

FEELING TO SEE: BLACK GRADUATE STUDENT WOMEN (RE)MEMBERING BLACK
WOMANHOOD THROUGH STUDY ABROAD

By

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ABSTRACT

FEELING TO SEE: BLACK GRADUATE STUDENT WOMEN (RE)MEMBERING BLACK WOMANHOOD THROUGH STUDY ABROAD

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This qualitative research study illuminates the lived experiences of Black graduate student women who study abroad. I provide insights on how these students made meaning of themselves through study abroad. I utilized sista circle methodology, a culturally responsive methodology, to examine the study abroad experiences of 23 Black graduate student women. A critical lens was used to analyze and examine how relationships and interactions influenced participants' meaning making of themselves through study abroad. Drawing on Black Feminist Epistemology (Collins, 2009), Endarkened Feminist Epistemology (Dillard, 2000), experiential learning, (Michelson, 1998), and participants' narratives, I created a heuristic representation of meaning making through study abroad. I focused my analysis of participants' narratives through three braided areas of inquiry: (a) influences of relationships and interactions with faculty, trip leaders, and peers; (b) interactions with Blackness in study abroad contexts; and (c) healing through relationships and interactions during study abroad.

Findings revealed the importance of returning to one's body as a site of knowledge production. Relationships and interactions during study abroad triggered emotional and physical responses experienced in their bodies. As adult learners, "trigger events" are necessary for learning and re-negotiating new identities (Biniecki & Conceição, 2014, p. 39). These events challenged former knowledge and prompted the Black women in this study to expand their knowledge of self. Thus, participants' narratives challenge the Western notion of meaning making that emphasizes cognitive learning. Instead, the Black women in this study utilized their

bodies as sites of cultural knowledge production. Triggering events prompted physical and emotional responses during study abroad and influenced participants (re)membering of Black womanhood.

These findings contribute to the academic dialogue on Black graduate student women's study abroad experiences (as one aspect of higher education). This study can inform future inquiry into examining intersecting identities in transnational contexts, embodied nature of knowledge, and transformative learning in study abroad. I expand on these notions, and others, as I conclude this dissertation with recommendations for practice, and implications for research and theory.

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This dissertation is dedicated to brave Black women.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	xiv
LIST OF FIGURES	xv
CHAPTER 1: BEGINNING THE JOURNEY OF (RE)MEMBERING.....	1
Meaning Making Under the Current Landscape	2
The Problem: Meaning Making Through Study Abroad	4
Purpose of the Study	4
Definitions of Key Terms	5
Overview.....	7
CHAPTER 2: BRAIDING THE LITERATURE	9
Origin of Graduate Study Abroad	11
Historical Overview of Internationalization in Higher Education	11
Internationalization of Graduate Education	12
Brief History of Study Abroad.....	12
Graduate Study Abroad.....	13
Structural Issues Influencing Black Student’s Decision to Study Abroad	14
Barriers Influencing Decision to Study Abroad.....	15
Academics and Unconscious Limits.....	15
Relationships.....	16
Racism, Discrimination, and the Media.....	16
Black Students’ Experiences of Study Abroad.....	17
Black Women Who Participate in Study Abroad	22
Context Matters	23
Self-Discovery	25
Chapter Summary	28
CHAPTER 3: EPISTEMOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK.....	29
Black Feminist Epistemology	30
Black Feminist Thought.....	30
Construction of Knowledge	31
Making Meaning Through Transnational Contexts.....	32
Endarkened Feminist Epistemology	33
Constructing a Paradigm of Knowing for Black Women.....	35
Chapter Summary	37
CHAPTER 4: CO-CONSTRUCTING THE METHODS	38
Methods.....	39
Culturally Responsive Focus Groups.....	39
Sista Circle Methodology	41
Relationship to Participants	42

Co-constructing Data	43
Pilot Study.....	44
Who Would (Re)member With Me?.....	44
Introductory Meeting	47
Virtual Sista Circles	48
Field Notes	49
Coding and Data Analysis	49
 CHAPTER 5: FIRST STRAND: INTERACTIONS WITH FACULTY, TRIP LEADERS, AND PEERS	53
Introduction to Findings	53
Faculty and Peer Interactions Revealing Notions of Support and Fear	54
Influence of Trip Leader Background	58
Interactions with Peers During Study Abroad	64
Summary of Thematic Strand One	68
 CHAPTER 6: SECOND STRAND: INTERACTIONS WITH BLACKNESS IN STUDY ABROAD CONTEXTS	70
Anti-Blackness as a Global Phenomenon	71
Black womanhood in the African Diaspora	74
Black Women’s Bodies on Display	78
Summary of Thematic Strand Two	83
 CHAPTER 7: THIRD STRAND: HEALING THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERACTIONS DURING STUDY ABROAD	85
(Re)membering Through Expanded Knowledge	86
Healing Through Self-Reflection	96
Healing Through Sista-hood and Othermothering	99
Summary of Thematic Strand Three	103
 CHAPTER 8: SYNTHESIS, RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONSLUION	105
Synthesis of Findings	105
Recommendations for Practice	107
Recommendations for Trip Leaders	107
Background Research of Location is Necessary.....	107
Conversations Regarding Global Power, Privilege, and Oppression.....	108
Transparency and Communication	109
Influence of relationships and interactions	109
Influence of Sista Circles	110
Technology During Study Abroad	110
Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions	111
Increase Trip Leaders of Color	111
Trip Leader Training	112
Recommendations for Globalizing Graduate Education Curriculum	112
Graduate Education Curriculum	112

Transformative Learning in Study Abroad	112
Implications for Scholarship	113
Adult Meaning Making Through International Travel	113
Transnational Context Expands Understanding of Intersecting Identities	114
Black Women’s Experiences in Higher Education Literature	114
Theoretical Implications	115
Embodied Nature of Knowledge	115
Use of Culturally Relevant Theories in Research	115
Methodological Implications	116
Use of Technology for Data Gathering	116
Influence of Sista Circles	116
Recommendations for Study Abroad Literature	117
Comparison of Institutional Types and Programs	117
Short-Term Versus Long-Term Programs	117
Conclusion	118
APPENDICES	120
APPENDIX A: Participant Solicitation	121
APPENDIX B: Participant Consent Form	123
APPENDIX C: Demographic Questionnaire	125
APPENDIX D: Sista Circle Questions	127
REFERENCES	128

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Participant Profiles	46
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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Braids as a Metaphor	7
Figure 2: Conceptual Model of Meaning Making Through Black Feminist Epistemology	36
Figure 3: Summary of Analysis	51
Figure 4: Braid of (Re)membering Black Womanhood through Study Abroad.....	52

CHAPTER 1: BEGINNING THE JOURNEY OF (RE)MEMBERING

My own experiences motivated this dissertation journey. Traveling abroad allowed me to think differently about my social positionality and my physical body, depending on which spaces I was navigating. For instance, in Vietnam my hair and skin were ever present as we traveled. Many women would stare at me and in some instances, would touch my hair. Often, people commented on my skin tone. These were experiences I was not prepared for, which prompted much reflection regarding who I am in the spaces in which I travel. These feelings I had prompted me to (re)member my understanding of Black womanhood. Black womanhood denotes a twofold meaning making process of outward experience as well as internal process. For instance, the outward experience reflects how being Black and being a woman influences how you are treated. At the same time, the internal process reflects how being Black and being a woman is a way of understanding your lived experiences. From my own experiences, what I once knew to be Black womanhood, would forever be changed after traveling beyond national borders.

Further, traveling with a predominantly White American group (including the trip leaders), there were multiple instances of privilege that went unnoticed and thus unaddressed. For instance, a white peer asked that our trip's graduate assistant, who was from Vietnam, to only speak English when our hosts could also speak English because she felt uncomfortable not understanding what was being said. I witnessed in instances such as these how privilege and language were interconnected and manifested during study abroad experiences, particularly for English speaking students from the US. This incident (among others) really upset me. I was angry that doctoral students in the College of Education, who claimed to be critical researchers, would act this way. I was upset that as a group of doctoral students, we did not interrogate our

social positionalities before, during, and after our study abroad. As a Black woman, I interrogate the interconnectedness of my privileges and oppressions daily through my own lived experiences. Needless to say, interactions with faculty, peers, and people in the community generated multiple questions regarding meaning making through study abroad. It was not until later that I realized what I was feeling in my body and my soul, was something to which I needed to pay more attention. I was beginning to see the importance of listening to what I was feeling in my body and why. I was learning to see the role my body played in my own meaning making of my lived experiences. I engaged in a process of meaning making I refer to as (re)membering, tied directly to my embodied lived experiences as a Black woman moving beyond the national borders on study abroad.

Meaning Making Under the Current Landscape

I kept a journal and reflected quite a bit during those three weeks in Vietnam. After returning to the US, I dialogued with a few other Black women who also participated in study abroad experiences. I was left wondering what were the experiences of other Black women who engaged in study abroad. I especially wondered about those who were older adult students pursuing graduate degrees. I decided to do some research. Amongst the multiple journal articles and dissertation studies, a handful of studies examined Black undergraduate students (Bruce, 2012; Cheppel, 2012; Day Vines, 1998; Gaines, 2012). Holmes' (2008) study included graduate students, however did so in combination with undergraduate students. Through further examination, Chapman (2007), Henry (2014), Jackson (2006), Sol (2014), and Willis (2012) examined self-identified undergraduate Black women's study abroad experiences. Black graduate student women's meaning making of their lived experiences while navigating transnational contexts warrants further attention.

Centering African American graduate student women in this study is not to say only they make meaning of these transnational experiences. However, there is something about Black graduate student women's lived experiences that elicits a nuanced process of meaning making as a result of moving back and forth from the US to study abroad spaces. For example, moving back and forth across bodies of water as an African American graduate student woman elicited broader global understandings of myself that I had not previously examined. My own international experiences provided instances of cultural contradiction and I continue to question in what ways my formal education has been a form of violence through intellectual colonization. Studying abroad and experiencing ways of living and being beyond US borders further confirmed for me that there are multiple ways of seeing and understanding the world. This notion challenged much of what I learned in US education. Having been educated in the US, I was taught to remove my intuition, to listen, and regurgitate what was taught to me.

Through her own transnational experiences, Dillard (2006) shared, "I found international experiences to be both critical and crucial sites of contradictions as well as important transformation and reconstruction of my perspectives" (p. 62). There was something about the study abroad context and transnational movement that triggered meaning making in more nuanced ways than in US contexts. Moving the experiences of Black graduate student women from the margin to the center of discourses and theories may create educational experiences in which everyone feels validated for who they are (hooks, 1984). My aim in this dissertation study was to center the process of collective meaning making for Black graduate student women as they navigated a particular transnational context.

The Problem: Meaning Making Through Study Abroad

A body of literature exists that examines the experiences of Black women who engage in study abroad (Chapman, 2007; Henry, 2014; Sol, 2014; Willis, 2012), but gaps in the literature exist relative to sampling and methods. First, previous studies only examined undergraduate women's experiences. Second, previous studies have utilized semi-structured interviews and surveys to understand participants' study abroad experiences. Additional bodies of literature examine Black women's identity development (Henry, West, & Jackson, 2010; Porter & Dean, 2015; Watt, 2006; Winkle-Wagner, 2009; Zamani, 2003), but these studies examine undergraduate students from within the US. Authors also argue undergraduate meaning making of study abroad focuses primarily on self-identity, personal desires, and experience (Dirkx, Spohr, Tepper, & Tons, 2009). For graduate students, "the sense-making process reflects a complex relationship between academic or professional goals and self-formative processes that seem inherent to adult learners participating in formal education" (Dirkx et al., 2009). However, adult meaning making is also influenced by participants' social positionalities. Black graduate student women's meaning making of study abroad is a largely overlooked phenomenon despite growing number of Black graduate student women who engage in it. This study seeks to address that gap.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to bring Black graduate student women's meaning making into the academic discourse of study abroad and higher education by addressing the question: *How do Black graduate student women make meaning of themselves through study abroad?* Secondary questions supporting this inquiry are:

- In what ways does transnational movement during study abroad elicit meaning making for Black graduate student women?
- In what ways do relationships and interactions influence Black graduate student women's meaning making of themselves during study abroad?

I chose to address these questions by exploring Black women's meaning making of themselves through study abroad – a context characterized by racial, gendered, national, and class dynamics. Study abroad is a unique learning opportunity for students who wish to pursue educational opportunities in countries other than their own (Twombly, S. B., Salisbury, M. H., Tumanut, S. D., & Klute, P., 2012). Further, studying abroad provides Black women opportunities to expand their knowledge of self and interrogate their social positionalities on a global scale (Chapman, 2007; Henry, 2014; Sol, 2014; Willis, 2012). These elements reflect the importance of a deeper examination of participants meaning making of themselves through study abroad.

Definitions of Key Terms. In this study, I refer to participants as *Black women*. This was a deliberate choice to acknowledge the multiple identities of participants in this study who, in addition to identifying as American, are also from the African continent and the African diaspora. When referring to Black women though, I am not defining who constitutes as such for my participants. Participants were asked if they identified as African American and were also given the opportunity to self-identify. Thus, participants who identify historically and culturally as African American and/or Black American were invited to participate. The term *study abroad* refers to the act of engaging in an educationally related activity in a country other than one's own. For this study, the term study abroad encompassed all education abroad programs by which

graduate students might engage. Examples included experiences that are credit bearing, non-credit bearing, cross-cultural, internship, independent research, exploratory, and fellowships.

Throughout these pages, *meaning making* refers to how participants came to understand or make sense of the life experience (Ignelzi, 2000) of study abroad. Meaning making of an experience is the process of “retaining, reaffirming, revising, or replacing elements of their orienting system to develop more nuanced, complex and useful systems” (Gillies, Neimeyer, and Milman, 2014, p. 208). Further, adult learning literature argues the inclusion of affect and emotion are necessary to understand personal experience in the lives of adults (Dirkx, 2001). Thus, drawing on the above definitions and my participants’ narratives, in this study I am referring to how the Black women in this study utilized their bodies as sites of knowledge production through study abroad.

As I describe how traveling to and from study abroad influenced participants meaning making of themselves, I introduce the term transnational movement. In this study, the term *transnational* (Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2012) refers to “a way of looking at endarkened feminism that is beyond or through (trans) the boundaries of nations” (p. 6). *Transnational movement* refers to the meaning and understanding derived from not just one physical space, time, or individual, but encompasses meaning making generated from interacting with people and contexts while moving to and from locations during study abroad. Participants expanded their understanding of themselves as they navigated study abroad locations.

I employed the concept of *braiding* as a metaphor throughout my dissertation. Utilizing braiding or “trenzas” was informed by Black Feminist scholarship (Abraham, 2001; Anim-Addo, 2014) and Chicana/Latina feminist scholarship (Gonzalez, 2001; Quiñones, 2012; 2016). I utilized braiding in this study because braids have touched all Black women’s lives in some way.

Honestly, when I hear the word 'braid', I automatically think of Black women. I believe this is linked to my own upbringing and getting my hair braided. I can recall at an early age my mom braiding my hair. And even to this day, as an adult, my sister just recently braided my hair over the holiday break. Braiding symbolizes a process of transformation from multiple strands into one constructed single braid. For example, the braider takes different strands and through a technique of weaving, they join them together, ultimately conclude with the final braid.

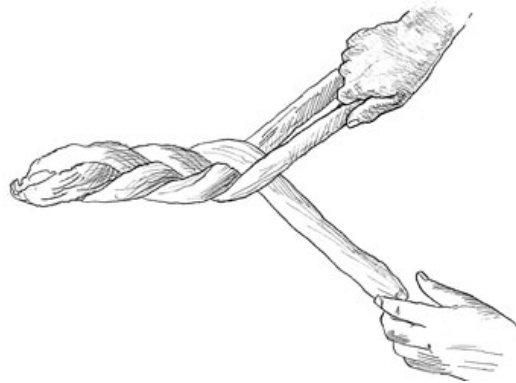


Figure 1: Braids as a Metaphor

As the braider of this dissertation, I connected the different chapters together to represent how different aspects of knowledge come together to form a process of meaning making missing from study abroad and higher education literature.

Overview

By conducting this study alongside Black graduate student women, the participants and I explored the unique role our bodies played in our meaning making through study abroad. In this dissertation, I argue relationships and interactions during study abroad influenced how the Black women in this study made meaning of themselves. This study contributes to the academic literature regarding study abroad, particularly at the intersection of interactions, knowledge production, and transnational experience. Analysis and findings from this study contributes to understanding 1) meaning making of lived experiences in nuanced ways, 2) the importance of

culturally relevant methods, and 3) how global experiences influence teaching and learning in graduate education.

To support my argument, Chapter 2 situates my study within current conversations regarding 1) internationalization and graduate student study abroad, 2) Black student study abroad experiences, and 3) the experiences of Black women who study abroad. Adding a third strand, Chapter 4 lays the foundation for my inquiry through the epistemological framework. I utilized both Black Feminist Epistemology (Collins, 2009) and Endarkened Feminist Epistemology (Dillard, 2000) to illustrate how Black women produce knowledge through lived experience, dialogue, and reflection with other Black women. In Chapter 4, I add the methodological strand, which includes my positionality statement, sista circle methodology, data collection, and data analysis. This chapter also concludes with the model of (re)membering Black womanhood generated from participants' narratives. Chapters 5 through 7 weave together findings and discussions, reflecting my thematic interpretation of participants' experiences. Chapter 5 examines the influence of relationships and interactions with faculty, trip leaders, and peers on Black women's meaning making of themselves through study abroad. In Chapter 6, I center Blackness within the study abroad context, drawing connections between interactions within the location and participant's social positionalities. In Chapter 7, I describe how participants' self-reflection influenced their meaning making of themselves through study abroad. Lastly, I begin Chapter 8, with a brief synopsis of my findings, then present implications for theory and practice, before presenting my concluding remarks.

CHAPTER 2: BRAIDING THE LITERATURE

As I began exploring Black women's experiences in study abroad, I realized how few studies specifically examined Black women's experiences. Further, I did not find any studies uplifting the voices of Black graduate student women who studied abroad. As I continued searching for any experiences in current literature regarding Black women's study abroad experiences, I recalled Collins (2009) who argued that in centering the experiences of Black women, one begins to see how their experiences have been historically erased and systematically marginalized from mainstream literature. Needless to say, the lack of literature left me heartbroken. Once again, I found myself wondering why the lack of interest in Black women's experiences. It took me feeling heartbroken to see once again the depth of erasure and marginalization occurring within study abroad research, as one aspect of higher education. Thus, I embarked on this dissertation journey to add to current literature and aid in the (re)membering of Black women's study abroad experiences.

