of taxis being unwilling to pick them up. Jameson told a story of a time he and his all-Black group of friends were prevented from

entering a club in Madrid while other groups of White people were allowed in. Mahlia recalled a time when a man walking behind her made loud and pointed negative comments about people of color with the intent that she would hear them. He then made it a point to bump into her, as opposed to the two White male friends she was with, while passing her on the road.

The female participants reported varying degrees of what Jackson (2006) refers to as "sexualized racism," (p. 46) ranging from catcalling to unsolicited sexual comments from men in public, and extending beyond that to sexual harassment and assault. Brooke disclosed a club experience in which two separate local men sexually assaulted her: one of them stuck his hands down her shirt and the other put his hands in her pants. Elena spoke about an incident where she was grabbed and kissed on her face, neck, and shoulders without her consent by an older man who introduced himself to her during a shopping trip. Several women mentioned that they were suspected or accused of being prostitutes. Elena was propositioned by a stranger who asked her if she was a "Russian person," a popular euphemism for the word "prostitute" in her host country. The women were acutely aware that their race played a role in these experiences.

> I'm seen as not, you know, innocent in a way….I was told some interesting things like, yeah, black girls they like, you know…like twerking… things like that… like, "I like how black girls are really curvy or like big butt or big boobs or whatever"…Stuff like that… it's like… would you really do this to Korean girl? This sounds pretty vulgar. I guess people are super straight up about my body features because I'm Black – Elena

Some participants had issues with their host families, and race played an obvious role. Three participants out of the total eight stayed with host families while abroad. Of those three, two, Jameson and Nadine, reported having issues with their host families. Although Jameson was reluctant to call what he experienced with his host mother racism, and felt that the term microaggressions might even be too strong, he admitted that he could sense some animosity with

his host mother that could have possibly been related to race. The relationship was tense and unfriendly, despite Jameson's initial attempts to develop a positive connection. Race was unequivocally a factor in Nadine's experience. Her host family made it clear that that she, by virtue of her race, was not wanted in their home. With the intent to insult, they compared Nadine to their former host student, a White woman who they praised for her beauty and Spanish-speaking ability. Members of the family openly spoke about not liking Nadine or made it a point to avoid her. She was even served meals at different times than the host family. Nadine's experience mirrors that of a student described in Willis' 2015 study, where the student was singled out for poor treatment by her host mother as the darker-skinned and more mature student in the group. Issues with host families are especially unfortunate. Students cannot avoid the places they live or the people that they live with. Jameson and, to a much larger extent Nadine, could not live comfortably in the places that were supposed to be their homes while they were abroad.

Despite the instances that they mentioned, participants tended to report not noticing much racism from locals. This was in part due to their limited knowledge about the dynamics of race in the host country. Sher recalled that it wasn't until after she returned home that she realized the racial meaning behind certain phrases she heard in South Africa. Jameson admitted that there might have been times that locals were racist, but that he couldn't be sure given the language and culture differences. Sweeney (2014) also had participants admit that not knowing about locals' racial attitudes protected them from noticing possible racism directed at them. Participants often minimized what they suspected possibly could have been racism, arguing that they couldn't possibly know the person's intentions. They worried that growing up in the U.S. may have made them sensitive to racism and several mentioned that they were careful of jumping to conclusions

as a result. Mahlia shared that focusing on racism would have ruined her entire experience, so she in large chose to focus on other things.

When it was clear that they were being discriminated against, participants reacted just as they would have in the U.S., either by simply moving on or by distancing themselves from the racist places and people they encountered. It was sometimes a conscious act of self-preservation, being aware that confronting their harassers could result in more conflict and stress. On the other hand, there were numerous instances that participants just didn't know how to respond. Brooke, for example, never got quite accustomed to the frequent hair touching or staring in Korea. The hair touching in particular, which happened frequently, would ruin her mood for an entire day. Yet, Brooke never figured out how to react in the moment. Participants admitted that they were unsure of what reaction would be acceptable, given their unfamiliarity with the cultural rules of the host country. Like Agatha, a participant in Sweeney's (2006) study, they were insecure about speaking out abroad without knowing "what the ramifications are for what you say" (p. 114).

Coming Home

Participants' experiences of race abroad continued to have an impact even after they returned from their host countries. According to Jackson (2006), upon returning home, study abroad students may find that "the familiar has become strange" (p. 195). Having gained new perspectives on race and reexamined their own racial identities, participants in this study found it difficult to resume life as it was before study abroad. This finding supports one of Jackson's (2006) conclusions that upon return, Black students need to renegotiate "old environments with new identities" (p. 194).

For Avery, study abroad was clearly a life-changing event, and her experiences of race played a big role in that transformation. In its entirety, her study abroad journey took her from her all Black community and placed her in one where she was one of few Black people in her cohort and community. It was an education in both racism in the U.S. and in the host country. It was also the first time she really thought about her own class critically and how together with her race, it dictated how she moved through the world. Though she was always aware that she was from a poor family, only abroad did she realize just how poor her family was compared to others in the U.S. and the extent to which access and opportunity were unevenly distributed by both race and class. Her other experiences abroad, including being picked on by a White male professor, seeing an image of her possible self (Markus & Nurius, 1986) in the Black female professor she met abroad, the friendships she made with other Black students (including some from the diaspora), and her experiences with locals—all of these together inspired Avery to reevaluate who she thought she was prior to studying abroad. Avery described the impact of going abroad as realizing that she had been in a box that she needed to escape:

> What it is...is that it started making me question the box? What's the purpose of the box? Why do I need this box? Why is this box so comfortable? I had to leave a predominantly Black space to discover… what is Blackness when you're not surrounded by it? – Avery

Upon returning home, she became inspired to chart a path uniquely her own.

> And coming back from Korea literally made me realize that I was like, knocking down all these things. I was literally asking myself all these questions to realize how much of a box I literally put myself in. Not only had I let other people put myself in the box, but I like threw chains around the box – Avery

In a stress and anxiety-filled year following her study abroad journey, she began to 'renegotiate' different aspects of her life, in her own terms, to break out of the different boxes she discovered she had been in prior to going abroad. She began to question her key relationships

and her decision to go to medical school right after undergrad. As a consequence, she would eventually break up with the boyfriend she had in the U.S. while she was studying abroad and indefinitely put her medical school applications on pause.

For Sher, it was learning about systemic racism in South Africa and seeing it play out in the lives of the friends she made abroad that transformed her. Unlike other participants, Sher made several local friends while studying abroad. Naturally, as her friendships with locals deepened, she came to understand their struggles as Black South African students, in particular, their challenges with affording their education. When the historic #FeesMustFall movement, in which a group of mostly poor and Black South African students protested against rising university tuition and fees, erupted during her stay, many of those at the front lines were her friends. In solidarity, Sher joined the protests. Galvanized by this experience, she left South Africa inspired to play a bigger role in social change at home. The opportunity came when she returned to her home campus just as racial tensions were boiling over.

> I remember coming back to campus learning about how university protests were going at [my host university] and connecting it back to what was going on my university which …[there] was also a big racial thing that was going on, and a lot of different racialized incidents were happening. So, I was able to use my firsthand perspective and experiences but also use the experiences that people around me when it comes to racism and colorism… all of those things to really have a new approach to things. – Sher

Although happy to be contributing to change on campus, Sher recalled feeling anxiety and stress like she had never felt in all of her years at her institution.

CHAPTER 5:
ENDURING RACISM ABROAD – THE IMPACT OF STRESS ON WELLBEING

Racism & Stress Abroad

In large, what made study abroad different for the participants in this study was also what made study abroad stressful for them: their Black identity and how it necessitated a constant navigation of race and racism. The stress emerged mainly from two factors: the increased positioning required from participants to navigate race in unfamiliar contexts and the absence of belonging abroad related to the isolating effects of racism. Other factors played a role in magnifying or exacerbating these stressors. Models of wellbeing suggest that this stress only becomes a threat to wellbeing when students do not have adequate resources to manage their stress.

Positioning Abroad

Positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999; Harré, 2011; Phoenix, 2004) provides a framework for understanding why one of the consequences of participants' experiences of race and racism while abroad was stress. Positioning is "the assignment of fluid 'parts' or 'roles' to speakers in the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions intelligible" (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p. 17). Simplified, the theory posits that when people interact with one another, they do not play out fixed or static characters, but fluid positions that are negotiated in conversation with others. People engage in positioning in all of their conversations and interactions and it "always involves negotiation between the positions that other people expect someone to take up, and what they do take up" (Phoenix, 2004, p. 106). Positioning has additional social dimensions. One of them is "the distribution of rights and duties" (Harré, 2011) to certain social roles like 'mom' or 'teacher,' their "rights" being how others in society are expected to behave towards this group, and their "duties" being the

expectations of how this group behaves in society. Another social dimension of positioning is the necessity of taken for granted story lines people tell about their selves, as well as larger societal story lines reproduced over time (Harré, 2011), both being related. Personal story lines are tied to how individuals would define their own identity and answer the questions: who am I? what are my values? Societal story lines are products of individual and group story lines reproduced over long periods of time. They are, by another name, social constructs, or the ideas, beliefs, or knowledge "constructed through human activity" when all members of a society make "meaning through their interactions with each other and the environment they live in" (Kim, 2001, p. 6). It is particularly relevant to this study to note that race is a social construct, having no biological or scientific basis. The idea that people belong to certain groups based on skin color, and that certain racial groups are superior, was first advanced in the 1730s by Carolus Linnaeus and later reproduced and proliferated by many others. These ideas became so prolific that they became the basis of racial policies in Europe, the United States, and various other countries, determining the rights and duties of racial groups (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010). The societal story line shapes how people position themselves according to race – with people of the same race and of course with people of different races.

When studying abroad, it is likely that most students, regardless of race, struggle to a degree with positioning as they navigate unfamiliar social constructs abroad. They lack knowledge about their rights and duties abroad and the taken for granted story lines of the host country, knowledge that is only developed by spending a significant amount of time in the culture/location. One could call it "culture shock," but for Black students, there are additional dimensions. In addition to dealing with the general social constructs, like mealtime etiquette for example, they are simultaneously navigating complex and unfamiliar constructs of race in the

host country. Concepts of race that are intricate and challenging to decipher. At home, Black students know how to position themselves according to race; they know "the rules." By adolescence, Black youths likely know how they are positioned in the U.S.—the stereotypes attached to their identities and how they can be expected to be treated by others on the basis of their race (Phoenix, 2004). In their U.S. institutions, Black students are more equipped to position themselves in response to the "everyday racism" (Barnes, 2001, as cited in Jackson, 2006), exclusion, and isolation they encounter on their campuses because they are intimately familiar with the dynamics of race and racism at home.

Yet, even when at home, when Black students know all the "rules," positioning still has the potential to cause a significant amount of stress. Positioning is social and relational, but also a deeply personal process of making sense of self and identity in the world (Phoenix, 2004). It occurs in all interactions, meaning that individuals are perpetually in the process of positioning, whether consciously or unconsciously, as they engage with others. For those of stigmatized racial identities, it can be argued that their positioning according to their race is inherently challenging and harmful, as it requires implicit or explicit recognition of their marginalized status in society, whether or not the individual accepts or rejects that social positioning. Each experience of racialized positioning can serve as a reminder of one's stigmatized status. This hypothesis is supported by research showing that how Black students navigate race in U.S. institutions and how they position themselves and are positioned by others contributes to their anxiety, low self-esteem, underachievement, and trauma (McGee & Stovall, 2015; Harper, 2011; Steele, 1997; Bruce, 2012).