This chapter braids together the body of literature regarding internationalization and graduate student study abroad, Black student study abroad experiences, and the study abroad experiences of self-identified Black women. These bodies of literature were important for me to include in this dissertation because they provided context for my dissertation study by highlighting how current literature situates the experiences of Black women who study abroad within current research. I first briefly examine the history of study abroad, particularly as it relates to internationalization practices in higher education and graduate education. This background information was contextually important to explain how graduate study abroad has evolved through international efforts. Next, I discuss structural issues influencing Black students' decisions to study abroad. When I began researching the topic, most of the research I

found focused on participants' decision making to study abroad and the barriers they experienced during the decision-making process. Then, I discuss how current literature presents the experiences of Black students who study abroad. After digging further into the literature, I came across a handful of dissertation studies examining the experiences of Black students who studied abroad. But, it was not until even deeper research that I came across another handful of studies specifically examining Black women who studied abroad. Thus, the final section of my review centers the literature on the Black women who study abroad. Put together, what is included in my literature review and the order, mirrors the process by which I found these bodies of literature and braided them together.

Study abroad is one experience some college students engage in during their educational journeys and plays an important role in enhancing global citizenship (Denda, 2013) and intercultural competence (Anderson & Lawton, 2011). Educators concerned with global education are interested in understanding how these global learning experiences influence participants' meaning making, especially as they pertain to their personal and professional pursuits. However, as we consider study abroad, participants tend to be undergraduate White women (Holmes, 2008; Sweeney, 2013). This assumption overlooks a community of adult learners who also engage in the experience. In 2013/2014, approximately 5.6% of study abroad participants were Black (Cheppel, 2012; Twombly et al, 2012). Additionally, in the same year, graduate students comprised 12.7% of all US students studying abroad (Institute of International Education, 2015). Little is known about the meaning making of Black graduate student women. To reach more understanding, this dissertation study provides deeper insight into the importance of returning to the body as a site of knowledge production for Black women who study abroad.

Origin of Graduate Study Abroad

In an increasingly globalized postsecondary education community, scholars concerned with graduate education are charged with preparing graduate students to engage with people around the world (Dirkx, Spohr, Tepper, & Tons, 2009; Sinclair, 2014). In response, some graduate programs have begun offering international experiences in faculty-led, short-term (three weeks or fewer) study abroad programs for doctoral students. Because study abroad programs specific to graduate programs are relatively rare, little is known about the experiences of graduate students and how such program influence graduate students and graduate education. In this section, I provide brief historical overviews of internationalization in higher education, internationalization of graduate education, study abroad, and graduate study abroad.

Historical Overview of Internationalization in Higher Education

Internationalization has become a key priority in US higher education (Merkx, 2003; Rumbly, Altbach, & Reisberg, 2012; Sinclair, 2014). There is growing concern regarding current curriculum and experiences not including aspects of global knowledge and experiences. Some internationalization efforts include recruitment of international students and scholars, research collaborations, curriculum, and study abroad (Knight, 2004; Siaya & Hayward, 2003; Olson, Green, & Hill, 2008; Sinclair, 2014). Higher education scholars have thus increased attention and efforts towards preparing students, faculty, and staff to navigate in a globalized world.

Multiple initiatives relating to internationalization in higher education began after World War II (Merkx, 2003). First, international students began enrolling in US colleges and universities, believing a US degree would provide more advantages than one from an institution in their home country (de Wit, 2002). Second, the increase in international students was followed by multiple internationalization efforts. First, universities began establishing offices to meet the

needs of the international students on their US campuses. Support services were followed by professional and national organizations, such as the Association of International Educators (NAFSA) (Merkx). During that time, we also saw the introduction of the Peace Corps, Fulbright grants, and the International Education Act of 1966. Third, universities saw increases in international studies majors as well as US students beginning to study abroad (Merkx). Fourth, universities began establishing global partnerships as well as research priorities and international development projects (Merkx). Lastly, universities were tasked with connecting international priorities to their missions. This strategy was later followed by the establishment of branch campuses. These examples illustrate the ways higher education has been at the forefront of internationalization efforts in the US.

Internationalization of Graduate Education

As large, doctorate degree granting institutions saw increases in international activities, higher education institutions began to add internationalization commitments in their missions (Merkx, 2003; Green, Luu, & Burris, 2008). Further, it is these departments who were more likely to support efforts of faculty to conduct international research and create partnerships with colleges around the world (Green et al.). Conversations though regarding internationalizing curriculum seems to remain at the undergraduate level. Scholars concerned with international education believe it is integral for graduate programs to consider international knowledge as part of their program curriculum (Bista & Saleh, 2014; NASULGC, 2004).

Brief History of Study Abroad

The earliest study abroad experiences for US students originated in the nineteenth century, focusing on tours, museums, and other cultural site visits to Europe (Twombly et al., 2012). The first study abroad tours took place after World War 1, taking women from eastern

colleges around the world. These earlier trips were either part of junior year abroad or faculty led programs, continuing the focus on cross-cultural learning. In 1919, the Institute of International Education, an independent non-profit organization, began several initiatives to increase US student participation in study abroad through the junior year abroad program and study abroad as a part of the undergraduate curriculum (Merkx, 2003; Green, Luu, & Burris, 2008).

Between World War I and II, factors such as the elective system in liberal arts education, the credit system, and general education, contributed to growth of study abroad programs (Twombly et al., 2012). Since then, preparing college students to interact with diverse peers, including internationally, has been a key priority for education, business and national policy. Today, the focus of study abroad continues to be cultural learning, however in the new global economy, the goal has expanded to learning to work with people from differing backgrounds and contexts to achieve responsible outcomes to issues we face as global citizens (Nolan, 2009).

Graduate Study Abroad

Graduate students tend to be on average 34 years old, have more professional experience, and have more focused areas of study (Dirkx, Millar, Berquist, & Vizvary, 2014; Shallenberger, 2009), all of which contribute to varying learning experiences yet to be fully understood for graduate students and requires further inquiry. Undergraduate student's sense-making of study abroad focuses primarily on self-identity, personal desires, and experience (Dirkx et al., 2009). For graduate students, "the sense-making process reflects a complex relationship between academic or professional goals and self-formative processes that seem inherent to adult learners participating in formal education" (Dirkx et al., 2009). These adult learners are motivated to study abroad by vastly different reasons because of their background and life experiences. For example, many adult learners are more open to new ways of seeing the world and are seeking

experiences that allow them to make deeper connections to their life experiences (Shallenberger, 2009). Further, adult students are often more motivated to study abroad because they seek to tie their experience to being parents or being able to directly connect their experiences to work (Shallenberger, 2009).

Graduate programs offering study abroad opportunities are on the rise (Dirkx, Spohr, Tepper, & Tons, 2009). This increase in programs presents a unique research opportunity to explore how meaning is generated through study abroad at the graduate level. Examining Black women's meaning making of study abroad at the *graduate* level is important to note here. A critical examination of the current literature was essential to more holistically understand the influence of studying abroad on graduate student learning, particularly for Black women. Thus, my goal in the following literature review is to critically examine the current study abroad higher education literature, illuminating the need to expand the focus of internationalization to include graduate education and Black women's experiences.

Structural Issues Influencing Black Student's Decision to Study Abroad

This section of my literature review examines Black students study abroad experiences. I include these experiences because much of the current literature examining Black students' study abroad experiences focus on decision-making, experiences, and barriers (Brown, 2002; Gaines, 2012; Penn & Tanner, 2009; Walker, Bukenya, & Thomas, 2011). Examples include lack of information, academic major, lack of faculty mentors, and finances. Further, much of the literature focuses on Black students as a monolithic group (Gaines, 2012; Day-Vines, 1998; Cheppel, 2012; Bruce, 2012). Previous studies focused on structural barriers and concerns that influence Black students' decision to study abroad. My dissertation study moved beyond these themes and centered on what students gained from studying abroad, despite structural issues.

Barriers Influencing Decision to Study Abroad

Academics and Unconscious Limits. Some scholars have identified multiple institutional barriers influencing Black students and their study abroad pursuits. One example is the lack of information regarding how an individual can participate in study abroad (Brown, 2002). Brown referred to the importance of showing students the benefits of study abroad and providing Black students in particular with information on how to finance the experience. A second barrier for Black student participation is their academic major (Penn & Tanner, 2009; Walker, Bukenya, & Thomas, 2011). Students who major in the liberal arts, social sciences, humanities, and foreign language are often those who have most access, flexibility, and time to fit study abroad into their program plan. More recently, African American students (along with other groups) are opting for short-term study abroad (6 weeks or less) instead of semester or yearlong (Bruce, 2012).

A third barrier for Black students' participation is the lack of faculty of color leading study abroad (Brown 2002; Penn & Tanner, 2009). In some cases, there is an increase in student of color participation when faculty of color led abroad experiences (Brown 2002; Penn & Tanner, 2009). Unfortunately, many faculty of color do not have international experience (Brown, 2002). This results in students of color having fewer mentors who share similar social positionalities, contributing to their lack of participation (Penn & Tanner, 2009). The fourth barrier for Black students is unconscious limits. Due to habitus, "previous experiences which can impose unconscious limits on an individual's educational and career aspirations" (Gasman, Baez, & Turner, 2008), students of color in particular may not seek out, get involved in, and/or pass up activities during their college careers. These previous experiences may be education related. For instance, being ignored in the classroom, being put down by teachers and peers, or being told

one's goal is unattainable. In the case of study abroad, students of color often do not feel this is an activity for them (Brown, 2002; Penn & Tanner, 2009; Walker, et al., 2011), which results in their missing out on the benefits.

Relationships. Within the current literature, one's family also influences their participation in study abroad. As Black students grapple with deciding to study abroad, they utilize family and their travel experiences as a source of information. Many values, norms, beliefs, and morals come from family (Chapman, 2007) who often lack previous travel experience and therefore study abroad may not be a priority. Messages heard such as "Black people don't travel" (Chapman, 2007, p. 86) and study abroad is "something that white people and rich people do" (Chapman, 2007, p. 86) are passed down as values in families. Such beliefs then influence Black people's desire to apply for study abroad (Dawson, 2000; Gaines, 2012). Educating students about the experience is not enough and often educating parent(s) is an important part of the process. A second relationship issue influencing Black student participation is the lack of Black friends and classmates represented within study abroad alumni or who have even traveled abroad personally. Students are highly influenced by friends and classmates (Walker, et al., 2011). For Black students, knowing someone who has studied abroad, who has shared their experiences, tends to have a positive influence on whether one will study abroad themselves.

Racism, Discrimination, and the Media. The global media is another issue influencing Black students' decision to study abroad (Gaines, 2012). Black people in particular locations are often portrayed negatively in the media. These portrayals often do not show large numbers of Black people, especially in countries where they are a numerical minority. Further, Black students have little to no knowledge regarding the experiences of other Black students who have

studied abroad (Gaines, 2012). Further, due to the mis-education of Black students (Woodson, 1998) in formal schooling, many African American students “do not always understand their relationship to Africa” (Dawson, 2000, p.125). Negative images of Africa and Africans portrayed in the media all act as hindrances not only for Black students to study abroad, but specifically to study abroad in Africa (Dawson, 2000). Many students have bought into the media’s negative portrayal of Africa and Africans. For example, portrayals include Africa as dangerous, war torn, and AIDS is running rampant. Further, Black students are concerned about how they will be perceived by Africans. Some Black students are concerned they will not be accepted or welcomed by Africans because they believe they are so far removed from their African ancestry. Both are concerns that hinder and challenge participation in these programs (Dawson, 2000). Chapman (2007) found, particularly when Black women go abroad, they learn their perception of themselves differs from the perceptions others have of them because of how they are portrayed in the global media (Chapman, 2007).

In this section, I discussed the current literature on Black students studying abroad. I included this section in my literature review because much of the current literature regarding Black students who are studying abroad pertains to barriers to overcome. My study moved the narrative beyond barriers. I argue there is much more to be understood from the study abroad experience, particularly for Black women graduate student women. In the following section, I move the focus to the few studies specifically examining Black students’ experiences and provide a different narrative than is seen in much of the current study abroad literature.

Black Students’ Experiences of Study Abroad

Black students continue to speak about what they learn about themselves because of their study abroad experience (Henry, 2014). Those interested in global education have recently

shifted their attention to how study abroad influences participants born in the US “sense of identity, self-concept, and self-esteem” (Henry, 2014, p. 10). Five studies have examined the experiences of Black students who studied abroad. Because there are five studies, expanding beyond these contexts is essential in future research. In my analysis, I first examine Gaines’ (2012) study centering on Black students who attended a Historically Black College & University (HBCU) and their perception of study abroad. I then turn to Day Vines (1998) who researched the impact of African diasporic travel on African American students. Next, I examine, Cheppel’s (2012) phenomenological study regarding how Black students made the decision to study abroad. This is followed by Bruce’s (2012) study focusing on the perception of study abroad through racial identity. Lastly, Holmes’ (2008) study explored the impact, involvement, and benefit of study abroad for undergraduate and graduate African American students. The following section analyzes these five studies more closely.

Gaines’ (2012) study aimed to quantitatively understand the perception of study abroad from Black undergraduates at HBCUs. This study added to current literature by including the experiences of students attending HBCU’s. “Although the majority of Black undergraduates do not matriculate to HBCUs, most Black college graduates were educated at HBCUs (Gaines, 2012, p. 9). Finance, family, and level of awareness were important issues in considering study abroad for participants in this study. Recommendations included the need for more faculty with international experiences as a potential influence on participation. Gaines’ quantitative study is important because it adds to current literature through the large data sample he collected. Gaines included a large sample, however lacked the lived experiences from participants that a qualitative study provides. A qualitative inquiry provides for more in depth examination of the how, why,

and in what ways through lived experiences. Thus, my dissertation built on Gaines' study by focusing on participants' actual lived experiences while studying abroad.

Unlike Gaines (2012), Day-Vines' (1998) qualitative study focused specifically on the impact of African diasporic travel on Black students through experience. Day-Vines determined African American undergraduate students began to replace negative stereotypes and assumptions about Africans with positive, informed ones. Additionally, participants were moved emotionally by the experiences of visiting slave remnants and began to examine African and African American values more critically. Due to their study abroad experience, students began to question their educational upbringing and what they were previously taught about Africa. Day-Vine's study provided a nuanced understanding of the importance of African diasporic travel for African American students and their psychosocial development. There are three aspects future research might include. First, an understanding of self-identified Black women's experiences, separate from Black men. Second, examining experiences from multiple study abroad locations, rather than just one. Lastly, expanding participants to include graduate students.

Cheppel's (2012) study examined African American students' intentions and reasons for participating in study abroad. Like Day-Vine's (1998), Cheppel's study limited participants to undergraduate students. Utilizing phenomenology though, was appropriate for this study and furthered Gaines' (2012) study by focusing on experience. This methodology allowed Cheppel to ascertain the meaning of the lived experiences of participants within the context of study abroad as the phenomenon, specifically from participants' perspective. Cheppel shared multiple findings in her study. A point of significance was African American students have important concerns regarding going abroad. For instance, Black students are concerned about being gone too long, racial issues, violence, and they question if studying abroad will actually assist them in being

more competitive on the job market. Similar to Gaines' (2012) study, Cheppel also determined the most important influence in the lives of the participants in this study were family, faculty, and knowing someone who studied abroad. This is important because multiple prior studies also indicate knowing another person, specifically another person of color who studied abroad, was influential in students' participation (Dawson, 2000; Gaines, 2012). While Cheppel's study examined important issues Black students considered in their decision to study abroad, the study did not examine concerns from the lens of participants' gender, perhaps unintentionally implying that all Black students experiences are the same. My study solely examined Black graduate student women, which illuminated the unique concerns considered in their decision to study abroad and in their actual lived experiences.

Bruce (2012) utilized semi-structured interviews to understand Black students' perception of varying study abroad contexts through the lens of racial identity. Bruce presented two important findings not discussed by Gaines (2012) and Cheppel (2012). First, participants found home while abroad. Similar to Day-Vines' (1998) study, participants reported finding home in relationships developed with local people from African countries, in study abroad group leaders who shared their racial identity (which was rare for most students), with other Black people they connected with when not on the African continent, and with other Black students they traveled with or met from other institutions while abroad. Second, culturally responsive study abroad leaders are a benefit to Black students. Due to the mis-education and lack of accurate information about their histories during schooling, Black students in Bruce's study were searching for connections to their past and familial ties missing from those pasts. For Black students, it was important for them to have a culturally responsive trusting relationship with a mentor/trip leader. This individual either actively and regularly encouraged them to participate in

a study abroad or provided them space to reflect and discuss experiences encountered while on their study abroad. Bruce concluded racial identity was an important aspect of his study; however, how participants grappled with lived experiences related to their identities beyond race was missing.

Holmes (2008) utilized inquiry and Afrocentric theory, to conduct a study exploring the impact, involvement, and benefit of study abroad for undergraduate and graduate African American students. Unlike previous studies (Bruce, 2012; Cheppel, 2012; Gaines, 2012; Day-Vines, 1998), Holmes' was the only study to include the study abroad experiences of Black *graduate* students. Participants expressed having similar experiences regarding study abroad as undergraduate students. For example, financing their trip, completing paperwork, and the lack of pre-departure information were prevalent issues amongst participants. Additionally, participants learned about their national identity as Americans, were better able to see different issues from multiple perspectives, and expanded their understanding of their racial identity in relation to the world (not just from a U.S. perspective). However, participants' experiences were not separated and understood by those who were undergraduates and those who were graduate students. My study focused on graduate students, concluding Black graduate student women do have different experiences and a nuanced process of meaning making different than undergraduates.

This section examined previous studies regarding Black students who studied abroad. A few aspects are missing from the current body of literature. First, previous research does not examine meaning making at the graduate level. My study responded to this gap by examining the meaning making process of Black graduate student women. Secondly, these studies lumped Black student experiences together, paying little attention to the differences gender may play in

how participants' meaning making changes as a result. Future studies regarding these elements would strengthen the current body of literature.

The following section of this literature review highlights studies specifically examining Black women's study abroad experiences. Because Black graduate student women are the focus of my dissertation study, I present this examination regarding how current literature discusses this population and their experiences.

Black Women Who Participate in Study Abroad

The majority of study abroad participants are White women (Holmes, 2008; Sweeney, 2013) and therefore White women's experiences are centered in much of the current study abroad literature. Centering White women's experiences in study abroad literature perpetuates a cycle erasing the experiences of women of color, specifically Black women. Harris (1990) argued "in a racist society like this one, the storytellers are usually white and so 'woman' turns out to be white woman" (p. 589). The process of being able to tell their story and reflect upon their experience assists Black women in further understanding who they are and what it means to be Black women from a global perspective (Henry, 2014; Jackson 2006; Sol, 2014, Willis, 2012). Further, this research counters the current narratives regarding study abroad. As such, my study shares knowledge and experiences missing from current research and does so through their collective stories. My study explored how Black graduate student women made meaning of themselves through study abroad.

In the following section, I present an analysis of how previous authors have methodologically and epistemologically studied Black women's ways of acquiring knowledge through their study abroad experience. Previous studies highlight how context influences

meaning making and what self-discovery occurs for Black women from studying abroad. My analysis follows those themes in the following section.

Context Matters

Grounded in intersectionality, Critical Race Theory, and Black Feminist Thought, Willis' (2012) ethnographic research examined the study abroad experiences of 19 undergraduate Black women attending community colleges. This study adds to current literature regarding Black women and study abroad because previous research has focused on the experience of "White, middle-class, female students at 4-year institutions" (Willis, 2012, p. 9). Willis's study fills a gap in two ways, by focusing on Black women and the community college context.

Participants who traveled to Spain and Italy expressed experiencing the most issues with microaggressions. Microaggressions are "subtle insults aimed at people of color. These may be verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual, and may be automatic or unconscious" (Willis, 2012, p. 21). For example, participants experienced looks and staring, being ignored by wait staff, being hissed at, propositioned, touched, and followed around at times (Willis, 2012). Despite negative instances, participants expressed multiple positive outcomes from the study abroad experience. Participants gained greater agency and empowerment, and a better sense of who they were in relation to others. Participants believed they could accomplish goals previously thought to be impossible, expressed more confidence in being Black women, and articulated a stronger commitment to feminism and social justice. These changes were all due to how they were treated and how they witnessed other women being treated while studying abroad. A concern of Willis' study though is many of the participants studied abroad years prior to when this study was conducted. Interviewing participants soon after they return may warrant more accurate and rich data.

Through semi-structured interviews, Henry's (2014) study built on Willis' (2012) study by examining participants experiences through multiple study abroad locations. Henry's study focused on the experiences of five undergraduate Black women who studied abroad for one semester to South Africa, France, South Korea, and a Semester At Sea program. The study highlighted how they navigated the study abroad process. Henry utilized womanist theoretical perspectives and narrative inquiry, and determined culture shock was a large factor in these women's experiences. Examples include adjustments to food, traveling around, adjusting to slower paces of living, differences in the education systems, having to be the expert on American history, and managing regimented expectations versus classrooms allowing students to think on their own. Henry's participants also expressed feelings of isolation by being the only one or one of few Black women during their experiences, which assists future studies in understanding what Black women grapple with during their study abroad experience.

Henry's study expanded current literature because she included multiple study abroad contexts in her study. However, future studies might seek to examine classroom interactions and those with the community more deeply to determine *what* about these interactions resulted in meaning making for Black women. Similar to Willis' (2012) study, participants in Henry's study created varying meanings from their experience by focusing on the value in all their experiences, whether positive or negative. Participants gained a "greater sense of self-acceptance and confidence; more independence, patience, and maturity; more open-mindedness; and a general sense of pride in achieving this accomplishment" (2014, p. 87). As one of the few studies concluding African American women gain self-acceptance, confidence, and a sense of pride, future research is warranted to understand what about the context of the study abroad experience leads African American women to these outcomes.

Self-Discovery

Chapman's (2007) study expanded on Henry's (2014) study by merging the theories of feminism, self-reflexivity, and intersectionality to examine how meaning of one's identity is made through the context of study abroad, particularly for undergraduate Black women. A strength of the study is data was collected in three stages – First, through oral histories gathered prior to the trip, then from experiences while abroad through journals, notes, social media posts, and the final stage concluded with meaning made from the experience after returning. These forms of data challenge traditional modes of reading and writing. In examining these modes further, Chapman's study demonstrates Black women in this study generate meaning from them. What Chapman is suggesting, that Henry (2014) and Willis (2012) do not, is we should examine the study abroad context more critically, through cultural modes of meaning making. From this examination, we learn how these particular modes assist students' meaning making differently than traditional modes often present in graduate education. Participants shared stories of residents asking questions about their hair and regularly staring and pointing. Additionally, participants were frustrated about determining where to get their hair done and having little to no access to hair care products in locations where Black women were not a critical mass. Chapman's study brings to light how undergraduate Black women made meaning from study abroad as a result of their hair experiences. Results of this study illuminate race and hair as social and racial markers for Black women and require attention in future studies.

Similar to Chapman (2007), Jackson (2006) also conducted a study examining how undergraduate African American women experienced study abroad from three data points. Findings indicate participants' national identity influenced their experiences more than any other identity. Further, participants also gained more self-assurance, personal strength, and

empowerment for themselves and others. Jackson's study contributes to current literature in regards to the scope of the study. Participants engaged in semester and year-long study abroad programs. Participation in these longer-term programs have been decreasing, especially for African American participants. However, Jackson's study only examined experiences from one institution.

Talburt and Stewart (1999) conducted an ethnographic study of the only undergraduate African American woman on a study abroad trip. While the study initially examined the experiences of all participants, authors turned their attention to the only Black woman on the trip because of how race and gender specifically began influencing the experiences of this student. The Black woman in their study shared she experienced negative reactions from individuals in the host community. Additionally, when she shared these encounters with other study abroad participants, they did not believe these encounters were due to her race or gender. Authors conclude further examining other self-identified Black women's study abroad experiences are warranted.

Chapman (2007) introduced an understanding of power through Black women's hair; however, only examines their study abroad experiences through their hair. While solely examining hair is important to Black women and their processes for obtaining knowledge, holistically examining their study abroad experiences from an intersectional lens is warranted. This point ties back to Talburt and Stewart's (1999) study as they conclude, "previous research offers only limited points of comparison for understanding how race and gender affect students abroad" (1999, p. 172). There is limited research on how the interlocking systems of race and gender (among additional identities) influence self-identified graduate level Black women who study abroad. Going into a study intentionally focusing on participants experiences and

understandings of race and gender, along with other structural forms of identity intersectionally, requires more in-depth attention. Both Chapman's and Talburt and Stewart's studies concluded racialized otherness occurs outside the US and require further analysis.

Utilizing the frameworks of African American psychology, intersectionality (Black Feminist Standpoint Epistemology), identity, and "cultural constructivist epistemology" (Methodology section, para. 2), Sol's (2014) study furthers Chapman's (2007) study by seeking to understand how African American women who study abroad make sense of their experiences in connection with their life histories. The inclusion of multiple paradigms strengthened this study because Black women's understanding of the world cannot be limited to only understanding their experiences from one mode of understanding. Multiple interpretive frameworks support the notion that Black women make meaning of their experiences through multiple processes enacted simultaneously.

Sol's (2014) study found undergraduate Black women's understanding of and shifts in their identity occurred as a result of their daily experiences, concluding Black women's intersecting identities are influenced by their daily experiences. Sol found these influences occurred when power dynamics changed in their everyday experiences, specifically in regards to their social positions within race, class, gender, and nationality structures. Examples such as being harassed by residents and stopped by police, bias towards their countries, and struggles with host families caused Black women to reflect in different contexts regarding their intersecting identities. Sol, like Henry's (2014) study, also examined the study abroad experiences of Black women in multiple contexts. However, an understanding of what specifically about study abroad locations provided through Black women's lens, different from other educational settings, was missing. Including the analysis of study abroad locations would

strengthen this study, specifically for scholars interested in meaning making taking place in varying higher education contexts.

This section examined previous studies exploring the experiences of Black graduate student women who have studied abroad. However, further analysis is needed regarding how aspects of study abroad influences meaning making for Black graduate student women.

Chapter Summary

Four studies examined the experiences of Black graduate student women who studied abroad. Much is missing, though, from current research, particularly from the experiences of African American *graduate* student women. First, little is known in current research regarding how Black graduate student women make meaning of themselves through study abroad. Second, no studies have examined how aspects of study abroad influences meaning making for self-identified graduate level Black women. Some examples of these aspects are daily activities, interactions with trip leaders and peers, interactions with people within the countries participants studied abroad, and how issues of social positionalities are implicated in trip preparation and during the trip. Methodologically, much of the current inquiry into study abroad experiences focuses on one-on-one interviews and surveys. More analysis is needed to understand how Black women co-construct meaning of themselves through dialogue and reflection with one another. The following epistemological framework chapter argues for the need to use Black Feminist Epistemology as the theoretical foundation for my study. My epistemological foundation supports my use of *sista circle* methodology, as a culturally responsive method, to understand Black graduate student women's meaning making of themselves as a result of study abroad.

CHAPTER 3: EPISTEMOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

I had the opportunity to learn how to cook a few Ghanaian dishes during my second trip to Ghana. Not only do I love to eat food, I also love to cook it. I found the opportunity to learn how to cook even a couple Ghanaian dishes, to be an extra special treat on this trip. Cooking is something I learned to do from the women in my family and more recently, my dad has taught me a thing or two. I recall though from my earlier cooking experiences, wanting my grandmothers and my mother to share recipes with me. My request of them was always met with, “I don’t have a recipe” and “you just have to watch me”. Learning to cook those dishes in Ghana was similar to my earlier cooking lessons. I had to watch. When asked, I handed these women various ingredients and assisted with stirring. As ingredients merged together, I saw dishes forming together. During one instance in Ghana, I was sitting outside the house scaling fish with aunty. Mind you, this was my first time scaling a fish. I recall not being able to see if I had removed all the scales and so I closed my eyes and felt with my fingers. Through closing my eyes and feeling my way, I was able to find the scales with my fingers and remove them. That moment with aunty illuminated for me one process Black women utilize to make meaning. Thus, through my own lived experience in Ghana, I realized the importance of *feeling to see*.

I shared the aforementioned story to illustrate my own meaning making during my time in Ghana. (Re)membering requires an understanding of the process by which Black women come to know and thus make meaning. As such, this chapter discusses Black feminist epistemology and Endarkened feminist epistemology as epistemological tools for understanding Black women’s nature of knowing. The Black feminist epistemological framework assisted in understanding what constitutes knowledge for Black women, how they come to know this knowledge, and therefore how meaning is made and understood (Collins, 2009). I then explained

how I utilized braiding as a metaphorical tool in my data analysis and reporting. Lastly, I conclude this chapter with the conceptual model of (re)membering, reflecting the lens by which I interpreted my participants meaning making of themselves through study abroad.

Black Feminist Epistemology

I begin this section by briefly introducing Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2009) as a liberatory project. I then move to examining Black feminist epistemology as a theoretical foundation for understanding the process of meaning making for Black women. Lastly, I conclude this section by presenting Dillard's (2000) Endarkened feminist epistemology, which places the notions of Black feminist epistemology within an educational context.

Black Feminist Thought

Collins (2009) argued "...elite men control western structures of knowledge validation, their interest pervade the themes, paradigms, and epistemologies of traditional scholarship" (2009, p. 269). White men's understanding of the world and experiences inform the way everyone comes to know (Collins, 2009; Dillard, 2000; Williams, Brewley, Reed, White, & Davis-Haley, 2005). Black women's understandings of the world counter those of White men and "have had to struggle against White male interpretations of the world" (Collins, 2009, p. 269). Black women have created alternative social spaces and locations for consciousness, in literature, daily conversations, and in everyday behavior. Much of the knowledge from these alternative spaces is missing from educational research and literature. These alternative locations allow for spaces of self-definition and self-valuation, where knowledge is shared and created in supportive communities. Dillard (2000) suggested it is in these spaces where theory or "narratives representations called life notes" (p. 664) originate as knowledge for Black women.

In *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins (2009) is “challenging the ways that knowledge is understood and constructed in the academy and beyond” (Dotson, 2015, p. 2323). For example, Collins suggests we become aware of the erasure of Black women’s experiences in literature by placing Black women at the center of discourses. Collins asserted, in centering Black women’s experiences, we learn what knowledge has been erased, silenced, and marginalized in educational research.

Construction of Knowledge

Collins (2009) suggested for Black women, knowledge is constructed in two ways: first through their intersectional lived experiences, and second, through reflecting and dialoguing about those experiences, especially with other Black women. Collins suggested it is within this connectedness during interactions, where dialogue and reflection occur and knowledge is shared, tested, and created.

Black women’s epistemology arises from their interactions with the world, their dialogue about those experiences, and how they make meaning as a result. Collins (2009) argued, to understand Black women’s nature of knowing, one must understand four tenets. The first is lived experience is meaning and “...because knowledge comes from experience” (Collins, 2009, p. 277), we must value experience as truth, especially for Black women. Second, Black women use dialogue and storytelling to share their experiences, especially with other Black women, and it is in these conversations, knowledge claims are heard and validated (Collins, 2009; Dillard, 2000). The ethics of care is the third element of Black women’s nature of knowing. “Talking with the heart” (Collins, 2009, p. 281) is an aspect of care acknowledging the value of individual perspective, understanding each person’s position, and valuing personal expressiveness (Dillard, 2000). Further, through “connected knowing” (Collins, 2009, p. 283) each person’s individual

experience adds to group understanding. The final element is personal accountability, where an individual must take a position and stick by it (Collins, 2009). Dillard (2000) expands this notion, pointing out one's knowledge claims are personal and cultural. It is within personal and cultural claims one is also "responsible to the members and well-being of the community from which their very definition arises" (p. 673).

Collins (2009) posits race, class, and gender are the structural systems oppressing Black women most and therefore influence their daily-lived experiences. Examining these intersectional experiences and how they influence individual Black women's lives is a way to understand how these identities interlock within certain contexts. This is not to say all Black women have the same experience. Rather, because of how their identities intersect and in what contexts, Black women's experiences cannot be easily defined or understood through one identity. Nor can they be understood in conjunction with genders other than those who identify as women. There is a need to center Black women's experiences and explore them with other African American graduate student women. In this research, my aim was to understand how African American women make meaning of their study abroad experience simultaneously with other African American graduate women who have studied abroad.

Meaning Making Through Transnational Contexts

As stated previously, there is an absence of literature examining Black women's experiences in the context of study abroad, especially as it pertains to their intersecting identities. In Black feminist epistemology, Collins (2009) argued for an expansion of Black women's meaning making beyond the US border. Collins asserted Black women's experiences cannot be understood just from a US context. Collins (2009) further emphasized, "stopping analysis at the US border thus functions to contain US Black feminist thought to Black women's interactions

with groups that are already in the United States” (p. 250). Therefore, Black feminist epistemology is useful for “...stimulating dialogue across the very real limitations of national boundaries, to develop new ways of relating to one another, in order to unpack the interconnectedness of Black women’s experiences” (Collins, 2009, p. 251). Dotson (2014) stated, “you have to constantly put yourself where you’re not at home and be an outsider within...constantly moving through landscape brings you to another perspective...another way of understanding the world.” Traveling beyond the US border prompts a global understanding of Black womanhood. Therefore, Black feminist epistemology justifies the examination of Black women’s transnational experiences.

Next, I discuss Endarkened feminist epistemology and how aspects of it assist in understanding Black women’s (re)membering within transnational contexts specifically in educational research.

Endarkened Feminist Epistemology

Theoretically and philosophically, endarkened feminist epistemology (Dillard, 2000, p. 662) expands Collins’ Black feminist epistemological theory for the purposes of educational research. Dillard (2000; 2006) wrote, there is a specialized knowledge positioned within the cultural, historical, and spiritual lived experiences of Black women missing from educational research. Shahid (2015) echoed Dillard by sharing, “my spiritual walk is not separate from my intellectual journey in academe” (p. 65). Further, endarkened feminist epistemology also emphasizes the importance of interaction and relationships; and requires the researcher to be responsible to those within the community they are researching. This responsibility ensures a culturally responsive method acknowledges and understands Black women’s diasporic experiences throughout educational research. Okpalaoka & Dillard (2012) wrote the following:

an endarkened feminist epistemology is also an approach to teaching and research that honors the wisdom, spirituality and critical interventions of transnational Black woman's ways of knowing and being in research, with the sacred serving as a way to describe the doing of it, the way that we approach the work (p. 6).

I included endarkened feminist epistemology for two reasons. First, endarkened feminist epistemology was essential for my dissertation study due to its inclusion of transnational movement. I define movement here in multiple ways. First, I am referring to traveling back and forth across land and bodies of water. Second, I am paying particular attention to valuing interactions and relationships between Black women from the African diaspora. Here, I am highlighting how transnational movement and interactions are essential to understanding lived experience and knowledge production in educational research. In my dissertation, I am centering how movement, lived experience, and interaction culminate to ways of knowing and acquiring knowledge between African ascendant women around the diaspora. Being an ascendant of African people, rather than a descendant, uplifts the forward movement of understanding oneself, thus re-conceptualizing the common downward (or moving backward) narrative often associated with African ascendant people (Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2012).

In regards to transnational movement, Dillard & Okpalaoka (2011) challenge Western notions of knowledge production by arguing lived experience, emotion, care, and the spiritual are essential to the nature of knowledge in transnational feminist research. Dillard & Okpalaoka (2011) go on to posit “from an endarkened feminist space, we are encouraged to move away from the traditional metaphor of research as a recipe to fix a problem to a metaphor that centers on reciprocity and relationship between the researcher and the researched” (p. 148). For Black women, the nature of knowledge resides in the production of knowledge and the spiritual journey

of “uncovering and constructing truth as the fabric of everyday life” (Dillard, 2000, p. 674).

Knowledge and wisdom derive from lived experience and are essential to making meaning of our own experiences through interactions and relationships with other Black women. Individual differences, expressiveness, emotion, and the spiritual are not distracting, but valued and encouraged (Collins, 2009; Dillard, 2000).

Second, endarkened feminist epistemology challenges what is considered truth in educational research and how Black women arrive at their “truth”. Dillard (2000) writes, knowledge and the acquisition of new knowledge is “stifled in traditional modes of representation and discourses” (p. 664). For instance, surveys and one-on-one interviews are highly valued as modes of acquiring data in educational research. These traditional Western modes of acquiring and validating knowledge contrast with what Collins and Dillard argued are culturally relevant, particularly for Black women. Further, endarkened feminist epistemology argues for more inclusion of Black women’s experiences in education research. One educational context receiving little attention in higher education is study abroad. My study aimed to utilize Black feminist epistemology and sista circle methodology to understand how study abroad, as one context within higher education, influences African American graduate student women’s (re)membering.

Constructing a Paradigm of Knowing for Black Women

I situated this dissertation within the critical theory paradigm as it relates to the ways Black women come to know, which compliments a Black feminist approach. A paradigm is “the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Thus, in a critical approach, nature of knowledge rests a structural understanding of experience and seek to

emancipate through inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Critical theory is the overarching paradigm by which I interpreted participants' co-construction of (re)membering Black womanhood through study abroad. I utilize critical theory in this dissertation alongside my epistemological framework, explaining the process by which Black women come to know through a structural and historically construct of meaning making.

The conceptual model in figure 1 displays Black women's make meaning of lived experience. The model reflects the following process for how Black women collectively generate and validate lived experiences as posited by Collins (2009) and Dillard (2006). The model is designed to portray visually how I made connections between the theoretical foundation and research questions initially guiding this dissertation.