Abroad, Black students do not know "the rules", and as a result are likely to do even more positioning than they would do at home, which may result in them feeling even more

stress. Within their cohorts, where racial climates of home are reproduced, Black students likely do similar levels of positioning as they would at home. Yet, the bigger challenge, and likely the bigger stressor, is positioning among locals in the host nation where Black students lack understanding of the historic and sociocultural dynamics of race. Together, the positioning within cohorts and the positioning with locals have a potentially overwhelming effect.

Absence of Belonging

Participants' experiences of race and racism also led to feelings of absence of belonging, which is another known contributor to stress. The absence of belonging seemed to be a consequence of the isolating effects of navigating race and racism abroad. For most participants, social support gained from the "accidental" friends they made abroad helped them to cope with the isolation, which helped them to reduce their overall stress. One participant had little social support abroad and her experience with stress was notably worse than other participants.

One story in particular highlighted the value of belonging abroad, and the participants' difficulty with obtaining it. Each participant was asked about their best memories of being abroad. Most participants discussed their travel, friendships they developed abroad, or their newfound independence. Elena, however, told a story about one of her last days abroad, when she was stopped by a local woman while wearing her host institution's letterman jacket. The story encapsulated the importance of belonging, for her, and the other participants in this study.

> "On the last day I was in Korea, going out in Incheon… going to my flight… and I was wearing it to the grocery store to get my parents like you know, souvenirs to bring back to America. And this, older woman…she was trying to get my attention and she was like "hakseang, hakseang" (student, student) I was like…I just didn't…it never occurred that she could be talking to me... I was like 'what?, she ain't talking to me'. Cuz you know, I don't get called like that. I know…like very few people talk to me in Korean up front, especially on the street like that or in a store and they never like… they don't talk to me because I'm a foreigner right. But when she said that because I had my jacket on I turned around, I was like, Wow, that was the first. You know, the last day I was there. It was the first time that I really felt like, Oh, I belong." – Elena

What is belonging and why is it so important? May (2011) describes belonging as a "sense of ease with oneself and one's surroundings" (p. 368). It is, according to Hill (2006), a sense of relatedness and connectedness with particular people, places, and things. The term also refers to being a member of, or being included in or accepted by, an organization, group, or society. These complimentary definitions reveal the two important dimensions of belonging. The first is that belonging can occur on multiple levels: in close personal relationships (family, friends, romantic partners), in organizations or institutions (schools, work, church), and in community (larger social structures). In the best circumstances, people achieve belonging on all levels. The second is that belonging is relational and dependent on how individuals and groups interact with one another. Through exclusion, an individual can be denied belonging. Inversely, individuals can also reject belonging by choosing to retreat (Biordi & Nicholson, 2013). On the need to belong, seminal work by Baumeister and Leary (1995) states that belonging has two primary features: frequent *positive* (emphasis added) interactions with a person or group, and the impression of "a bond marked by stability, affective concern, and continuation into the foreseeable future" (p. 500). Belonging has been linked to social, psychological, and physical wellness and the lack of it can result in psychological sensitivity and stress (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), as well as anxiety and depression (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Researchers of sense of belonging in education have connected it to student achievement, engagement, institutional commitment, and persistence (Hausmann et al., 2009; Kember & Leung, 2004). The literature on the international student experience in the West has highlighted the importance of sense of belonging to both academic success and psychological health (Atri et al., 2007; Yao, 2015).

The research suggests that it is the isolating effect of racialization and racism that makes it more difficult for Black students to achieve sense of belonging abroad. Isolation, according to Biordi and Nicholson (2013), is the foil to belonging's connectedness, ease in one's surroundings, and group membership. Rather, it represents distance, exclusion, and the "loss of place within one's group" (Biordi & Nicholson, 2013, p.85). Researchers have found that feelings of isolation are common to Black students in U.S. postsecondary institutions. Underrepresented minority students (URMs), Black, Latinx, and Native American students, are more likely to report less belonging on campus than White students (Johnson et al, 2007; Hausmann et al., 2009). This group of students can sometimes feel that they are a "'guest in another's house'" and not full members of the campus community (Lain, 2016, p. 84). Studies have shown that the main reason that Black students, and other students of color, feel isolated on U.S. campuses is the frequent discrimination they face, usually in the forms of microaggressions, stereotypes and intentional exclusion. As a result, these students (understandably) perceive their campuses to be hostile racial climates (Chang at al., 2011; Johnson et al, 2007). Black students likely see themselves as being in a "'dominant peer normative environment,'" (Berger, 1997, p. 449) "based on White student culture" (Yao, 2016, p.773) that is intrinsically discriminatory and exclusionary. Walter & Cohen (2007) have suggested that Black students in post-secondary institutions may face *belonging uncertainty* based on the belief that "people in my group don't belong" (p. 87) due to their awareness of how they are perceived and stigmatized in these spaces. It is, consistent with Biordi & Nicholson's (2013) assertion, that Black students are first isolated by exclusion, through the racist treatment they receive in their campus communities, which communicates to these students that they do not belong, who as a result then choose to voluntarily isolate themselves to reduce their chances of encountering this treatment/messaging.

Abroad, the dynamics of isolation and sense of belonging appear to be the same. Discrimination from peers and locals cause students to feel isolated from the larger cohort community and local community and thus encourages them to isolate themselves from these groups. This study's participants' experiences of being isolated serve as proof. For Elena, it was the fact that she perpetually stood out as a Black woman and was positioned as an outsider by locals. No matter how much effort she put into connecting with the locals by speaking the language, there never seemed to be anyone who acknowledged her efforts, which resulted in her constantly feeling like an outsider. For Avery, it was the constant othering by the U.S. students in her cohort in the way they spoke to her and treated her. For Julian, it was simply existing as a Black person in a country so steeped in White supremacy and dealing with racialized classism from members of his cohort. Apart from a few brief weeks she spent with her cohort of U.S. students and with another host family in Nicaragua, Nadine felt a lack of belonging for the entirety of her program, especially in her terrible living situation with her host family. Brooke, of course, was particularly devastated by absence of belonging given her ethnic ties to her host country.