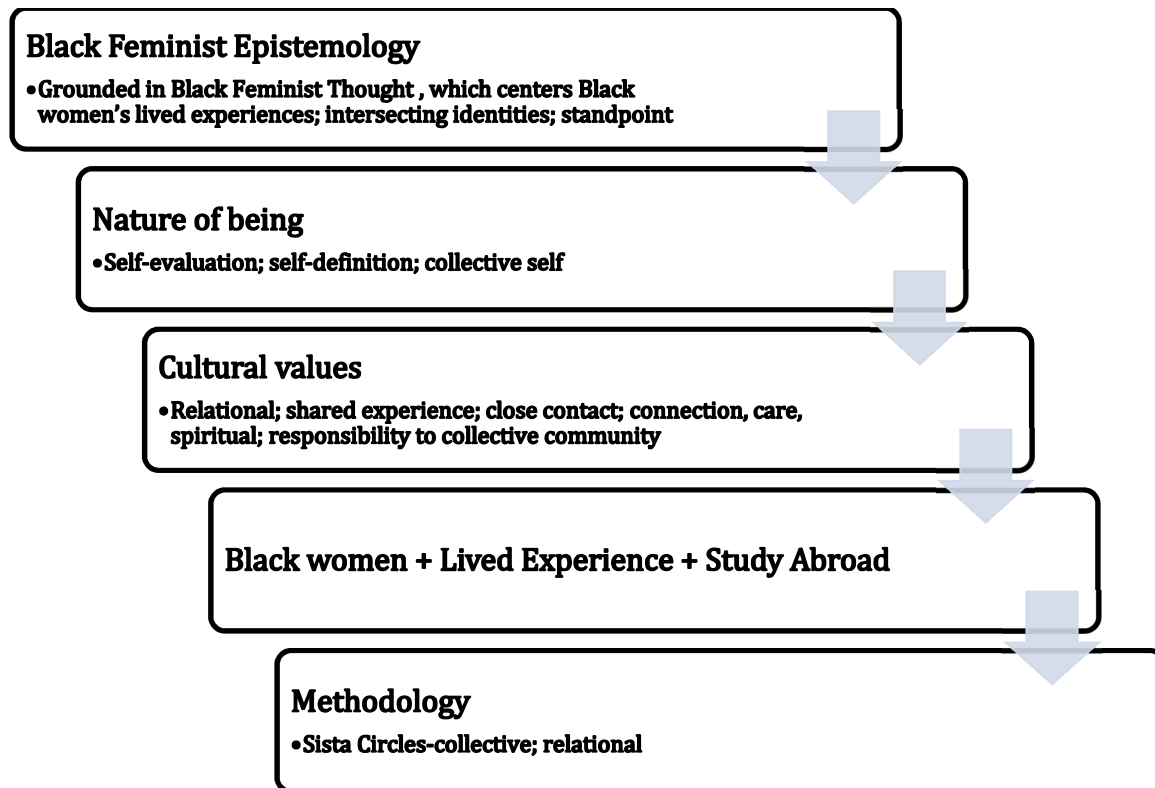


Figure 2: Conceptual Model of Meaning Making Through Black Feminist Epistemology

In my commitment to Endarkened feminist epistemology (Dillard, 2006), my study is grounded in Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2009). The first tier in figure 1 displays how Black feminist thought requires a centering of Black women's lived experiences as a foundation for meaning making. Black women's lived experiences can only be understood from the lens of their intersecting identities (Collins, 2009). Moving next to the second tier, Black feminist epistemology argues Black women must self-define and self-value their experience. Here though, the self is understood through collective knowing of intersecting identities and with other Black women. The third tier reflects that it is through cultural values such as relationships, shared experiences, close contact, connection, care, responsibility, and the spiritual where Black women make meaning (Collins, 2009; Dillard, 2006). Lastly, the fourth and fifth tier, result in the culmination of current literature and theoretical foundation, which led to the use of sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) as essential tools for answering my research questions. My inquiry rests at the intersection of Black women's lived experiences and context of study abroad. My aim was to dive deeper into Black graduate student women's experiences and understand more fully how they (re)membered Black womanhood through study abroad.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the tenets of Black feminist epistemology and how I utilized Collins (2009) and Dillard (2000) to illustrate how Black women come to know. Additionally, this section examined how understanding this process is essential to understanding Black women's experiences in educational and transnational contexts. The following chapter discusses my methods. I explain how utilizing sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) further assisted in my study to acquire, interpret, and analyze the experiences of Black graduate student women's meaning making through studying abroad.

CHAPTER 4: CO-CONSTRUCTING THE METHODS

I recall eating breakfast with two sista-scholars during my first trip to Ghana. During our conversation, we covered such topics as relationships with men, sex, religion, faith, and Black women's bodies, to name a few. As we collected our belongings and began to transition to that day's activities, Dr. XXX turned to us and said, "you know we just did a focus group". I froze. I began to recall our conversation and realized not only had we engaged in what I later learned was a sista circle (Johnson, 2015), but that I have been engaged in a number of these sista circles throughout my daily interactions with other Black women. As we walked, Dr. XXX went on to challenge our understanding of what it means to conduct a focus group. She suggested what we had been taught about focus groups was not how we should be conducting them. For instance, she challenged us, as Black women, to consider the following methodological questions. Why are you, as the researcher, not a part of the group? Why do you have all these questions? Why not let the group flow as it should naturally? Shouldn't participants be able to ask questions of one another? What would a (focus) group look like that empowers and uplifts Black women's ways of knowing and being; and validates such at the same time? During this brief interaction, my understanding of focus groups was forever changed. That moment with the two sista-scholars during my study abroad transformed my understanding of what it means to (re)member Black womanhood.

This chapter represents the essential elements I utilized in braiding together my methodological plan for generating, interpreting, and analyzing my data. In the following sections, I expand on my data collection. I begin by discussing sista circle methodology and why it was essential to my dissertation. The methodology is followed by my data collection process, which includes participant selection, virtual sista circles, and field notes. Next, I outline the data

analysis process. Lastly, I introduce the heuristic process of (re)membering Black womanhood through study abroad. *Figure 2* depicts how the Black women in this study made meaning of themselves through study abroad. Grounded in Black Feminist Epistemology (Collins, 2009), Black women make meaning of themselves through lived experience, reflection, and dialogue with other Black women. However, Black Feminist Epistemology is informed by ways of knowing grounded in US ideology.

Methods

In this section, I first introduce the group format and discuss why a culturally responsive group format, rather than one-on-one semi-structured interviews, was essential for my dissertation. I then introduce sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015), which is a culturally responsive methodology theoretically grounded in Black Feminist Epistemology.

Culturally Responsive Focus Groups

Focus groups provide researchers access to collective data generated from relationships and interaction amongst participants, not otherwise generated in a one-on-one interview (Byrd, 2009; Huber, 2010; Kitzinger, 1994; Liamputtong, 2010; Madriz, 2000; Moore-Callahan, 2010; Romm, 2015; Wilkinson, 1998). Liamputtong (2010) wrote, “the primary aim of a focus group is to describe and understand meanings and interpretations of a select group of people to gain an understanding of a specific issue from the perspective of participants of the group” (p. 3). Focus group participants are chosen for their ability to respond to the research questions by co-constructing shared meaning of an experience through group interaction (Huber, 2010; Kitzinger, 1994; Liamputtong, 2010; Madriz, 2000; Moore-Callahan, 2010; Wilkinson, 1998). The content generated is important, however the benefit of focus groups is they “draw attention to the interactional features of the data” (Rodriguez, Schwartz, Lahman, & Geist, 2011). Focus groups

are useful when a researcher aims to obtain stories from participants. However, a culturally responsive group was essential to this dissertation, which I discuss in more detail in this section.

There are two important elements to consider when utilizing culturally responsive focus groups (Rodriguez et al., 2011). First, the focus group is culturally responsive when participants' identities are validated as a part of the research process (Baillargeon, 2013; Madriz, 2000; Rodriguez et al., 2011; Wilkinson, 1998). Rodriguez et al. (2011) further stated, "a group setting focused on gender, ethnic culture, and socioeconomic background, validates and empowers participants and their collective experiences within the research process" (p. 409). In Black feminist epistemology, Black women come to know through lived experience, dialogue, and reflection with other Black women (Collins, 2009; Dillard, 2000). Therefore, data gathering through the co-constructed meaning making mode of a group was the most appropriate data collection method for my dissertation.

Second, creating an environment where participants' cultural communication styles are valued is important to identity validation in culturally responsive focus groups. Rodriguez et al. (2011) argued, "for many women, collective story-telling about their experiences can feel more natural than traditional one-to-one seeing" (p. 411). For research with Black women, utilizing collective storytelling as a mode of collecting data and as the actual data itself, is a culturally responsive method. For my dissertation study, I included these cultural styles of communication to maintain consistency with how Black women make meaning through cultural modes of expression. Some examples include cultural forms of speech, description, emphasis, tone, and relations to the spiritual. Additional examples of this communication style include the Black oral tradition of "call and response" (Cooper, 1892; Dowdy, 2011; Sale, 1992), validating one another's experiences, challenging one another, laughing and joking, and asking for clarification

on experiences and particular points of view. For my dissertation study, culturally responsive focus groups allowed me to center the study abroad experiences of Black women and allow them to legitimate what is truth and how they arrived to it.

Sista Circle Methodology

I met with a friend shortly after defending my dissertation proposal and shared with her that my committee challenged me on my proposed methodology. Specifically, my committee said, focus groups are not a methodology, but rather a way to gather data. My friend, having recently returned from a conference, responded by telling me she attended a session where a woman spoke about “sista circle methodology” (Johnson, 2015) and believed it might fit with my dissertation. I read my friend’s conference notes and reached out to the author. I learned the methodology she created was a culturally relevant methodology grounded in a theoretical framework that supports the meaning making process for Black women! From the interactions with my committee, friend, and a new sista-scholar, I found a methodology that validated the (re)membering of Black womanhood.

Thus, I utilized sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) for my dissertation research. Sista circles are simultaneously a qualitative research methodology and provide a supportive space for Black women to connect and generate knowledge (Johnson, 2015). Similar to focus groups, sista circles are culturally relevant spaces for Black women to come together and discuss topics and issues pertinent to their lived experiences. Sista circles were more appropriate for this dissertation than focus groups because they allowed Black women to come together and generate collective knowledge in culturally relevant modes.

There are three distinguishing features of sista circles (Johnson, 2015). First, sista circles center the informal communication styles that are unique to Black women (Johnson). In

traditional focus groups and interviews, the researcher controls the conversation by asking a question and participants respond. Sista circles are more relaxed and participants feel comfortable being and expressing themselves in culturally relevant ways. Additionally, participants control the flow of the conversation. Empowerment is the second distinguishing feature of sista circles (Johnson). Sista circles empower their participants through the collective knowing that is generated within the group. In this particular group setting, participants support and uplift one another. Black women's lived experiences and stories are truth, and therefore participants' experiences are validated and valued. The role of the researcher is the third distinguishing feature of a sista circle (Johnson, 2015). In traditional focus groups, the researcher facilitates by asking the question and listening to the responses (Hennik, 2014; Puchta & Potter, 2004). For sista circles, the researcher moves beyond simply facilitating. In sista circles, the researcher is an active participant in the discussion and shares their experiences as well. Rather than the top-down facilitation approach of focus groups, everyone is an expert and contributes equally to the group. In participating equally, the researcher supports, validates, and empowers participants, which is culturally congruent to Black feminist epistemology and to this dissertation.

Relationship to Participants

My role as the researcher was necessary to consider in sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015). Throughout data collection and analysis, I was aware of my social identities and how those identities influenced the research process (Rodriguez, Schwartz, Lahman, & Geist, 2011). By social identities, I am referring to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, and age. Particularly for sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015), the research process may be hindered if the researcher does not share some of the social identities as their participants

(Johnson; Rodriguez et al., 2011). I shared some identities with participants and I have engaged in two study abroad experiences as a graduate student. My own intersecting identities, as they relate to those of my participants are also important to note here. I did not automatically understand my participants' experiences just because we shared multiple identities and had all participated in a study abroad program as graduate students. Thus, I remained conscious of this during the sista circle and data analysis. Sista circle methodology requires the researcher to be an active participant in the group and thus part of the data generation process. I was an active participant in the sista circles, so my experiences were not separate from theirs. However, when multiple participants agreed with another's story, I or another participant asked for clarification. There was often agreement of experiences during the sista circles, but each one of us wanted to share our stories, so we gave one another that space to do so.

In my commitment to Endarkened feminist epistemology and in line with sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015), I was engaged in a co-constructed meaning making process with my participants. I developed five broad questions to guide discussion during the sista circles. However, I kept in mind that in sista circle methodology, it is important to allow the participants to control the flow of the conversation. Thus, the broader questions guided the conversation and allowed for additional questions to naturally generate during the sista circle amongst participants. I conducted a pilot study during summer 2016, utilizing sista circle methodology (Johnson), which I explain in more detail in the following section.

Co-constructing Data

Qualitative research places human beings as the focus of understanding, seeking to understand experience as the unit of analysis (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011). Meaning is created and validated through Black women's lived experiences and subsequent dialogue and reflection

with other Black women (Collins, 2009). Thus, grounded in Black Feminist Epistemology and sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015), data was collected from multiple sources. The primary data collection method for this dissertation was sista circles (Johnson, 2015). As secondary sources of data, I also collected field notes in the form of my personal memos, which I generated alongside each sista circle, and through follow up conversations with participants during data analysis. The following sections provide more detail regarding my data gathering and analysis plan.

Pilot Study

Prior to data collection, I conducted a pilot study, which supported my methodological choices and dissertation methods. I utilized feedback from my dissertation committee to generate questions to ask participants. I recruited three participants for the pilot study who self-identified as Black graduate student women and studied abroad during their current graduate degree obtainment. Only one of the three participants also participated in the actual dissertation study. The pilot sista circle allowed me to test the methodology, the Zoom technology (a video conferencing software), and troubleshoot technology issues. During the pilot study, I realized an introductory meeting with participants was necessary and would allow me to 1) begin developing rapport, 2) explain the background of the study, 3) discuss the research questions, and 4) present participants the option remain private by keeping their camera off.

Who Would (Re)member With Me?

I identified participants utilizing three different avenues. First, I emailed my participant solicitation to contacts to whom I am personally and professionally connected. I had multiple conversations with Black women as this dissertation developed. When the time came to recruit participants, I followed up with many of these women to either participate and/or to pass on my

solicitation email to anyone potential participants knew. Second, I utilized social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter. I posted my solicitation to my page and friends who I am connected to, shared the call on their pages. I did the same on twitter. I also posted the call to the Facebook groups, *Women of Color in Grad School* and *Black Women in Higher Education*. Lastly, I sent my solicitation to SECUSS-I, an online listserv for Education Abroad professionals. Through this listserve, my solicitation was sent electronically to almost 9,000 subscribers.

I created a Google form to inform potential participants about the study and to assist me with keeping track of participants' responses. The form contained the participant criteria, the demographic questionnaire, initial consent form, and instructions to sign up for an introductory meeting and a sista circle. I utilized doodle poll to schedule these all meetings. As participants completed the Google doc and doodle polls, I emailed them and confirmed their introductory meeting and sista circle. As part of their confirmation, I sent them connection instructions and Zoom links to both their introductory meeting and sista circle. I also sent participants the full consent form and asked them to return it to me before their sista circle, which they all did electronically. In the end, 23 Black graduate student women completed the study in its entirety. Their profiles are reflected in *Table 1*. Utilizing purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2002), the following participant criterion was achieved.

- First, all participants were asked if they identified as African American women. I was particularly interested in the experiences of women whose ancestry can be traced to the African continent and who also identify as American. However, in line with Black Feminist Epistemology, I also provided participants a space to self-identify.

- Second, participants were all enrolled in any graduate program (regardless of institutional type), either Masters or Doctoral at the time of data collection.
- Third, participants must have participated in a study abroad at some point during their graduate program. Such programs include, but are not limited to, credit and non-credit bearing, exploratory or cross-cultural experiences, fellowships, internships, and independent research. Additionally, participants could have participated in more than one study abroad program (regardless if it took place during their undergraduate and/or graduate program).
- Fourth, participants could have traveled to any country, participated with any group type, and be led by leaders from varying social identities. My aim here was to ensure a variety of experiences regarding trip location, group make up, and leader background. Contextual diversity in participants' experiences provided varying responses, resulting in more rich dialogue between participants.

NAME (pseudonym)	Self-identification	Graduate Degree level	Field of Study	Study Abroad Country	Length of Time studied abroad
Marie	Black/African American, Woman, heterosexual, Christian	PhD	Education	Netherlands	3 weeks
Benny	Black, Caribbean, female, early 30s, Christian	PhD	Education	Indonesia	3 weeks
EM	Black (of Caribbean and African American descent), woman, 24, American, queer, Anglican	PhD	History	Barbados & England	3 weeks; 3 weeks
Michelle	Black, African-American, 32, American, heterosexual, Christian (non-denominational)	PhD	Education	Cuba	2 weeks
Denise	African American (ascendant of African slaves in the United States), heterosexual, Christian, early 30's	PhD	Education	Ghana	10 days
Lynea	Black/African American, woman, 29, heterosexual, Christian	PhD	Human Development & Family Science	South Africa	1 month
Courtney	Black American cis-hetero-woman	PhD	Education	Cuba	2 weeks

Table 1: Participant Profiles

Table 1 (cont'd)

Seame	Ghanaian American	Masters	Public Health	Laos	10 weeks
Alexandria	Christian African-American cis-woman heterosexual 30 years old	PhD	Education	Ghana	10 days
RE	I am a 35 year-old, heterosexual, Haitian-American, Christian woman	Masters	Language and Literacy	Austria and Germany	2 weeks; 1 semester
Gabrielle	Black 30+ progressive female	PhD	Education	Spain	14 days
Ax	Black, female, 50, American, straight, Apostolic Pentecostal, mother, grandmother, professional, educator	Masters	Education	Ghana	10 days
EB	Straight, Black, US Citizen, 29	Masters	International Politics	United Kingdom	1 year
Becky	Black womanist	PhD	Education	Indonesia	3 weeks
Ama	Race: Black, Ethnicity: Multi-Ethnic (Ashanti, Susu), Gender: Female, National Identity: US citizen, second generation Ghanaian/Sierra Leonean, Religion: non-religious	PhD	Teaching & Learning	Cuba (twice)	10 days each trip
Journey	Black woman	PhD	Education	China; South Africa	3 weeks each
Blair	Black Woman	PhD	Education	Indonesia	3 weeks
Lee	Black, Jamaican, Woman, Straight	PhD	Education	Indonesia	3 weeks
Jeri	Black, afro-Caribbean American, Female, American, straight, Christian	Masters	Public Health	India; Panama	3 weeks; 1 week
Ashley	Christian Black Female in the United States	Masters	Education	Colombia; Panama	4 days each
Chioma	Black American, Nigerian, Igbo, female, 31 yrs old	PhD	African Diaspora Studies	South Africa	3 weeks
Monda	African American, Female, U.S., Heterosexual, Christian	PhD	Education	New Zealand	2 weeks
Laylah	African American, female, 42, heterosexual, Baptist	PhD	Education	China; Morocco; Spain	1 week; 1 week; 2 weeks

Introductory Meeting

Based on a conversation during the pilot study, I decided to have an introductory one-on-one meeting with each participant prior to their sista circle. The introductory meeting allowed participants and myself to get to know one another. We introduced ourselves, discussed our research interests, and shared about our backgrounds, and I answered any questions they had about the study. Additionally, we tested internet connectivity and troubleshoot Zoom. We also discussed sista circle methodology and reviewed the consent form.

Virtual Sista Circles

Virtual platforms are becoming more popular in conducting qualitative research (Turney & Pocknee, 2005; Tuttas, 2015; Woodyatt, Finneran, & Stephenson, 2016). Ultimately, I utilized Zoom to conduct the virtual sista circles. Conducting virtual sista circles was beneficial to this dissertation study for multiple reasons. First, collecting data virtually allowed me to meet and gather experiences from participants who were enrolled in programs from a variety of institutional types. Second, I was able to obtain experiences from varying study abroad locations and contexts. Lastly, because most study abroad trips have a small number of Black women, participants were able to connect with other Black graduate student women and process their experiences collectively.

Eight virtual sista circles were conducted to obtain collective experiences from self-identified Black graduate student women. Each sista circles consisted of 3-5 participants, including myself. I prepared and asked five broad questions. However, in line with sista circle methodology, participants asked their own questions of other participants. As displayed in appendix D, sista circle questions focused on participants' study abroad experiences, what it was like to study abroad as an African American graduate student woman, and the significance of cultural and personal artifacts and memories. During the sista circles, participants first introduced themselves. Once everyone provided introductions, each participant was given the opportunity to share what they wanted about their study abroad experiences. I allowed the conversation to develop naturally from there. Participants muted their microphones as they shared to drown out background noise. This did not hinder anyone from speaking and we were still able to see other participants' reactions from their body language. Even though I asked the guiding questions, the circles were natural conversation spaces where participants also asked questions of one another.

The best way I can describe the sista circles was that they were really affirming. They were spaces unlike what I have experienced in the past. I have previously engaged in what I now know to be sista circles; however, this was the first time I was able to engage solely with other Black women around a topic important to us and just be us. Sista circles ranged from slightly over 90 minutes to 3+ hours. Often, I had to make participants aware of the time and inquire if they wanted to continue, which they replied they did. They were very appreciative for the study because they said no one had given them the space to interrogate study abroad in relation to being Black women. There were times when the camera froze and I was not sure if it picked up the conversation; however, when I watched the video back, it did not contain these freezing moments.

Field Notes

Field notes are a less formal method of journaling during data collection (Maxwell, 2013). I generated field notes during and immediately after each sista circles. It was essential for me to note my personal reactions and thoughts. I utilized these field notes as my own “life notes” (Dillard, 2006) as I wove together these experiences into a co-constructed examination of an experience.

Coding and Data Analysis

All data from the sista circles were transcribed. I utilized constant comparative analysis (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009) to code my data. Open coding was the first stage and involved chunking the data into smaller units. As I read the transcripts, I created a code for each of these chunks. Because the Black women in this study spoke in stories, examining their experiences through smaller chunks allowed a better understanding of their experiences. Viewing and understanding these narratives from chunks, altered as little as possible to not

remove meaning, and assisted in braiding together a co-constructed process of meaning making from their lived experiences. I utilized participants' lived experiences as theory to explain the knowledge production process in which Black women engaged. Thus, a theory of knowledge I call (re)membering Black womanhood generated from participants' narratives. The next phase of the process was axial coding (Charmaz, 2006; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). In this stage, I grouped the codes into fewer categories. I identified reoccurring themes and larger ideas I noticed in the data. In the final stage, called selective coding (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009), I developed themes to represent the entire content of the data. I want to note here that although I engaged in the above process of analysis, I also found myself repeatedly going back into the data to understand more accurately the points participants were making.

Participants' narratives elicited a process of meaning making yet to be uncovered until this dissertation study. I utilized Black Feminist Epistemology and Michelson's (1998) notion of "experiential learning" to frame the process of (re)membering Black womanhood in which participants and I engaged. *Figure 3* illustrates the two-part meaning making process that culminates to the (re)membering of Black womanhood. For instance, I am referring to two processes of meaning making taking place simultaneously. First, the Black women in this study made meaning and thus (re)membered Black womanhood through outward reactions to their bodies (e.g. hosts not wanting to house them and being affirmed while traveling with other Black women). The outward reactions were informed by the study abroad location and how Black women's bodies have been historically and structurally treated in that space. Participants connected these experiences to how they believe Black women's experiences have historically been silenced and marginalized in society. At the same time, there was a second process of meaning making taking place. Here I am referring to the inner intuitive process of meaning

making resulting from the outward structural reactions. I refer to these feelings as trigger moments. These trigger moments helped participants realize that reactions to their bodies were aspects of global structural oppression occurring beyond the US national container. For example, learning their bodies were not welcome in hosts homes revealed to them that anti-Blackness also occurs in Indonesia. Reactions to their bodies during study abroad help the Black women in this study to (re)membering Black womanhood.

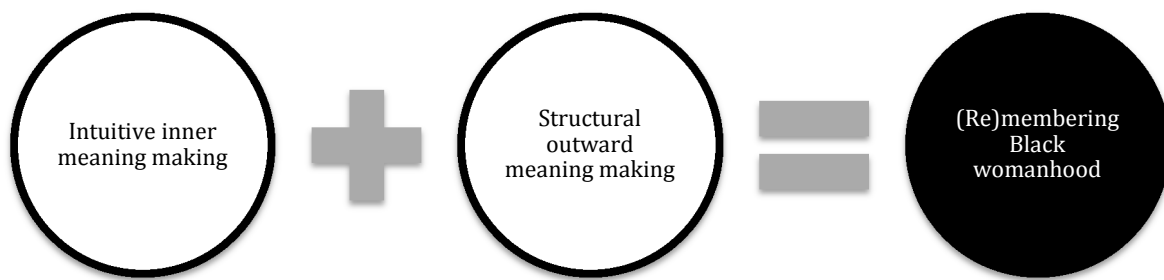


Figure 3: Summary of Analysis

Figure 4 displays how interactions during study abroad influenced participants' meaning making of themselves. Further, participants' bodies were sites of knowledge production as they engaged with people, contexts, and themselves. This embodied form of meaning making challenges the Western notion of meaning making, which emphasizes the separation of the mind from the body and focuses on cognition. Thus, through their bodies, participants 1) found new ways of understanding themselves, 2) emphasized the importance of relating to other black women globally, and 3) emphasized the importance of connected and relational meaning making for Black graduate student women.

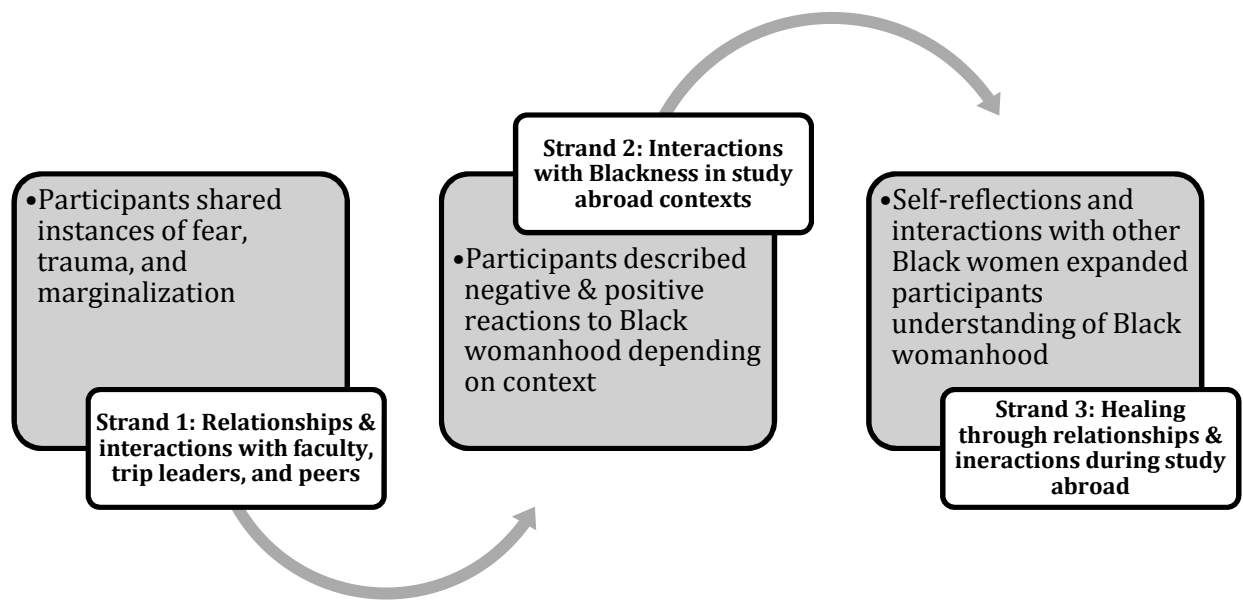


Figure 4: Braid of (Re)membering Black Womanhood through Study Abroad

The following chapters respond to my research questions by arguing how relationships and interactions influenced Black graduate student women’s meaning making of themselves. The Black women in this study chose to co-construct meaning together and trusted me to be their braider.

CHAPTER 5: FIRST STRAND: INTERACTIONS WITH FACULTY, TRIP LEADERS, AND PEERS

Introduction to Findings

I had the opportunity to travel to Ghana for two weeks following the conclusion of my formal data gathering. It was in Cape Coast, Ghana where I began writing my findings and discussion chapters in the midst of my own sista circle with two other sista-scholars. I was also reading Yaa Gyasi's (2016) *Homegoing* during this writing trip. This was my second trip to Ghana, and it felt different than the first, more familiar. One evening, after an afternoon of reading and fellowshiping on the beach, we returned to the house, and I was struck by a thought about what it meant to (re)member through traveling outside of the United States, especially as a Black woman. I wrote the following passage:

*What does it mean to heal?
Seeing all facets of me, reflecting on how I've come to be.
Coming to understand myself in my complexities.
Accepting myself in this space, right now.
The process of being ok with being vulnerable and uncertain.
Experiences, people, interacting with other black women...questioning, challenging,
wondering...US education socialized me to not do this growing up, and it wasn't until recently
that I gave myself space to define my own liberation.*

Given the scarcity of research examining the experiences of Black graduate student women who study abroad, little is known about the depth of violence occurring during these particular academic experiences and how Black women make meaning of themselves as a result of these experiences. Participants' narratives illuminated the trauma and pain experienced by Black women who study abroad. I refer to participants experiences of trauma and pain as "trigger events" (Biniecki & Conceição, 2014, p. 39). As I share in the following chapters, interactions triggered participants and prompted physical and emotional responses felt in the bodies. As adult learners, trigger events are necessary for learning and shaping new identities (Biniecki &

Conceição, 2014, p. 39). Participants in this study are drawing attention to adult learning at the interaction of transnational context and social positionality. As such, participants in this study (re)membered Black womanhood through trigger events during study abroad.

In this chapter, I demonstrate relationships and interactions with faculty prior to study abroad and trip leaders and peers during study abroad influenced Black graduate student women's (re)membering of Black womanhood. By sharing and critically examining participants' narratives, I suggest Black women in this study utilized their bodies as sites of knowledge (Michelson, 1998) to (re)member Black womanhood as an expanded process of meaning making during study abroad. Michelson (1998) argues it is essential that we "restore the body as a site of experiential learning and at the same time understand the body itself as a product of culture and history" (p.222). This chapter braids together the study abroad experiences of the Black graduate student women through three subthemes:

- 1) Faculty and peer interactions revealing notions of fear and support.
- 2) Influence of trip leader background.
- 3) Interactions with peers during study abroad.

Faculty and Peer Interactions Revealing Notions of Support and Fear

As the *sista* circles progressed, I noticed there was something underlying participants' responses related to their graduate student identities. I could not quite put my finger on it. Thus, I began asking participants to specifically consider what it was like to study abroad as graduate students. Refocusing our discussion to consider participants' graduate student identity at the beginning of the *sista* circle allowed participants to reflect on and (re)member Black womanhood from graduate student perspectives. What emerged were reflections and memories regarding challenging interactions, lack of support, and notions of fear that surfaced during interactions

with faculty. Discussions regarding study abroad caused participants to recognize similarities between prior experiences as Black graduate student women navigating the US academy and their study abroad experiences.

Most participants expressed not being supported by faculty as they prepared to embark on their study abroad experiences. This lack of support mirrored experiences they had with faculty as they navigated their graduate programs. For example, EM, a graduate student in history, discussed being the only researcher in her dissertation proposal course who was questioned about the scale and scope of her study. This course was unrelated to study abroad, but was a required course she took prior to beginning her independent research abroad. She was also the only person of color in this proposal course and the only person researching the experiences of folks of color. In her *sista* circle, EM recalled how she responded to her professor and peers' critique of her sites, saying, "just the archive for slavery is so slim sometimes, too, that you have to cast a wide net in some ways and be ambitious". In a follow up conversation, EM and I discussed her preparation to conduct her independent research abroad in more depth. EM had proposed a multi-site study to Barbados, England, and Spain (as well as a few other sites in the future) and was met with skepticism and criticism from her professor and peers. At the time of her *sista* circle, she had already conducted research for two weeks in Barbados and approximately three weeks in England. The skepticism and criticism she experienced regarding her research alongside other folks of color is not new to the experiences of Black women pursuing graduate degrees (Benjamin, 1997; Carter, 2001; Collins, 1986; Williams et al, 2005). Specifically, it was her white professor and three white peers who provided the most criticism of her research (criticism not given to her white peers regarding their research).

The sentiments of her professor and peers revealed two concerns EM reflected on in her sister circle. First, her white peers did not see the value in EM conducting her multi-site research abroad. Second, their criticism revealed their lack of knowledge regarding the scope, depth, and impact of slavery globally. The criticism she received regarding her proposed research abroad caused her to consider comparisons between doing research abroad and research in the US.

Reflecting on her experiences leading up to her study abroad, she realized the lack of support she experienced during her graduate studies in the United States, also translated to her experiences as she prepared to conduct research abroad. EM was not the only participant to feel a lack of support during graduate school as she recalled her study abroad experiences. As EM discussed her experiences, Marie began to also consider some of her own study abroad experiences as a graduate student. Like EM, Marie also felt a lack of support as a graduate student, especially from her advisor. Marie responded with the following regarding her own experiences.

We [she and her advisor] were having a conversation about summer and what I was gonna be doing. I had gotten an opportunity to do a research fellowship and then also the fellowship to go abroad and this person who is a White man [said], I should consider whether or not I'm gonna have time for both of these things. The fellowship to go abroad will always be there. And so my first response was, actually, no, it's not always going to be there. One, I'd applied last year and wasn't accepted. Two, I applied this year. I'm getting to go and yet you're devaluing this opportunity by saying it's always going to be there. I think he had different perspectives from other folks who have been like, this is a great opportunity! Take it! Whether or not I can do both is beyond me because I'm a hard worker and I can get both done, but second, this idea that this opportunity will always be there, that's not the case.

While preparing for study abroad, both EM and Marie expressed not being supported by faculty. Both women mentioned feeling excited and acknowledged the privilege they felt being able to study abroad. However, as they interacted with faculty and trip leaders, their enthusiasm was met with a lack of support.

Benny, a graduate student who studied abroad in Indonesia, shared similar sentiments as EM and Marie regarding feeling a lack of support from faculty. A question from Denise prompted Benny to draw connections between her relationships with faculty prior to studying abroad and her experiences with faculty during study abroad. For example, as she recalled a negative racialized experience (detailed in the following chapter) while studying abroad, she was struck by how one faculty member's reaction mirrored experiences she had with other faculty prior to studying abroad. A brief portion of their conversation follows.

Denise: I have a question, Benny. Were those issues of racism and White supremacy raised with your school's study abroad office or anything like that?

Benny: A couple people said, you all should make an official complaint. They're like we can make an official complaint, but we're graduate students, and [I thought] we also know there's retaliation. We know that people mess with your assistantship. We know people will talk about you. We know that people will treat you differently...there is a power dynamic here.

Denise and Benny's conversation sheds light on issues of power that arise between graduate students and faculty who engage in study abroad together. In Denise's inquiry, she assumed Benny's trip was connected to the university's study abroad office and thus a formal complaint about the racial incident and trip faculty's response might be made to them. Benny's reflection on her experience revealed a power differential between faculty and graduate students. Benny's narrative sheds light on the influence of relationships and interactions with faculty and graduate students on meaning making. Reflecting on interactions with faculty during study abroad triggered aspects of participants' relationships with faculty prior to studying abroad. Benny's narrative illuminated how fear is used as a form of power over graduate students. For Benny, the triggering event was study abroad. As she reflected on her study abroad, she was prompted to consider the relationship between faculty and graduate students.

As EM, Marie, and Benny centered their relationships with faculty prior to study abroad, they expressed feeling a lack of support and feeling fearful of retaliation. These very raw emotions caused the Black women in this study to feel silenced and marginalized (Collins, 2009). Participants' reflections demonstrated how educational spaces often perpetuate dominance over Black graduate student women through their lack of support for their ways of knowing (Carter, 2001; Collins, 1990; Edwards, 2014; Williams et al, 2005). What EM, Marie, and Benny came to understand is how fear is utilized by faculty who are in privileged positions to maintain dominance over graduate students. It was disorienting for participants to feel fear and lack support from faculty who are supposed to be embodying the opposite. Participants narratives revealed the influence of disorienting events in (re)membering Black womanhood. The Black women in this study revealed how their bodies response to triggering events expanded their awareness of faculty and graduate student relationships.

Influence of Trip Leader Background

In this subsection, I demonstrated how interactions with trip leaders illuminated trip their lack of preparedness to deal with issues of race and gender during study abroad. Participants' also emphasized trip leaders' backgrounds foregrounded their lack of preparedness. For example, participants shared that race was rarely addressed during trip preparation (Bruce, 2012; Willis, 2012; 2016). Participants' assertion supported much of what is discussed in current research on study abroad trip preparation. Trip preparation often focuses on lodging, money, daily activities, emergency plans, cultural shock, and learning outcomes (Bruce, 2012; Henry, 2014; Tulega, 2008; Varner, 2001; Wilson, 2014). In one sista circle, you could hear the frustration in participants' voices as they shared information regarding anti-Black sentiments were missing from study abroad recruitment and preparation conversations. Denise, a graduate student in

education who studied abroad in Ghana stated, “I’m just always fascinated by experiences of anti-Black racism that Black folks experience when they study abroad, and then [higher education] institutions [say] everybody should study abroad”. The sentiments expressed by Denise are not reflective of her study abroad to Ghana; however, as a higher education scholar-practitioner, she has engaged in multiple conversations regarding Black students and their study abroad experiences. Benny, a graduate student studying education who traveled to Indonesia, responded to Denise’s point by adding, “when we were talking in our meetings, preparing for this trip, why didn’t you [trip leaders] warn us about this [anti-Blackness]? Why didn’t you warn us about how they viewed Black people in this country”? Their conversation revealed the frustration they felt regarding the lack of attention paid to issues of race as they prepared to study abroad. Benny was clearly outraged. Their conversation exposed the “colorblindness” (Bonilla-Silva, & Dietrich, 2011; Warikoo & de Novais, 2015) often engrained in trip leaders. By not addressing race and other issues of difference, trip leaders perpetuated this colorblind narrative that everyone is the same. Denise and Benny’s discussion illustrated that race is far too often not discussed as participants prepared to study abroad. We see here again, participants were left feeling disoriented. Needless to say, the Black women in this study were caught off guard.