Although isolated from the larger community, Black students can find belonging on an interpersonal level within their friendships, which can be key to their coping abroad. Usually, participants gravitated to the other (few) Black students in their programs, but in the cases where the participant was the only Black student in the cohort, they often gravitated to the non-White students, who they related to as fellow minorities. For participants, finding a group of similar people helped them make sense of the experiences they were having with members of their cohort or with locals. Brooke would discuss her frustrations with the constant hair touching she was subjected to by locals with one of her roommates, another young Black woman who also

encountered unwelcome touching often. After being denied entry from the club in Madrid, Jameson took some time to debrief the experience with the other Black people with him at the time, until they decided to move on to another location. Baker (2010) writes that for most students suffering from loneliness and/or lack of belonging, what they may need the most is someone they can talk to about their problems. Thus, being able to find belonging at the interpersonal level helped students to relieve some of the stress of being isolated and marginalized at the community level.

It was Nadine's extremely isolating experience of racism in her community and her inability to find belonging at either the interpersonal or community level that made her experience so distinctly terrible and stressful. Among the group, Nadine was the only participant who was unable to establish a core friend group or community in her host country. The structure of Nadine's program required her to separate from the larger cohort of U.S. students to complete an internship in a less metropolitan part of Costa Rica. Besides members of her host family, Nadine had few people to speak and connect with on a personal level. Social support on the personal level could have helped Nadine alleviate the stress created by her negative racialized experiences. Though Nadine did reach out to family and friends at home for support, belonging requires connectedness *in close proximity* (emphasis added) (Baumeister & Leary 1995). It is important that Black students have social support available locally in order to cope with their racism-related stress.

Additional Factors

Stress is complex and personal, so although participants had similar experiences of race and racism, other factors might have had a magnifying or exacerbating effect on the stress participants felt due to positioning and absence of belonging. The main factors in this study

were: other stressors, participants own cognitive development, and preparedness for the experience of race abroad.

Other Stressors. It is possible that other stressors Black students might endure concurrently with their racism-related stress has the effect of magnifying the racism-related stress, and vice-versa. More than half the participants in the study shared that they persistently worried about money and that even having enough money for food was challenging at times. People that experience financial insecurity are particularly susceptible to stress (Mental Health Foundation, n.d.). Other participants had preexisting physical and mental health conditions that also made them particularly vulnerable to stress. Brooke had a history of depression and was receiving treatment for it prior to going abroad. She was able to ward off depression with medication, but shared that having to forgo the counseling she normally received at home, she developed some anxiety related to the issues she had with belonging during her time abroad. Nadine shared that in normal conditions, her health wouldn't be considered the best, making her more susceptible to the damaging effects of stress. As her stress worsened due to her various negative experiences abroad, so did her health.

Elena experienced a death in her family while abroad and was unable to return home to be with her family during that time. She shared that her grieving was made even more difficult by the stress of feeling like she did not belong in her host community.

Participants' Cognitive Development. Students are in a particularly vulnerable state of emotional and psychological development, and as such, are more vulnerable to particular stressors than other age groups. Butler (2019) writes that the college years are defined by transition, causing a "heightened sense of mental and emotional arousal" that can lead to "emotional highs and lows" (p. 144). At this developmental stage, all students are vulnerable to

stress. However, Black students simultaneously navigate racial identity development at this stage, meaning that they "devote additional energy" to psychological development (Pope, 2000, p. 308). The added mental work Black students do can make them more psychologically vulnerable to stress than the majority of their study abroad peers.

Preparation for Experiences Abroad. Research has shown that preparation can be critical for stress reduction and management (Wallace, 1984). Participants' levels of preparedness for their experiences of racism abroad appeared to affect how much stress they felt. Most participants, six out of the total eight, shared that they felt they were not sufficiently prepared for their experiences of racism abroad. The two that did, Mahlia and Jameson, prepared themselves. Jameson spoke with other Black students who had studied abroad in locations he chose as his study abroad destinations while Mahlia used blogs to prepare herself for Italy's racial climate. Others made attempts to prepare, but while abroad discovered that their efforts had been misguided. Brooke, for example, imagined that speaking with the Chinese exchange students at her home institution would give her an impression of what being an exchange student in Korea would be like for her. Nadine asked an advisor in her home institution's study abroad office about the racial climate of her future host country, and was assured she would be welcomed; she was not. Compared to those less prepared, those more prepared for their experiences abroad appeared to have experienced less stress due to the racism they encountered. This is likely in part because they expected to have these experiences, and were somewhat prepared for the positioning they would have to do and the possibility that they would not belong completely in their host community. For those less prepared, the stark difference between their expectations and their reality added to their stress abroad. They did not expect some of the things that happened abroad and could not anticipate how it would make them feel. Nadine had such

high expectations for Costa Rica. She thought it would be a place where she would be welcomed by other people of color. This made it even more difficult for her to process the terrible treatment she was subject to, which was the exact opposite of what she had expected.

As far as preparing to go abroad, all participants shared that their institutions were either uninvolved or underequipped to help them in this process, ultimately playing background or nonexistent roles. Two specific issues were cited regarding how participants were inadequately prepared by their institutions. One was the lack of explicit dialogue about how race would affect their experience abroad. Mahlia recalled the use of vague language that hinted that students might face "challenges," or that there might be "cultural differences," but left it up to students to imagine what those challenges or cultural differences might be. Participants shared that their institutions did not provide realistic depictions of their host country, specifically about attitudes on race and gender, and what kind of treatment to expect from locals as Black people. The other issue participants noted was the inability to speak to someone from the same racial/cultural background that could potentially give them an idea of what the experience would be like for them in their specific study abroad location. A few had the opportunity to speak with Black students who had studied abroad in the host country before them, but most didn't.

Predicting Wellbeing Abroad

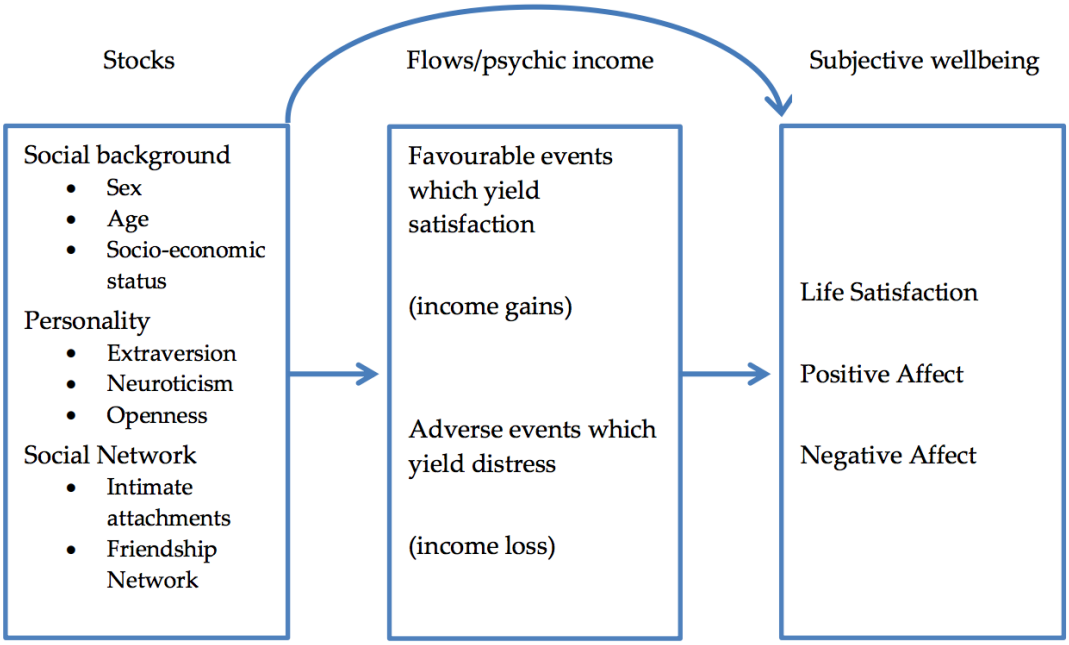
Experiencing racism-related stress abroad doesn't automatically predict poor wellbeing abroad. It was clear that while stress was ubiquitous, some participants were able to manage this stress better than others. For others, the stress abroad was overwhelming and harmful to their wellbeing. The differences suggest certain dynamics that can either mitigate or aggravate the impact of stress on wellbeing, and the ability, by looking at an individual Black student's experience, to predict their wellbeing abroad.

Models of Wellbeing

There is currently no universally accepted definition of wellbeing, though various characteristics of what wellbeing might look like in practice exist. While attempting to put forth their own definition, Dodge and colleagues (2012) review the fundamental theoretical perspectives that inform the most current understanding of wellbeing. Abstract constructs like happiness and life satisfaction have been shelved in favor of dynamic equilibrium theory, first proposed by Headey & Wearing (1989) and based off Brickman and Campbell's 1971 work, showing that people usually return to a "baseline" of happiness following major life events. Headey and Wearing's framework (see Figure 1) proposes that individuals maintain certain "stable stocks" (social background, personality, and social network) that they draw from to deal with life events that either increase (favorable) or decrease (adverse) personal satisfaction to affect subjective wellbeing. Assuming a consistent pattern of events, individuals maintain a "normal" equilibrium distinct to their identity and personal circumstances (their "stable stocks"). Consequently, wellbeing equilibrium is disrupted only in the event of deviation from an "equilibrium pattern of events" (Headey & Wearing, 1992, p. 16). The dynamic equilibrium model has been proven valid following empirical research by others in the field.

Figure 1

Headey & Wearing's (1991) stocks and flows framework



Source: Dodge et al., (2012, p. 227)

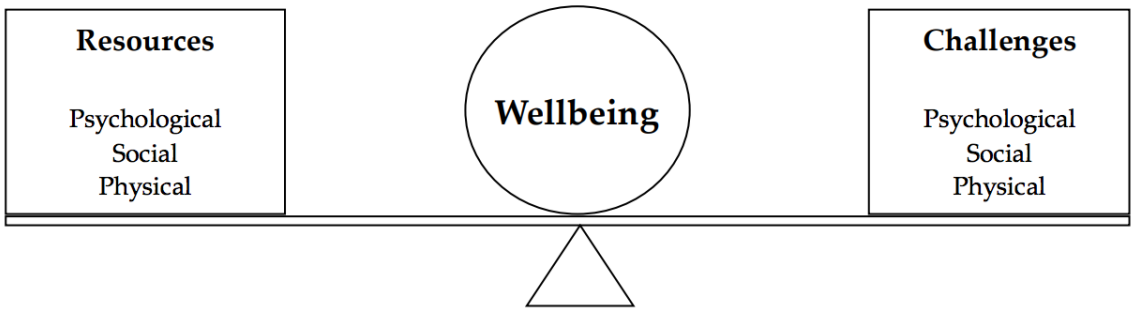
Although race was not included as part of social background in the study that inspired this framework, race is a part of an individual's social background, and this model is a suitable tool for analyzing the wellbeing of Black students. Headey and Wearing's model recognizes that an individual's social background will affect the experiences (the "flows/psychic income") they are likely to have. In this understanding, an individual's race, along with their other identities, will affect how they move through the world. This model allows for a race-conscious analysis of wellbeing.

The model proposed by Dodge and colleagues (2012) simplifies Headey and Wearing's framework while also pulling from Cumming's 2010 exploration of how level of challenge affects subjective wellbeing and Hendry and Kloep's 2002 inquiry on the relationship between resources and personal challenges for individual development. The resulting model (see Figure

2), referenced earlier, is a seesaw in which wellbeing is "the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced" (Dodge et al., 2012, p. 230).