Like the experience Benny shared, Seame, a graduate student in public health who studied abroad in Laos and Panama, also realized her trip leader did not address race as they prepared to study abroad in Panama. She explained, “I feel like that [race] is just not talked about. That okay, you look different than the other students, and they [people in Laos] could accept you in a different way”. As a global health master’s student, Seame had studied abroad in Panama several times. She expressed not feeling prepared to deal with racial incidents on her study abroad. Similar to Benny’s experience, preparation for those trips entailed brief and

surface level mentions regarding the potential for being treated differently. She was disappointed because she was not prepared for what she actually experienced. Instead, Seame expressed she would have preferred trip leaders directly address processes of racialization that have and could occur on study abroad.

Benny and Seame raised significant concerns regarding trip leaders background and lack of preparedness to deal with racial incidents on study abroad. Their reflections uncovered the tension that arose when trip leaders neglected to discuss race with participants whose daily lived experienced is informed by race. We can see this further in a later conversation between Denise and Benny.

Denise: We don't talk about racism and white supremacy [during study abroad]. Like as graduate students, we're at a place [in our lives] where we can have more challenging conversations. I just need to know before I get there, and they catch me off guard.

Benny: I live in America. I deal with it all the time. Why set me up to go somewhere where I'm not anticipating it [racism], and now I have to manage it [racism].

From the perspective of the Black women in this study, trip leaders had little to no knowledge of the depth of anti-Black racism embedded in some of the communities in which participants studied abroad. Seame, Denise, and Benny expressed being frustrated with trip leaders' lack of attention to race. Participants were triggered by the absence of conversations about race and gender. Participants are describing the friction that surfaced as between themselves and trip leaders. Thus, participants' reflections revealed the influence of race and gender as they (re)membered of Black womanhood.

Not all participants expressed their meaning making of themselves resulted from negative interactions with their trip leaders. Some contended positive interactions with trip leaders of color greatly influenced their (re)membering of Black womanhood. Participants elaborated on how these particular trip leaders centered race as they prepared to study abroad. For example,

Ax, a graduate student in education who studied abroad in Ghana, shared having a Black trip leader influenced her meaning making. She recalled that her trip leader centered Blackness in their preparation to travel to Ghana. Ax went on to say her trip leader required participants to consider their social positionalities and find connections to people in the communities in which they were studying abroad. She also required participants to look deeper into their own cultural backgrounds and history. Having a trip leader who centered participants' race and culture while drawing connections to the communities in which they were studying abroad influenced how Ax began to see herself as a Black woman. Ax articulated, "I do think the debriefing at night, the breaking down at night, every night, helps with that because Dr. XXXX can say, 'okay, so you talked about a lot of surface things. Tell me what you feel about it' ". Ax was pushed to go deeper in her responses and really link her understandings of U.S. Black womanhood to a more globally connected understanding of Black womanhood. Ax believed having a trip leader who was Black and also a woman greatly influenced her ability to see the connections already present between her as a Black graduate student woman and the people in Ghana. Further, comparing Benny, Seame, and Ax's experiences supports the evidence that it is often trip leaders who are faculty of color who discuss race during study abroad (Bruce, 2012; Willis, 2016). Interrogating race is a cultural tax that often falls on the shoulders of racially minoritized faculty in higher education (Hirshfield, & Joseph, 2012; Joseph, & Hirshfield, 2011; Padilla, 1994). However, interacting with a Black woman trip leader who centered race alongside trip prep and during studying abroad provided Ax the space to (re)member her Black womanhood. Ax did not feel the same tension expressed by Benny and Seame. Ax, instead felt affirmed and valued because her trip leader centered her racialized and gendered experiences and connected them to study abroad.

Similarly, Chioma, a graduate student in Black and African studies who studied abroad in South Africa agreed with Ax's sentiments regarding the positive interactions she had having a Black trip leader. For example, she discussed how her trip leader highlighted the importance of race because of their study abroad location. She stated,

the big difference with the study abroad in grad school is that racial component. That's something the professor really took into concern because the goal was to engage with [and] understand South Africa from the perspective of Black South Africans.

Chioma expanded on Ax's point by making clear the positive influence of her interactions with her trip leader. Centering Black South Africans as they prepared for study abroad and then interacting with them on study abroad allowed her to see the importance of including aspects of race (as one aspect of her intersecting identity) during study abroad. Chioma's reflection also demonstrated why her interactions with her Black trip leader was important for her (re)membering Black womanhood. Specifically, centering race in their study abroad allowed Chioma the opportunity to interrogate her daily activities in more complex and critical ways.

The background of trips leaders, particularly in juxtaposition to the participants' backgrounds, also mattered in terms of age and prior professional experiences. Graduate students may be older and/or have more professional experiences than the typical undergraduate study abroad participant or even than the trip leaders themselves. This may result in graduate participants being more aware of what is not being addressed, expecting higher levels of transparency, and wanting, perhaps from having done so in other environment, to engage more deeply with complex questions and identities. For example, participants in this study felt when racial incidents occurred, trip leaders were not transparent and did not discuss the issues with them. Further, participants expressed that trip leaders did not provide a space for them to process

these incidents as a group. Blair, a graduate student in education who studied abroad in Indonesia, shared the following of her experience.

There was a lot of racial tension on our trip, and I don't think the leadership handled it appropriately. [Trip leaders] didn't advocate for us...they didn't protect us...they didn't represent us. And it was difficult for me because as an administrator, you take care of your people.

Blair's explanation speaks directly to the communication style and support needed by the Black graduate student women in this study. This study's participants drew connections between their interactions with trip leaders and the importance of factoring in varying communication styles.

Davis (2015) argues, Black women enact a distinct communication style that is "assertive, truthful, and direct" (p. 22). By not sharing what was going on, trip leaders' communication styles conflicted with the cultural communication styles that the Black women in this study enact in their daily lives (Davis; Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003; Popp, Donovan, Crawford, Marsh, & Peele, 2003). Dialogue and reflection are essential to Black women's ways of knowing (Collins, 2009), and thus, interactions with trip leaders, or lack thereof, elicited feelings of being silenced and ignored. The interactions with faculty during study abroad caused participants to (re)member Black womanhood related to modes of communication not culturally in line with who they were as Black women. Interactions between the Black graduate student women in this study and faculty trip leaders made clear the importance of adopting multiple modes of communication and of discussing race while facilitating study abroad trips.

The Black women in this study asserted the background of trip leaders influenced their (re)membering of Black womanhood. Specifically, participants emphasized trip leaders' social positions, the degree to which they centered race during study abroad, and the manner they communicated with participants influenced their meaning making. Discussions during the sista

circles revealed the value participants placed on trip leaders' background, inclusions of race, and the importance of cultural communication.

Interactions with Peers During Study Abroad

Some participants shared relationships and interactions with peers influenced their meaning making of themselves during study abroad. Ama, a graduate student in education who studied abroad in Cuba, described how one interaction with a peer caused her to realize she was having a vastly different study abroad experience than her peers. Ama shared in her *sista* circle a conversation she had with a peer during study abroad about Cuba and communism. More specifically, Ama explained that in this particular conversation, a white peer mentioned to her that Cuba made her [the peer] think about communism, and in her opinion, communism was bad. Ama described to her *sista* circle the anger she felt towards her peer's assertion as well as her response, stating, "there's a lot that Cuba has done in terms of education of African folk. I was like, you need to be careful. Your relationship to this nation is very different than for me as an African woman". The conversation between Ama and her peer illuminated how participants' intersecting identities influenced the meaning they came to understand about themselves from interactions in study abroad spaces. Ama articulated the interaction with her peer illuminated a connection between Cuba and her Black womanhood. This interaction revealed the frustration she felt with her peer. This finding suggests study abroad spaces mean different things to participants depending on their social positionalities.

Similar to Ama, Michelle's meaning making was also influenced by peer interactions while on study abroad. Michelle, a graduate student in education who also traveled to Cuba for her study abroad, explained how an interaction she had with a peer caused her to realize she was having a vastly different experience than her peers during study abroad. Her (re)membering of

Black womanhood involved the moment a white peer noticed that the staring Michelle was experiencing on study abroad was different than those of other participants. She shared the following story.

As a Black woman to be in that space [Cuba], I just saw Black women being devalued. And I always got these looks. Like one point, I was stepping out of where we were staying, and this Cuban was riding by on a motorbike, and he stared at me, and he kept staring, and I stared back. I didn't care. I just stared back, and he looked over his shoulder and kept staring at me. Like my group, there were like six or seven of us at the time waiting for him to pass, and this White girl said, why did he give you the stank look like that? And I was like, I get that look every day. That's what you all don't realize. I get that every day that I'm here, but you all don't see it. *Well, those were moments when I'm like, you all are having this fun experience while I'm dealing with crap on my own.*

Michelle's reflection is important for two reasons. First, like many of the other Black women in this study, Michelle was routinely stared at by passersby. Second, Michelle shared also feeling frustration with her peer in her complete lack of awareness that this staring was occurring daily. When Michelle's peer saw the staring herself, she began to consider that Michelle was having a different experience than she was. Michelle disclosed in her sista circle that she attempted to share her experiences with her peers, but they did not believe her. It was only when her peers saw instances for themselves that they validated her experiences. The staring, the reaction by her white peer, and then her conversation with her peer reiterated for Michelle that her experience and her own retelling of her experience was not enough to be believed.

The Black graduate students in this study (re)membered Black womanhood through the eyes of their peers and confirmed what they felt as Black women in the United States. Participants were reminded that oftentimes their experiences are not validated until white peers can see them for themselves. This invalidation of Black women's lived experiences relates to a larger arc of thinking regarding whose truths count (Hartman, 1997; Razack, 2007). What

Michelle's reflection demonstrated in that moment relates to inherent suspiciousness that Black women cannot be "objective" in their telling of experiences (Hartman, 1997; Razack, 2007).

Some participants also shared how interactions with peers of color influenced how they made meaning of themselves and (re)membered Black womanhood through study abroad. For example, participants articulated that interactions with peer people of color assisted their need to have coping strategies in place to deal with the trauma they experienced during study abroad. EM, a graduate student in history who conducted independent research abroad in Barbados and England, discussed being in Barbados during the murders of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile. She said that interacting remotely with peers of color who were also abroad allowed her to process what she was feeling. EM emphasized, "a number of my other colleagues in my program that are Black were abroad at the same time and also by themselves so we all sort of virtually connected to talk about ways of self-care". She also stated even though it was difficult being away from U.S. Black folks, "it was sort of nice to be away from it all and to be in a place like Barbados". EM's interactions with peers of color revealed two points regarding her body as a site of knowledge (Michelson, 1998). First, EM learned how important interactions between peers of color are, especially during traumatic experiences. Second, being away in Barbados provided EM's body and spirit a break from the United States during a time when the murders of Black people were regularly being shown in the media. EM realized it was important to maintain relationships with peers from afar to process racial incidents occurring while studying abroad. From their narratives, the Black women in this study demonstrated the influence of interactions with peers of color on their meaning making. During her study abroad, EM utilized social media to connect with other peers of color abroad. On one hand, some scholars believe utilizing social media hinders students' engagement while on study abroad (Huesca, 2013). On the other hand

though, EM and her peers maintained a necessary community of support over social media (Hetz, Dawson, & Cullen, 2015; Joinson, 2008; Kim & Tussyadiah, 2013).

EM went on to elaborate about how connecting with peers through social media was a form of self-care her body needed, particularly given the research she was conducting. The topic of self-care is not often discussed in the study abroad literature. However, the Black women in this study utilized multiple forms of self-care as coping mechanisms during study abroad. I discuss these examples in more detail in Chapter 6. In this chapter though, EM's reflection revealed the importance of relationships and connectedness to Black women's (re)membering of Black womanhood. Her research broadly examines slavery, and she is often doing research in isolation. As she spoke, I could hear that her research is a heavy weight to carry. Thus, connecting with peers through social media allowed EM an outlet where she was able to combat her isolation.

Some participants also shared how peer relationships influenced their meaning making of themselves during study abroad. Further, for some participants, peer relationships with other Black participants, influenced their meaning making as they studied abroad in Black countries. Journey, a graduate student in education, had the opportunity to participate in two study abroad experiences while pursuing her Ph.D. On her first trip, she traveled with a mixed race group to China, and on the second, she traveled with an all Black group to South Africa. As she reflected, Journey began to see how her relationships and interactions with her peers influenced her (re)membering of Black womanhood. Specifically, her reflections pointed to how the differences in their academic backgrounds manifested in daily interactions. The discipline for her first experience was education, and for the second, it was African and African diasporic studies. As she interacted with peers during the second trip, she reflected on her interactions with peers in

China and compared them to those she had in South Africa. In their interactions, Journey realized what little knowledge she had obtained during her previous two degrees regarding Black history. She reflected on the following in her *sista* circle.

I thought I knew a whole bunch, but traveling with them [the all Black group to South Africa], I realized how much I didn't know about Black history, Black authors, and Black rhetoric. Just being there for three weeks with them I learned so much about history that it really changed my approach, even in my dissertation.

Journey's interactions with graduate student peers who were studying the experiences of Black people globally in their programs exposed her to new understandings of what it meant to be a Black woman. Thus, her understanding of herself as a Black graduate student woman expanded to include notions of Blackness beyond the United States.

For Journey, her reflections illustrated the importance of relationships amongst Black students who study abroad in African countries (Lee & Green, 2016). Interactions with her peers were essential to Journey's (re)membering of Black womanhood. Further, being in the diaspora to discuss Black literature, authors, and issues expanded Journey's knowledge of herself as a Black woman. Collins (2009) and Dillard (2000; 2006) discuss the importance of interactions and relationships, particularly as they pertain to Black women. Studying abroad in South Africa with other Black graduate students was essential for Journey's meaning making of herself.

Summary of Thematic Strand One

The Black women in this study were triggered by their interactions with faculty prior to studying abroad and with trip leaders and peers during study abroad. Participants were challenged by these interactions, but they were necessary for their (re)membering of Black womanhood. Participants' reflections confirmed their meaning making was connected to their physical and emotional responses to these interactions. By paying attention to these triggering instances, the Black women in this study generated new awareness of themselves. Being

triggered was their bodies natural response to a tension they experienced in their ways of knowing. Thus, participants illustrated the importance of listening to their bodies response a catalyst for new knowledge processes. Narratives shared in this chapter extend current conversations in study abroad regarding notions of fear and support, power dynamics, legitimacy of experience, self-care and knowledge. In the next chapter, I continue to the second strand of the braid and demonstrate how interactions *within* study abroad *contexts* influenced participants meaning making of themselves.

CHAPTER 6: SECOND STRAND: INTERACTIONS WITH BLACKNESS IN STUDY

ABROAD CONTEXTS

I also had the opportunity to share about my study abroad experience during the sista circles. Recall from Chapter Four that a requirement of sista circle methodology (Johnson, 2015) is that the researcher is an active participant in the sista circle. During sista circle five, I shared memories of Donkor Nsuo (Slave River and site of the last bath) in the town of Assin Manso in Ghana and of when we visited Cape Coast slave dungeon in Cape Coast, Ghana. In these moments I realized what Dillard (2012) refers as “cultural memories” (p.1). I touched water my ancestors bathed in for the last time before being taken from their homes at the Slave River. I walked on the ground and out the ‘door of no return’, just like my ancestors at the slave dungeon. However, I was able to come back through the ‘door of return’. In both places, it felt like I had been there before; the best way I can describe it is as a sort of *déjà vu*. I reflected during the sista circle about my own meaning making as a result my experiential learning (Michelson, 1998) within study abroad contexts. As I shared my experiences at the last bath and the slave dungeon, I was struck by the cultural and spiritual significance of water, blood, and land, particularly as a Black woman. Even though I had never been to those places, I felt a connection to them. I realized it was my body (re)membering Black womanhood. I could not have arrived at such (re)membering without visiting those sites in Ghana.

I shared the aforementioned narrative to illustrate the cultural connection I felt in my body during visits to particular study abroad sites. My interactions in Ghana made me feel like I belonged to a space. In this second strand, I provided narratives from participants that demonstrated the influence of these interactions on their meaning making. For example, interactions in particular geographical locations shifted the identities of the Black women in this

study. In this chapter I weave together the complex meaning making process of (re)membering Black womanhood around three themes:

- 1) Anti-Blackness as a global phenomenon.
- 2) Blackness in the African diaspora.
- 3) Black women's bodies on display.

This chapter continues the discussion regarding the influence of relationships and interactions on meaning making and builds on the previous chapter by centering Blackness within specific study abroad contexts. Participants' narratives were woven together and exposed the portability of anti-blackness on a global scale. Further, this chapter exposed how moving beyond the U.S. national container (Mahalingam & Reid, 2007; Shahjahan & Kezar, 2013) allowed the Black graduate student women in this study to (re)member Black womanhood in nuanced ways.

Anti-Blackness as a Global Phenomenon

During our *sista* circles, participants discussed varying interactions with people in the locations where they studied abroad. Participants' meaning making of themselves as Black women was the result of their interactions and relationships during daily activities on study abroad. I asked all the participants to share what it was like to study abroad as a Black graduate student women. In response, participants described anti-Black interactions. For instance, Lee, a graduate student in education who studied abroad in Indonesia, "experienced racism firsthand in Indonesia when our host families didn't want to host the Black people. And that's exactly what they said. They didn't want to host Black people". She went on to connect her own experiences as a Black person in Indonesia to how she witnessed Papuans (historically also from the African diaspora) being treated in Indonesia. Lee and many of the other participants in this study learned

anti-Blackness is not just contained within U.S. boundaries (Agathangelou, 2013; Bashi, 2004). Prior notions of racism being solely a U.S. phenomenon were shattered.

The context in which Lee studied abroad elicited a lived experience where she felt, as a Black woman, she was not welcome in Indonesia. She also discussed witnessing the Papuans being treated in the same ways she experienced herself and saw taking place with other Black women who studied abroad with her in Indonesia. What Lee's experiences revealed is the notion of Black women's subject formation (Edwards & Baszile, 2016; Collins, 1986; hooks, 1990), particularly as it is understood from a U.S. lens. Lee began to connect her experiences as a Black woman in the United States to the experiences of Papuans in Indonesia. Lee was angry by how she was treated. This was exacerbated by how she witnessed Papuans being treated. This triggering moment really challenged her. She realized anti-Blackness was not just a U.S. phenomenon, but is also experienced by Black people globally. Keeping with the notion of centering themselves as the subjects, participants in this study utilized their pain and anger as sources of knowledge (Hart, 1998) to understand how far anti-Blackness reached. Instead of disregarding their emotions, the Black women in this study used what they felt within their bodies as sources of knowledge. Thus, the context of Indonesia and the interactions participants experienced influenced how Lee made meaning of herself. Lee's (re)membering of her U.S. Black womanhood was expanded to a global understanding of Black womanhood.