Figure 2

Dodge, Daly, Huyton & Sanders (2012) Definition of Wellbeing



Source: Dodge et al., (2012, p. 230)

Both models (Headey & Wearing, 1991; Dodge et al., 2012) are useful for understanding the wellbeing of Black students abroad. The first, although complex, shows the various factors (i.e. personality, social networks, background) that may affect wellbeing. The latter, in its simplicity, shows the importance of balance, and is optimistic in its assertion that in the event of adversity, wellbeing can be restored when an individual has the appropriate resources. Both models are also validated by Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) influential theory of stress and coping (Ryan & Twibell, 2000), referenced earlier, which states that people only experience harm when their level of stress exceeds the resources they have to cope.

Taken together, these two models suggest that the wellbeing of Black students abroad may be better understood by examining whether their experiences abroad create stress at a level higher, the same, or lower than they are accustomed to, and if higher than they are accustomed to, whether they have sufficient resources to manage the stress.

A Dynamic Equilibrium: Achieving Balance for Wellbeing Abroad

The experiences of the participants in this study support a dynamic equilibrium hypothesis of the wellbeing for Black students abroad. To some extent, all participants were stressed by their experiences of racism abroad. However, five participants distinguished themselves from the rest by reporting harm to their mental and/or physical health during their study abroad journey, suggesting that they did not have adequate resources to meet their challenges. Brooke noted that the stress she felt due to absence of belonging exacerbated her existing mental health issues, leading her to develop anxiety while abroad. Elena recalled a conversation with her mother more than half way through her program when she confessed that she thought she might need to see a mental health professional. Dealing with the death of her grandmother away from family while also in a place where she felt isolated from the larger community had become overwhelming. In addition to the stress of preparing to go abroad, Avery also spoke about the stress of returning to try to reconcile who she was at home with the person she had discovered she could be while abroad and how it left her mental health "in shambles." Similarly, Sher was so affected by her experiences abroad that returning to life as usual on her campus was impossible. Although glad to be filled with new energy to push back at the racial injustices on her campus, she recalled it leading to stress that spilled over into anxiety. Nadine felt that the amount of stress she was under led her to fall ill towards the end of her program—so much so that she ended up leaving her internship placement and host family two weeks earlier than planned.

What these individuals had in common was that none of them had the resources to match or address their individual stress levels. Most had just enough to cope, often due to the

'accidental' friends they made abroad. Nadine was distinguished by having virtually no resources, including "accidental" friends, to help her cope abroad.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of experiencing racism abroad on Black students' wellbeing. Participants did experience racism abroad, and the encounters of race and racism they described are consistent with the existing literature (Jackson, 2006; Bruce, 2012; Sweeney, 2014; Willis, 2015). Navigating race and racism caused stress related to positioning and absence of belonging, which all participants experienced to some degree. Even so, wellbeing was only harmed when participants did not have the resources to match their levels of stress. This study also sought to understand whether Black students feel well prepared for the racism they encounter abroad. The answer to this second question was highly personal. Some were prepared enough for the degree of racism they faced in their host countries. Some felt prepared, but discovered they were insufficiently prepared while abroad. What was apparent in all participants' experiences is that they were left to their own devices to prepare for the racism they faced abroad—their home institutions were hardly involved. As a result, several participants were completely unprepared and especially vulnerable to stress from experiencing racism abroad.

The following section explores the implications of these findings for study abroad offices and administrators and suggests recommendations for how they can help Black students to have more positive and less stressful experiences abroad.

CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Universities and colleges are responsible for creating spaces that foster the wellbeing of students to enable them to learn and grow unfettered (Desai et al., 2017). This obligation to protect the wellbeing of students should apply as much as when students are abroad as when they are at the home campus. This study provides clear evidence of the unique threats to wellbeing Black students face when studying abroad. As a result, institutions should seek to understand and mitigate those threats to support better wellbeing for this group of students.

The following lays out several recommendations for practice that study abroad offices and administrators can utilize to improve the experience of Black students. Overall, Black students need better preparation and support.

Recommendation for Practice

This research suggests four major areas of development for study abroad offices and administrators to help them better support Black students abroad for the purpose of protecting their wellbeing: adopting a race-conscious lens of study abroad, increasing focus on diversity, creating more intentional programming and preparation for Black students, and providing comprehensive support through the entire lifespan of the study abroad experience.

Area One: Adopt a Race-Conscious Lens

The first and most important step that study abroad offices should take is recognizing the role that race plays in the experiences of Black students who study abroad, and resisting the inclination to see "Whiteness as the norm" (Sweeney, 2014, p. 66). Compared to the whole, Black students do make up only a small percentage of U.S. students who study abroad, which has led to a tendency of focusing less on this group of students and their needs. However, at 6.1% of all students studying abroad in the 2017-2018 academic, Black students were more than

20,000 students nationally, a significant number of students well-worth paying attention to. Only through adopting a race conscious-lens can institutions begin to do the work of understanding this population of students and what they need to have positive study abroad experiences.

Area Two: Focus on Diversity & Inclusion

By creating a culture of diversity and inclusion, study abroad offices can create spaces that are more attuned to the unique needs of Black students. Study abroad offices should hire individuals that are "culturally responsive" and support professional development for all staff.