Another participant also discussed how the anti-Blackness she experiences during study abroad influenced her meaning making of Black womanhood. Laylah, a graduate student in education, explained how interactions in China influenced her meaning making around notions of anti-Blackness. She studied abroad in China, Spain, and Morocco, but the experiences she shared focused on her flight to Shanghai and her time there. She reported, "on the airplane, the

man took pictures down my shirt, [I] spent the first couple hours at the police station”. In a follow up conversation, I asked Laylah to share in more detail about her ordeal to which she explained, “It was the biggest disaster ever...as we walked down the street in the Bund district, people made monkey noises” and “on the train, my hair was pulled”. After these experiences, Laylah was hesitant to consider study abroad again or even traveling out of the United States for personal reasons. With the encouragement of other Black women, she changed her mind and decided to later study abroad in Spain and then Morocco. Similarly, Journey, a graduate student in education, also mentioned how interactions in China influenced her meaning making around anti-Blackness. She said she was unable to “blend in” and shared that the pointing, picture taking, and being stared at “was the most uncomfortable thing I’ve ever experienced in my life”.

Laylah, Journey, and Lee shared similar narratives regarding how anti-Blackness during study abroad influenced their (re)membering of Black womanhood. The painful experiences triggered feelings of not being wanted in Asia. You could hear and see the frustration and anger as they described these interactions. They could barely believe what they were experiencing. So, how does their experience assist us in utilizing the body as a site of knowledge to understand meaning making? Michelson (1998) argued, “it is important to restore the body and the emotions as sites of knowledge-production and to reconfigure the subjectivity through which we know the world” (p. 223). What Laylah, Journey, and Lee’s reflections illustrated how trauma triggered responses in the body and prompted new meaning of themselves. Paying closer attention to how trauma felt in their bodies caused them to re-negotiate their worldview around notions of anti-Blackness. Their experiences reflected the influence of geographical location on meaning making.

None of the participants in this study were prepared to deal with the anti-Black interactions they experienced during study abroad trips in Indonesia and China. Dillard (2012) argues, contextual history is essential to understand the spaces we are visiting but also to understand the lens by which we come to analyze why the experiences are occurring. Participants' interactions revealed the need trip leaders and students to discuss historical and cultural knowledge of student abroad locations during trip preparation.

Lee, Laylah, and Journey's stories revealed how interactions within study abroad contexts influenced participants (re)membering of Black womanhood. Participants in this study thus (re)membered Black womanhood through the lens of anti-Blackness. Further, participants in this study noted that they have dealt with racial incidents on a daily basis throughout their lives and even as graduate students (Benjamin, 1997; Borum & Walker, 2012; Carter, 2001; Hubain, Allen, Harris, & Linder, 2016; Williams et al, 2005). However, the Black women in this study were surprised by how far anti-Blackness traveled. Participants' bodies took an emotional and physical toll as they experienced various forms of anti-Blackness during study abroad. These experiences caused pain and frustration. Participants' experiences revealed how pervasive anti-Blackness is throughout the world.

Black womanhood in the African Diaspora

Nine of the 23 participants in this research studied abroad in a country on the African continent or in the African diaspora. The African Union defines the African diaspora as "communities throughout the world that have resulted by descent from the movement in historic times of peoples from Africa, predominantly to the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and among other areas around the globe" (New Dictionary of the History of Ideas, 2005). In this strand, I examined more closely how the Black women in this study (re)membered Black

womanhood through relationships and interactions on the African continent and in the African diaspora. When asked about their study abroad experiences as Black graduate student women, participants discussed what they felt in these locations, why they chose to study abroad in those countries, and for those who engaged in multiple study abroad trips, they compared African spaces to other countries they had visited. In this subsection, I illuminated how interactions within the African diaspora caused participants to feel welcomed and affirmed. Further, I revealed how interactions in these locations elicited the importance of spiritual connectedness, revealing the influences of the intangible. I also uncovered how the feelings participants described were often opposite of what they experienced in the United States.

One participant expressed her (re)membering of Black womanhood derived from the welcome she received from the people she interacted with in Cuba. Ama, a graduate student in education who studied abroad in Cuba, shared that Cuba embraced her Blackness. For example, she mentioned being more comfortable and affirmed in Cuba compared to how she felt in the United States: “most of the time when I do travel...I make a very conscious decision to go to Black spaces”. Regarding her time at home, she emphasized, “in my hometown of Washington, DC and I’m walking down the street with, like, white gentrifiers, they’re looking at me as if I’m not supposed to be there”. Ama preferred to study abroad in a “Black country” because of previous experiences of not feeling welcomed or comfortable in a white country. For her, a “Black country” is where Black folks are the majority of the population. As Ama reflected on her study abroad, her meaning making centered her comparisons of spaces as they related to interactions in those spaces. Ama’s (re)membering of Black womanhood was directly connected to how she was treated Cuba versus the United States.

Like Ama, other participants elaborated on the influence of interactions within the African diaspora on their meaning making of themselves. Courtney, a graduate student in history who also studied abroad in Cuba, and Ax, a graduate student in education who studied abroad in Ghana, shared similar sentiments as Ama regarding their (re)membering of Black womanhood as they interacted with people and cultural sites in the African diaspora. For instance, both Courtney and Ax felt a sense of home they could not describe regarding studying abroad in a Black country. Courtney and Ax had the following exchange during their *sista circle* which supported Ama's sentiments regarding feeling at home in the African diaspora.

Courtney: Randomly on the street, it was something in the air. Like it just really felt like, wow, I could live here. This is home. I can't even explain it. It just really felt comfortable. Like I didn't fear for my life. I didn't think anybody would hurt me. You know, nobody looked at me like they do in the States. Like it was different.

Ax: Really interesting because the feeling you describe is kinda how I felt in Ghana, but again, don't even know if I'm from there which is, again, how do you feel that and you have no idea. You don't necessarily know you have any connection to that space, but you feel it.

What participants concluded was the context of their study abroad elicited "a common loss of a home" (Ahmed, 1999, p. 329) as they reflected on their study abroad juxtaposed to their experiences in this United States. Participants' reflections revealed the emotional strain of not feeling welcome in the United States. However, what Courtney and Ax drew attention to is the spiritual connection they felt within the African diaspora. Their sentiments supported what Dillard (2012) argues regarding spirituality and connections to space, particularly related to Black women's meaning making. Courtney and Ax described the connection they felt within their bodies from studying abroad in a place where they, as Black people, were the majority. Everywhere they turned, people looked like them. Thus, their (re)membering of Black womanhood occurred by simply studying abroad amongst other Black people in the diaspora.

Their meaning making uncovered the importance of feeling a sense of belonging in a geographical location.

All the participants who studied abroad in a Black country expressed similar sentiments as Ama, Courtney, and Ax did regarding the spiritual connection they felt to the space. For example, participants spoke about emotional connections they experienced when they arrived at these places they had never been before. Dillard (2006) discusses home as “a somewhat mythical space that many African Americans yearn for in our pilgrimages to Africa given our historical and contemporary oppressions and marginalizations as African ‘Americans’” (p. 55). What Dillard is describing is the embodied spiritual and cultural connection African Americans feel given their historical roots to the African continent. Often, Black people take journeys to the African continent to find historical connections to their past (Morgan, Mwegelo, & Turner, 2002). Dillard (2006) goes on to argue, as descendants of African slaves who were stolen from the African continent and transported as cargo to build the United States, African Americans have an unresolved sense of belonging to the continent of their origin. Participants utilized their bodies as sites of knowledge as they visited African countries during study abroad. Interactions with these sites revealed the importance of belonging spiritually and culturally to location. Their experiences illustrated meaning making is not always in the tangible experiences but also in the intangible. Thus, (re)membering Black womanhood reflects the cultural and spiritual connections participants felt in their bodies around the notion of belonging.

Ama described another experience she had while in Cuba regarding the grouping together that takes place amongst Black people when they come to a space. She was referring to the natural gathering that takes place amongst Black folks when we come into a space and see one another. Ama noted the following in her *sista* circle.

When Black people are in a space, we often pool. We may be from different places, but especially if we're a minority in a space, like we pool and we gravitate towards each other. Yeah, I found that to be, like, really profound.

Dillard (2012) described home as “a place that is our center...a refuge, a homeplace” (p. 56). In these places we call home, no matter where people are from, Black people often find comfort and belonging by gathering together with one another (Morgan et al, 2002). Ama brings up the importance of “pooling” for Black women’s meaning making of themselves through study abroad. This finding helps to explain how home also signified what happens when Black people get together; there is a sense of comfort that Ama’s reflection illuminated.

Ama, EM, and Ax all described the physical and emotional responses they felt studying abroad in Black countries. These spaces elicited a sense of belonging they could not quite touch but that they could feel in their bodies and in their souls. Interactions within the diaspora illuminated the importance of the intangible. What I am referring to is how participants made meaning through things they could not touch. For the Black women in this study, these feelings were belongingness and home. Thus, participants’ reflections revealed the influence of the intangible in (re)membering Black womanhood during study abroad. The lived experiences they shared provided an expanded definition of what home and belonging means for the Black graduate student women in this study.

Black Women’s Bodies on Display

In this subsection, I take up more literally Michelson’s (1998) notion of experiential learning as I explain how the Black women in this study (re)membered Black womanhood through their bodies being on display within study abroad contexts. For example, participants shared people wanting to take their pictures and being grabbed to take pictures without permission. This was not the same experience participants witnessed their non-Black peers

having. The Black graduate student women in this study asserted they felt like they were on display and in a different way than other participants with whom they studied abroad. As such, this subsection focuses on two points. First, I highlighted some of the experiences participants described regarding feeling like their bodies were on display. Second, I discussed how participants' experiential learning around being on display concluded in (re)membering Black womanhood.

Some participants in this study also studied abroad during their undergraduate studies and/or traveled abroad for work or personal reasons. As participants in this study reflected, they did not differentiate the meaning they made of personal travel from travel for school. One participant who was able to engage in reflection across her experiences in Columbia, Panama, China, and Ecuador was Ashley, a graduate student studying education. She explained,

your body can be public property. If you're in close proximity to someone, they don't have a problem touching you. Being offered babies is a real thing, like people have handed me their children to take photos of me with their child.

In the recording, you could hear the frustration in Ashley's voice, but you could also see in her body reactions that the incident she described has happened so much that it is commonplace. The other participants in her *sista* circle agreed, having similar instances happen to them during study abroad. Chioma, a graduate student in African Diaspora and African cultural studies who studied abroad in South Africa, also traveled to China while a graduate student. She affirmed Ashley's example by also mentioning people wanting to take pictures of her while she was in China. Other participants chimed in to add similar experiences to the conversation. Jeri, a graduate student in public health, shared that she was stared at a lot while visiting a club in India during her study abroad. Focusing on their bodies as sites of knowledge, participants' experiences revealed Black women's bodies are not seen as human, and thus, they have little say over how their bodies are

treated. Further, the Black women in this study felt their bodies were not seen as human, and thus their bodies are not respected or valued. The interactions Ashley, Chioma, and Jeri describe demonstrated their belief that Black women's bodies are meant for the use and entertainment of others.

Additional participants reported their meaning making of themselves was influenced by literally being on display. Benny, a graduate student in education who studied abroad in Indonesia, was a spectacle in Indonesia, articulating,

in Bali, this man walks over and...he took my hand again...and then I see this photographer standing there and I was like, no, and then we take a picture. And a lady walks up and does the same thing like two seconds later.

Benny went on to share this incident occurred at an event the graduate students were attending. Benny recounted the trip facilitators' response, which was, "this guy is a comedian. he's well respected...he likes to make his students laugh. He likes to take pictures with people". As Benny shared with us in her sista circle, she emphasized, "I'm the only one who he took a picture with...even after I said no". Benny's experience revealed a couple important points. First, she described feeling like her body was a spectacle, available for a strange man's use and enjoyment. Second, even after she clearly said no, the photographer persisted. Making matters worse, after expressing her discomfort with the incident, her trip leader diminished and dismissed her feelings.

The Black graduate student women in this study repeatedly mentioned being stared at, as well as being asked, or even forced, to take pictures for others' enjoyment. This kind of Black or Black woman-as-entertainment has a cultural history. These experiences are reminiscent of the experiences of Sara Baartman (her colonial name) also known by her stage name as Hottentot Venus (Kerseboom, 2011). In 1810, she was brought to England and later France to be on

display until the 1970s. Her body was used as a scientific justification for the creation of the “other” (Kerseboom, 2011; Qureshi, 2004). More specifically, she was used to pathologize, specifically, Black women’s bodies (Henderson, 2014; Kerseboom, 2011; Qureshi, 2004). Thus, what Benny’s (and other participants’) experiences revealed is Black women’s bodies continue to be displayed as “other” and for others to forcibly enjoy their/our bodies. Being displayed and photographed in this way was traumatic. Benny went on to share that the incident left her with little energy to respond.

Benny’s sentiments regarding her experiences abroad connect directly to how she felt as a Black graduate student woman navigating a predominately white institution. She described how interactions in both spaces elicited notions around her intersecting identities. For example, she said, “I have really felt the intersection between race and being Black and being female”. She described her body, hair, and voice as how she felt those characteristics have influenced her experiences as a graduate student. Prior to staying abroad, her meaning making was largely tied to her race. However, after study abroad, she was able to see more clearly how race and gender influenced her meaning making of her Black womanhood. She noted, “before [study abroad], for the most part, [I] really identified more strongly with being Black. But this year, not only am I [having experiences because] I am Black, [but also because] I am female”. Between the experiences she had in her graduate program and these incidents in Indonesia, she said, “I was done”. We need to consider the depth of Benny’s emotional and physical response to these interactions. After years of not being heard and being made to feel she could not respond, this particular incident in Indonesia left Benny depleted. Further, having had similar experiences in previous educational spaces, she was left with minimal energy to respond. What Benny is referring to is the impact of repeated racial microaggressions often felt by Black women in the

academy (Donovan, Galban, Grace, Bennett, & Felicié, 2013; Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Hunt, M, 2013; McCabe, 2009; Willis, 2012). Tuitt and Carter (2008) argue, “racial microaggressions can be understood as subtle and not-so-subtle racial assaults that confirm and/or reinforce the threats that black students anticipate in PWIs” (p. 53). One thing we are able to see through Benny’s reflection is that racial microaggressions occur globally and not just in U.S. academic spaces (Sweeney, 2014; Talburt & Stewart, 1999; Willis, 2012; 2015). A second point is that instances during study abroad open participants’ eyes, and they are thus able to expand their lens of meaning making to their intersecting identities. Unfortunately, painful study abroad experiences are what provide these moments of reflection and (re)membering.

Ashley, Chioma, Jeri, and Benny’s words are painful. Through their gender, size, hair, skin tone, and even the tone of their voices, participants began to realize the variety of ways their physical features were racialized and gendered during study abroad. Their race and gender became attached to their bodies in ways they had only previously understood from their experiences in the United States. Further, in these moments, participants were often not allowed to outwardly express their pain. It was not until participants engaged in the *sista circle* that they were able to freely offer their stories to other Black graduate student women. Participants in this study were then able to “theorize [their experiences] from the point of pain” (Edwards & Bazile, 2016, Denise, para. 3), which aided in their ability to (re)member Black womanhood further even after studying abroad. Participants’ inability to fully feel their pain in the face of oppression is a direct limit on Black women’s agency, limiting their ability to resist everyday manifestations of oppression (Ashley, 2014; Collins, 2009). What the Black women in this study confirmed was the self-censorship (Gildersleeve, Croom, and Vasquez, 2011) they are forced to engage in, in their inability to feel or express agency over painful experiences they had during study abroad.

Ashley, Chioma, Jeri, and Benny shared experiences of being grabbed, having their picture taken without permission, and staring, demonstrating the trauma of feeling as though they were on display during study abroad. Additionally, the Black women in this study regularly made connections between their emotional and physical reaction during studying abroad to those they have had as Black women navigating academic spaces in the United States. Participants emphasized the way their bodies were interrogated in particular geographical locations influenced their (re)membering of Black womanhood. Further, the type of experiential learning displayed in this study reflected how transnational movement influenced participants' meaning making. For example, until studying abroad, the Black graduate student women in this study understood their experiences solely from a racialized lens, which is often the case living in the United States. As the Black women in this study navigated spaces outside of the United States, particularly countries in Asia, the African diaspora, and on the African continent, they began to see their previous understandings of Blackness were insufficient. Participants' reflections illustrated how traveling outside the United States aided in the expansion of meaning making regarding Black womanhood.

Summary of Thematic Strand Two

To summarize, the second thematic strand examined how interactions within study abroad contexts influenced participants (re)membering of Black womanhood. The participants in this study abroad uncovered a mode of understanding transnational movement that has only minimally been examined. For instance, authors have examined meaning making at the graduate level (Dirkx, Spohr, Tepper, & Tons, 2009) and adult meaning making of international travel (Biniecki & Conceição, 2014). This study extends these discussions by illustrating how meaning is made of transnational contexts through notions of Blackness. Relationships and interactions

within study abroad contexts revealed racism is a global phenomenon. Further, participants in not saw value in traveling to within the African diaspora because it elicited feelings of home not felt in the U.S. The participants articulated instances of being on display that have a historical significance that continue to this day. The Black women in this study engaged in a nuanced mode of meaning making utilizing their bodies as sites of knowledge to (re)membering their understanding Black womanhood. In the final strand, I move to exploring meaning making by examining how participants interacted with themselves by looking within. What I mean is how being introspective influenced participants' (re)membering of Black womanhood. The final strand concludes the braid by examining how relationships and interactions with themselves and other Black women influenced the participants' meaning making during study abroad.

CHAPTER 7: THIRD STRAND: HEALING THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERACTIONS DURING STUDY ABROAD

My experiences studying abroad in Vietnam prompted me to wonder what other Black graduate students experienced when they studied abroad. Experiences with my white peers on the trip triggered my inquiry into how interactions and relationships influenced peers' meaning making. Even though I had negative experiences with peers during study abroad, the experiences still aided in my own (re)membering of my Black womanhood. More specifically, my body was ever present in the stares I received, the pointing in my direction, and the touching of my hair without my permission. However, through these experiences, I was able to see how the reactions to Black women's bodies influenced my interactions and thus expanded how I understood my Black womanhood. Further, studying abroad with an all Black group in Ghana illuminated the importance of examining race along with additional identities, as they related to the study abroad spaces, to understand meaning making. I began to see cultural connections between my ways of moving around in the world and other Black people in Ghana. Even not knowing Twi (the most widely spoken language in Ghana), I still able to see how other Black people communicated with one another. Their bodies said more than words were able to express. Thus, this transnational movement that is study abroad allowed me to draw connections to my ancestral home of which I was previously unaware. As I reflect on the culmination of my study abroad experiences, I see now the importance of trauma and pain experienced through the body on (re)membering how we make meaning.

Chapter 5 examined interactions with faculty and peers, while chapter 6 discussed contextual interactions. Both chapters influenced how these interactions challenged participants meaning making of themselves and presented new ways of (re)membering Black womanhood.