Culturally Responsive Mentors. What is the value of a "culturally responsive" mentor? According to Bruce (2012), they are uniquely equipped to help students unpack and make sense of challenging experiences "while providing moments of affirmation"(p. 57). Although Bruce (2012) believes that these mentors do not have to share the same race as the student, only "an empathetic understanding of the oppression and social challenges associated with being African American" (Bruce, 2012, p. 53), there is evidence to suggest that it is best if these mentors are Black. "Cultural mistrust" is known to prevent Black students from seeking out non-Black administrators to speak with (Whaley 2009, quoted in Bruce, 2012), even if they are well-trained on the subject of race. Assuming cultural similarities, which might not always be accurate, Black students are more likely to speak with Black administrators honestly about their concerns and issues, and take their opinions and suggestions more seriously. In this study, participants shared that the staff of their home institutions' study abroad offices were almost exclusively White or non-Black. Though they felt fine discussing the logistics of their programs with these administrators, participants felt that these administrators were poorly equipped to understand their experiences and needs as Black students, and that they likely didn't care. In addition, several participants, like Julian and Nadine, discussed not feeling comfortable with going to their

on-site program administrators, who were White, about their challenges. It is critically important that study abroad offices have staff that look like Black students, that understand the unique concerns of Black students, and that students feel comfortable approaching. However, these individuals cannot simply exist as symbols; it needs to be clear that they are actively there to engage with, support, and advocate for Black students.

Diversity & Equity Professional Development. For all staff, there needs to be more professional development specifically in the area of diversity, inclusion, and equity, particularly on how race, gender, sexuality, and other markers of identity can shape students' lives and experience abroad. Participants of this study mentioned that their administrators failed to mention that they may face challenges related to their race abroad. In fact, there was minimal focus on race at all and without being prodded, administrators were unlikely to bring up the topic of race by themselves. This signals a concerning race-blind approach to study abroad by administrators. Overall, study abroad offices should be aiming to embed the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion into the culture of how they operate. This means serving students not only when it comes to race, but gender and sexuality, disability, socioeconomic status, and more. This is likely to change not just how administrators engage with students, but also how they plan and operate their programs.

Area Three: Intentional Programming and Preparation

There are some concrete and near immediate changes institutions can make in how they craft and implement programming that can improve the experience of Black students studying abroad. These include measures to create supportive community around Black students to reduce their encounters of racism and racism-related stress.

Housing. Institutions have the power to make sure that students are entering into living arrangements that are welcoming and supportive. Screening procedures can be used to guarantee that every host family is willing to welcome students of all different identities. Hosts that are unable to meet that standard should not be allowed to host students. Institutions should also confirm that any third-party programs utilized also follow these guidelines.

Peers. Institutions can also consider how they prepare and engage White (and other non-Black) students during study abroad. All students should understand their responsibility to respect their peers when they go abroad, and understand that they are held to the same standards of conduct as when they are on campus. Talburt & Stewart (1999) suggest that it could be valuable for entire cohorts to have mediated discussions about how students' different identities will affect their experiences as part of the study abroad curriculum. It could help all students to reflect on their privileges, and the role they can play in shaping the experiences of others. This could happen pre-departure, or even continuously throughout the program. There is a bigger need for race-consciousness, and acknowledgement of how dynamics of race play out both at home and abroad, so administrators might tie this work to larger efforts to improve campus climate.

Matching Students to Programs. Administrators should spend more time with students pre-departure to match them with programs that best meet their individual needs. Butler (2019) writes that each student brings a unique set of inputs into their study abroad experience and thus each is likely to experience a program differently. The same program may present too little, too much, or just the ideal amount of challenge for a student depending on their background and personality. Study abroad should challenge students, but too great a challenge causes undue stress and harm to wellbeing (Jones, 2013; Butler, 2019). By carefully learning about students'

goals and desired learning outcomes, study abroad advisors can direct Black students to the programs of best fit. For example, Nadine studied abroad through a third-party program that placed her with a host family. She was not fluent in the language of the host country, making it difficult for her to advocate for herself. This was a program that did not match the level of support that Nadine needed. She would have likely benefitted more from a program similar to the one Mahlia attended, where she would have lived with other Americans. Despite the racism she might have experienced in this group, it would at least be familiar to her, and she would have known how to cope with it.

Area Four: Comprehensive Individualized Support

Students will benefit from more personalized support, whether from study abroad administrators or peers, to help them cope with their experiences of race and racism abroad. Advising should be individualized, to account for each person's unique identity and experiences, and available to students throughout the entire lifespan of the study abroad experience. This includes the time preparing students before they study abroad, during their study abroad experiences, and even after they return.

Before. Before going abroad, participants will benefit from direct discussion about the racial climate of their host destination, as well as the experiences of race they are likely to have there. They should also be educated on ways to mitigate the impact of whatever they might experience abroad. For example, developing a close community of friends helped participants in this study to cope abroad. Students should be made aware of the importance of friendships and community to having positive experiences abroad. If students need support to help them to create that community, that support should also be made available. Intentional roommate parings is one way institutions can help students to find community abroad.

During. Black students are likely to be navigating multiple identities while abroad, and the dynamics will continuously change as they meet new people and have different experiences. Students need guided reflection to better understand how their intersecting identities may affect their evolving experiences. Once students are abroad, institutions can have their "culturally responsive" administrators check-in regularly with Black students abroad, and intentionally focus part of the conversations on the student's experience of race. Black students who have returned from study abroad can be called on to serve as virtual coaches or peer mentors for Blacks students currently abroad. With the appropriate training, these students, having immediate understanding of what the students abroad are going through, will be well-equipped to help other student make sense of their experiences. Students should also have more formal mental health resources available to them abroad. Counseling, in particular, has been shown to help college-aged students manage their stress (Chao, 2012).

After. There is need for a more robust reentry process that recognizes that study abroad might have been an incredibly stressful time for Black students or that it might have simply been unpleasant. Study abroad can have a lasting impact beyond the time students spend away. When experiences are negative, the harm caused to students may also continue long after students return. Several scholars (Bruce, 2012; Gothard et al., 2012; Sweeney, 2014) have remarked on the value of a more robust re-entry process, which can help returning students gain closure from their experiences while simultaneously helping to inform interested students. Returned students can be called on to speak to groups or have one-on-one conversations with Black students interested in studying abroad. It is a valuable way that returnees are able to reflect and make sense of experience. Support through counseling, or at least availability for this support, should extend throughout students' study abroad experiences and after.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several recommendations for future research. The study could be replicated with additional participants and include participants who studied in other parts of the world than the participants of this study, for example, the Middle East, Australia, and Eurasia.

Researchers interested in this topic should also aim for greater gender balance, although the gender gap (favoring women) in study abroad might make this difficult (Salisbury et al., 2010).

All participants in this study attended 4-year institutions. It would be useful to replicate this research in 2-year institutions and vocational colleges to explore how institution-type may affect the experiences of race Black students have abroad.

Based on the results of this study, an experimental study might also be attempted in which the treatment group would receive ongoing support and check-ins from a study abroad administrator. End-of-program evaluation could measure overall satisfaction with experiences abroad, ability to deal with instances of racism or other racialized experiences, and perception of wellbeing during and immediately following study abroad.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. Sampling was not random, even within the defined population, and relied largely on the snowball method. The defined population was students who had studied abroad and who identified as Black or African American. Several other criteria for participation were exclusionary. Particularly, the aim of the study was to explore the impact of racism experienced abroad on wellbeing. Potential participants who did not feel that race played any role in their experience abroad were intentionally excluded. There was only one potential participant who did not meet that criteria.

Another possible limitation was that participants were likely to have had different understanding of race and racism, which are highly complex and fluid concepts. Thus, with questions where participants were asked to identify and discuss their experiences of racism, participants could have different ideas of what constitutes racism or not. Even if every Black person in the U.S. viewed the world through a similar lens, each person's understanding of race would still be colored by the diversity of their circumstances and life experiences. It is also possible that participants were at different stages of their racial identity development (Cross, 1997), which was not evaluated in this study.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to understand how the experiences of Black students abroad can affect their wellbeing. While other studies have looked more generally at the Black experience of study abroad, this study is distinguished by its specific focus on understanding the impact of racism abroad on wellbeing. Eight Black study abroad alums were interviewed for this study. Participants were from different parts of the U.S., attended different institutions across the country, and studied abroad in different regions. They were of diverse backgrounds and personalities, and each with a unique story of their time abroad.

Yet, what was common about their experiences was that all were required to navigate race and racism abroad in complex, dynamic, and sometimes unpleasant ways. Participants faced onlyness and white supremacy in the local community, as well as U.S.-style racism from their peers. They were forced to reconsider their racial identities while also dealing with racism from locals in their host communities. The impact of participants' various experiences of race and racism abroad was stress, particularly as it related to the work of positioning themselves abroad and the feelings of absence of belonging.

The stress Black students' experience abroad can be harmful to their wellbeing, but it doesn't have to be. When Black students have the appropriate resources and support to manage their stressful encounters of race, they can have challenging, but not damaging, educational experiences abroad. Institutions can better support students towards this reality by adopting a race-consciousness that transforms how they hire and develop staff, plan and execute programs, and advise and support students.

Historically, study abroad advocates have aimed to improve the diversity of study abroad by increasing the participation rates of Black students and other students of color. This study revealed that another way to improve diversity of study abroad is by focusing on improving the experiences of the group of students who already do go abroad. It is critical that the concept of diversity be expanded beyond just participation, and it finally address the need for all students to have the same quality of experiences abroad. There will be additional returns too: when Black students have good experiences, they become evangelists for study abroad (Jackson, 2006), urging their peers to also seek educational experiences abroad.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself and share your study abroad location, year and duration
2. Why did you choose to study abroad?
3. Why did you choose your study abroad location?
4. How would you describe your study abroad experience overall?
5. What are your best memories?
6. What was your favorite part about studying abroad?
7. What were your challenges?
8. What are your worst memories?
9. What role did your race and/or ethnicity play in your experience?
10. What, if any, were your experiences of racism during your time abroad?
11. Can you recall any specific incidents of racism? What happened?
12. If you experienced racism often, how did you react to it or deal with it?
13. At the point in which you experienced them, how did your encounters of racism shape the rest of your study abroad experience?
14. How did these experiences effect you emotionally?
15. How do you think dealing with racism effected your health?
16. What resources were available to you to cope with these incidents?
17. Do you believe your institution prepared you for the racism you experienced abroad?
18. How might they have prepared you better?
19. How did your experience of racism shape your overall experience?
20. Would you recommend your study abroad location to other Black students? Why? Why not?
21. What advice would you give to other Black students who want to study abroad?

Appendix B: Recruiting Email

Dear Recipient,

My name is Motun Bolumole, a final year student in the Master of International Higher Education program at Boston College. I am conducting research into how Black students experience study abroad, with specific attention to their experiences of racism, and how these experiences may affect these students' feelings of wellbeing. Nationwide, Black students are underrepresented in study abroad participation. Unfortunately, this may also mean that Black students who study abroad are not considered when institutions develop support programs and materials. The results of this study into the lived experiences of Black students who have studied abroad will be used to make recommendations to improve preparation and support services for Black students who study abroad.

This study is being conducted as part of the requirements for my master's program, and is supervised by Dr. Betty Leask, Visiting Professor at the Center of International Higher Education at Boston College.

For the purposes of the study, I am seeking students who meet the following criteria. If you meet all of these criteria, please consider being part of this study.

- Identify as African-American and/or Black
- Studied abroad as an undergraduate student enrolled in a U.S. institution between 2014-2019
- Completed a study abroad program that was at least a semester-long
- Are a U.S. citizen or permanent resident

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one 60-90 minute interview. I will be seeking your permission to record the interview. Participants will be compensated for interviews with $10 Starbucks gift cards. The interview will be scheduled at a time and place that is most convenient for you.

If you meet the eligibility requirements listed above, and are willing to be involved, I hope that you share your experience by participating in this study. If you do not meet the eligibility requirements but know someone else who does, please consider forwarding this email. If you would like to participate or have any questions about this study, please contact me at lastname@bc.edu or 555-555-5555.