This chapter builds on the previous two by examining participants' relationships with themselves through self-reflection and their interactions with other Black women. So far I have illustrated the traumatic incidents that triggered participants meaning making. However, the focus of this chapter is to examine more closely how participants resisted during these instances of trauma and healed. In this chapter I suggest Black women made meaning of themselves through their intersecting identities, by engaging with themselves, and through sistahood and othermothering. This chapter weaves together a collective understanding of (re)membering Black womanhood through participants expanded understanding of themselves. For example, the study abroad space provided participants opportunities to expand their knowledge of themselves through their social positionalities in ways they had not prior to studying abroad. As participants traveled, their meaning making of their Black womanhood grew from a U.S. standpoint to one that is more globally informed. Keeping with the braiding metaphor, this chapter is divided into three strands of (re)membering based on participants' responses:

- 1) (Re)membering through expanded knowledge.
- 2) Healing through self-reflection.
- 3) Healing through sistahood and othermothering.

(Re)membering Through Expanded Knowledge

In this subsection, I demonstrated relationships and interactions during study abroad influenced participants (re)membering of Black womanhood through notions of privilege. These interactions illuminated notions of privilege around participants' U.S. identity while also reflecting aspects of their oppressed identities. In addition to Michelson's (1998) notion of experiential learning, I am also drawing on the aspect of Black Feminist Epistemology that argues that Black women's lived experiences must be understood through an intersectional lens

(Collins, 2009). Participants' study abroad experiences and the resulting sista circles allowed Black graduate student women the opportunities to interrogate how their identities intersected, rather than just understanding their experiences as simply racialized. Being Black means different things when removed from the U.S. national container (Mahalingam & Reid, 2007; Shahjahan & Kezar, 2013) and navigating different contexts around the world. When asked why she believed her study abroad experiences in Ghana were different as a graduate student, Alexandria, a graduate student studying education, responded with the following,

So one guy I was talking to, I was at the bar, having a beer and he was like, oh, my god, we should get married and I was just like, bro, no. I was like why do you ask? People keep asking me that. Why do people do that? And he was like because we don't wanta be in this country anymore. We wanta go to another country...and we wanta go to America cuz he said you all got everything in America. And I was like, yeah, but more money, more problems. You know, and he was like, yeah, it might be more money, more problems but...I'd rather take that than here. And so it was just also this realization, this place that I had fallen in love with is a place that the people that are there want to leave.

During her sista circle, Alexandria mentioned the numerous marriage proposals she received while in Ghana. Some might say this was simply men complimenting her. However, pushing this notion further, what Alexandria asserted in her reflection was that women's bodies, and in this case, Black women's bodies continue to be used as a commodity readily available for men to possess and consume; and in this case, for access to a more desirable geographic location (Hartman, 1997; King, 2013; Miller-Young, 2008).

Alexandria also grappled with her class privilege as a U.S. citizen. The conversation she had while she was in Ghana pushed her understanding of her class to a place she had not yet considered until she studied abroad. She continued her reflection in the sista circle with the following thoughts,

Class came up so much. But it was this concept that my ancestors were slaves but then we go to the country [Ghana] that was very popular in the slave [trade]...and I have [class] privilege here. But in America, my privilege looks very different but then it's

almost as though, this country benefited from slave trade, but also I'm going back to this country [Ghana], and they're telling me that the country [the United States] I came from, that I think that's horrible to your spirit and to your psyche, is better...right? I had a lot of those conversations in my journal about class and that moment of like, wait, I'm a higher class here and what does that mean that I'm a higher class in this place [Ghana]? And I don't think as an undergraduate student, I would've been able to really tease those things out.

Alexandria's story uncovered a connection to slavery as it related to her (re)membering of Black womanhood through her privilege. Ghana was one of the last locations on the African continent where stolen Africans were taken before they were shipped as cargo during the transatlantic slave trade. Being from the United States and studying abroad in Ghana provided Alexandria opportunities to consider her experiences of oppression as a Black person in the United States while also considering the privilege associated with her class and being a US citizen. This privilege manifested for Alexandria in two ways. First, she was able to pay for study abroad, a clear reflection of economic privilege. Second, having a U.S. passport allowed her, as a Black American, the ability to travel freely to places many folks from African countries cannot. The interaction Alexandria's described caused her to pause for a moment of and reflect. Alexandria's U.S. privilege and lens, juxtaposed with her minoritized status as a Black American, provided her a lens to critically (re)membering Black womanhood in nuanced ways What Alexandria is eluding to is how daily interactions with people in Ghana caused her to consider her intersecting identities in ways she had not prior to studying abroad. Further, Alexandria's lived experience and reflection presents the passport itself as a document weaving together both class privilege and U.S. citizenship privilege. What Alexandria further complicates in the tension she felt is how race, gender, class, and citizenship status intersected during her daily interactions while studying abroad. Alexandria's reflection demonstrates why graduate student experiences are a meaningful entry point for understanding meaning making of study abroad.

Alexandria shared an additional point regarding travel. Specifically, she discussed how her interaction with a Ghanaian woman elicited thinking differently about her Blackness. She explained,

I realized that people can't just go where they want to...I was at the W.E.B. Dubois Museum, [and] this lady, kept talking about how she liked my hair. I was like, you should come to America, you know, get your hair. And so I said it like two or three times...finally she said, I can't just get up and go to America. She said, even if I could afford a plane ticket, somebody has to sponsor me. I mean, they literally have to write a letter [saying they] support her while she's in America and there was this moment of, oh...there's this privilege of travel that I had never really considered that my American passport does.

Studying abroad in a space like Ghana provided Alexandria a moment to (re)member her Black womanhood in a way that she had not yet considered. It was in her interaction with a woman in Ghana that Alexandria began to interrogate the privilege of having a U.S. passport, despite being minoritized as a Black person in the United States. Until her conversation with the woman at the W.E.B. Dubois Museum, Alexandria had not considered the privilege she held as a U.S. citizen. Everyday interactions provided the Black women in this study reflective moments where they were able to engage in meaningful conversations that challenged their understandings of Black womanhood differently than they had prior to studying abroad.

Pushing the discussion of U.S. privilege further, a second conversation examined privilege through issues of language. Lynea, a graduate student in human development & family studies who studied abroad in South Africa, sparked a discussion about English being privileged as *the* universal language spoken in academic spaces around the world (Altbach, 2007; Bjorkman, 2008; Jenkins, 2006). During her study abroad, Lynea felt inadequate because she spoke only English. Lynea shared how her interactions in South Africa caused her to consider this linguistic privilege, and she began thinking differently about this,

Literally everybody I encountered could speak at least two languages, English and something else. And I'm over here [in South Africa], I can't communicate with you and I'm expecting you to communicate with me in my language, in your space. I felt really bad.

Here Lynea described feeling frustrated because she did not know a language other than English. She also expressed feeling uneasy regarding the privilege she had being able to speak the default language fluently. Lynea's experience made her consider the privilege she has as an English speaker. Her experience caused her to question not speaking the languages of the country she was visiting as well, being monolingual. Denise, a graduate student in education who studied abroad in Ghana, agreed with Lynea saying, "I only speak one language. They [Ghanaians] speak three. I am here in a space my ancestors probably came from, and I can't greet anyone". We see here the added frustration expressed by both participants as they came to grips with their intersecting identities of being from the United States and being Black in African countries. Lynea and Denise's discussion reflects how daily interactions during study abroad caused them to consider privilege in a new way. The Black women in this study now see privilege how English is privileged in spaces outside of the US (Altbach, 2007; Bjorkman, 2008; Jenkins, 2006).

Unlike Lynea and Denise, Chioma, a graduate student studying Black and African studies, provided a different narrative of healing through expanding notions of self. Her experiences though implicate her U.S. Black identity and her Nigerian heritage as she navigated her study abroad in South Africa. While she was born in the United States, her parents immigrated to the US from Nigeria. She has also traveled to Asia and Europe. As she reflected on her study abroad, she compared her experiences in all those locations as a Nigerian American woman. For instance, Chioma's reflection illustrated the tension often experienced as a Black

woman who identifies with multiple heritages. She experienced study abroad in slightly different ways, but her experiences connected to Lynea and Denise's. She asserted,

Coming from two Black cultures, it was more exciting to kind of understand how Black women function in this space. So where I have traveled and had to deal with issues of racism and such in Asia and Europe, it was a very different experience in South Africa. But as an American, there's a kind of unspoken—but very much shown—privilege that I had to negotiate. I felt like I had to kinda fight to remain equal [as a fellow “African”] and not be given special privileges [as an American]. So I would say that was kind of how I was navigating that space, the multiple Black cultures, and trying to, you know, talk to people as fellow Black, fellow Africans but constantly be put outside of that space and being like, well, you're actually American, you're not African. I'm like no, I'm African.

Chioma interpreted quite a bit about meaning making from this single interaction. During this instance, Chioma was confronted with her race, culture, gender, and national identities. In comparing her experiences in Europe, Asia, and South Africa though, Chioma prompted the question: what are the geographic boundaries of Blackness? While she had not studied abroad in Europe or Asia, she had traveled there; she had experiences of anti-Blackness in those places. Chioma realized being Black shaped her experiences in Asia and Europe, and being American often shaped her experiences in South Africa. Reflecting and discussing her study abroad experiences during the *sista circle* allowed Chioma the space to construct similarities in her study abroad experiences and discuss them in a manner she had not previously. Geographical location was influential in Chioma's (re)membering of Black womanhood. Further, the more she traveled she was built on previous knowledge that continued to shape her meaning making.

One conversation amongst participants revealed how study abroad prompted expanded notions of self. Blair, a graduate student in education, studied abroad in Indonesia. Becky also studied abroad in Indonesia and is pursuing a graduate degree in education. Gabrielle, who is pursuing a graduate degree in education, studied abroad in Spain. For them, interactions during study abroad illuminated notions around their age. For instance, interactions during study abroad

prompted participations to consider aspects of their age, work experience, and prior knowledge (Dei, 1994; King, 1997; Merriam & Mohamad, 2000; Merriam & Ntseane, 2008). A small excerpt from our conversation follows:

Becky: We didn't have a whole bunch of meetings before we met, but we went through a number of exercises, and the last meeting we had before we left, I was frustrated during that meeting because I felt like the exercises and the questions, the conversations we were having were not age appropriate.

Gabrielle: I mean, they're training us to be professors, to be a part of the academy so we have to think differently about our time. Like we're building our research agendas. We're building our scholarly lives.

Blair: I totally agree with that, and I just add, with age comes wisdom. We're going to learn something, right? To acquire a transferable skill hopefully, right? I didn't go on this trip, like oh, I'm about to go on vacation for three weeks.

Becky: It's something I see consistently in the academy. There's this relationship that develops that seems like no matter what your experience is, no matter the fact that you are a grown person in a very responsible job with a lot of responsibility, none of that is taken into account. And so, for me, it was respect me, just as a person. You know, it was just seems like...there's only one way of doing things, that they [trip leaders] know how to do.

The conversation above between Becky, Blair, and Gabrielle revealed two points. First, their conversation illustrated how interactions during study abroad exposed notions regarding participants age and professional status. As stated earlier in this chapter, the Black graduate student women's experiences as graduate students were different than those of undergraduates. Thus, the activities used to engage them as they prepared for study abroad and while studying abroad needed to be age and experience appropriate.

Marie, a graduate student in education who studied abroad in the Netherlands, built upon Becky, Blair, and Gabrielle's conversation by specifying how notions of gender developed as she reflected on her study abroad. However, Marie reflections focused on our interactions as Black women and the influence of the sista circle. She articulated, "I'm glad this [study] is focused on women because we are always at the bottom. [Researchers are] always studying Black men's issues. I hate having to bring it up because you feel like you're a traitor to Black people".

Marie's (re)membering of Black womanhood through study abroad was prompted by her experiences leading up to the actual study abroad, rather than the experience itself. Her (re)membering was also influenced by her interactions with other Black women during her sista circle. What Marie adds to this conversation is the frustration she has felt as a Black graduate student researcher in the academy. Marie shared not having the space until the sista circle to center her Black womanhood and discuss how interactions influenced her (re)membering. As such, when the women in this study were given the space to process their experiences during their sista circles, they began to make connections between their study abroad and their experiences as graduate students in the United States. Becky, Gabrielle, Blair, and Marie's reflections explained how interactions influenced their (re)membering of Black womanhood around the intersecting identities of their age, professional roles, and gender.

After Marie's sista circle, I was left pondering, why are Black women's experiences not worthy of attention in the United States? In her response, Marie discussed multiple issues. First, she shared her thoughts regarding gender in the Black community. Her narrative pointed to an issue of those identifying as Black women feeling as though their research is less valued in comparison to those identifying as Black men (Harris & Patton, 2016). For instance, Marie stated it is the researchers who conduct research alongside Black men who are often awarded funding for their research, but research examining the experiences of Black women are often not seen as valuable and are not supported. In her analysis, Marie brings to light feelings of invisibility, specifically as a Black graduate student woman (Henry & Glenn, 2009; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). Second, as Marie reflected on her study abroad experiences, she centered the structures of race and gender in her analysis regarding research prior to, during, and after studying abroad. She also utilized my dissertation study as a reference point to support her claim. Centering her

lived experiences as she reflected on study abroad elicited notions regarding the racialization of gender and how this process manifested for her in her experiences as a Black graduate student woman.

Marie likened the erasure of Black women's experiences and knowledge to the historical process that took place on plantations during U.S. slavery. Marie explained, "I feel bad having to even bring it up because I feel like it's just another way of dividing the slaves on the plantation, and it's frustrating. It's very frustrating for me". Denise, a graduate student in education, shared similar sentiments as Marie. As she reflected on her visit to the slave dungeon in Ghana, her (re)membering of Black womanhood uncovered a connection between how the lack of interactions experienced in a particular study abroad space influenced her meaning making of study abroad. In the following explanation, Denise shared how spending more time in the male slave dungeon than in the female slave dungeon confirmed what she had felt, as a Black woman, prior to studying abroad. She elaborated,

When we went to the dungeons, I literally could've melted myself into the wall of the women's dungeon because the connectedness was that we always hear about the Black men. We always hear about issues with Black men and...when they were enslaving Black people, the narrative always go to they beat Black men. They raped Black women in front of Black men. How bad for Black men? I was like fuck that shit. He's not the one getting raped! Like I understand that hurts you, but literally, it's not happening to you, and so when I was in that dungeon, like we went into the men's dungeon. We stood around the men's dungeon. We did libation in the men's dungeon. We touched the walls. We talked about the ground being made of skin and dirt and blood and nails and feces. And then we come up and we go to the women's dungeon, it's like, eh, here's the women's dungeon where they raped people. And here's the rest of the women's dungeon. And look at the door we're going out now. I literally just stayed back in the women's dungeon because shit happens to us all the time, and nobody says anything. Or it's said just as this quick, passing so we don't say more, and I just wanted them to know like I hear you, I see you, I'm here and if I'm here, that means you're here, and I think for the women on our trip, it was really like this is our space. But it's so part of being a Black woman, a Black woman is that people are silent about our oppression, are silent about our pain, and people don't want to hear it.

Often, in talking about slavery, the focus is centered on the treatment of Black men's bodies (e.g. lynchings and castration). However, African female slaves "received the brunt of this mass brutalization and terrorization not only because they could be victimized via their sexuality, but also because they were more likely to work intimately with the white family than the Black male" (hooks, 1981, p. 19), also having to submit to white masters, their wives, and children. In discussing her Ghana study abroad experience, Denise's meaning making centered the lack of time they spent in the female slave dungeon in comparison to the time the group spent in the male dungeon. She then connected this interaction to the historical erasure of Black women's pain and experiences. Denise and Marie (re)membered Black womanhood through trauma and pain associated with their intersecting identities. These traumatic experiences were a necessary trigger to draw connections between study abroad and the historical and epistemic erasure of Black women's experiences.

My goal in this subtheme was to demonstrate how transnational movement prompted meaning making for the Black graduate student women in this study. Specifically, the transnational movement I am referring to is the act of traveling from the United States to a study abroad space and then back to the United States again. Moving transnationally expanded the Black women in this study's understanding of themselves. As Alexandria, Lynea, Denise, Chioma, Becky, Gabrielle, Blair, Marie, and Denise reflected on their study abroad, they illustrated the importance of the body as a site of knowledge. Participants worldviews were challenged as they traveled and interacted with new people and places. Thus, transnational movement was a catalyst for Black women's (re)membering of their Black womanhood.

Healing Through Self-Reflection

Thus far I have discussed how interactions with trip leaders, peers, and in study abroad contexts influenced the meaning making of the Black women in this study. In this subsection, I suggest through inward interactions, namely, how participants' relationships and interactions with themselves through yoga and journaling, for instance, influenced their (re)membering of Black womanhood. These modes of critical self-reflexivity (Grove, 2003) assisted participants in acquiring and validating knowledge through their bodies. However, it was important to note here how relationships and interactions motivated participants' self-reflexivity. Culturally, Black women engage in dialogue and reflection as modes of generating knowledge about themselves and how they relate to the world (Collins, 2009; Dillard, 2006). Examples of these modes include journaling, yoga, culture, age, and professional experiences. For the Black women in this study, these particular modes illustrated how they arrived at new knowledge of themselves. For example, participants made meaning by reflecting on previous understandings of being Black graduate student women at the same time as they reflected on studying abroad. This subtheme how the Black women in this study arrived at new knowledge, insight, and wisdom through self-reflection.

Participants expressed how engaging in self-reflection during study abroad influenced their meaning making of themselves. For instance, Marie, a graduate student in education who studied abroad in the Netherlands, articulated how engaging with herself through self-reflection influenced her (re)membering of her Black womanhood. She emphasized that journaling during study abroad and then being able to dialogue with other Black women triggered her meaning making. What is unique about Marie's meaning making is that her sista circle took place about a month after she returned from study abroad. Thus, her experience was still fresh in her mind.

Marie noted that while she had a topic she was supposed to be researching, she found herself much more focused on interrogating her own meaning making. More specifically, during these moments of self-reflection, she found herself focused on the influence of her own relationships and interactions as she navigated study abroad as a Black woman. Marie's journal topics were thus born out of her lived experiences, rather than the topic of the trip. Marie's (re)membering occurred as she looked inward. Chapman (2007) wrote Black women make meaning of their study abroad experiences through journaling, blogging, pictures, and dialoguing about their experiences. Marie's example illustrated the importance of looking within and journaling as a mode of meaning making.

Other participants shared additional ways they engaged in self-reflection during study abroad. EM, who studied abroad in Barbados and England, responded to Marie and emphasized how much practicing yoga assisted her in learning more about herself. Yoga also assisted EM in staying grounded while she was abroad. She saw yoga as a gift to herself, stating, "I can experience my own kind of body freedom and fully experience...really love myself in a way that, that like the rest of the world doesn't". She went on to say,

as a researcher, I realize not only do I see myself in documents and...in history but also figuring out ways to cope with what those entanglements mean as well for my own wellness and for my own focus when working with the sources.

Both Marie and EM's experiential learning suggested the body was an important site for their (re)membering Black womanhood. Through journaling and yoga, participants engaged in an "ongoing conversation about [their] experiences while simultaneously living in the moment" (Grove, 2003, p. 105). This form of self-dialogue demonstrated how participants experienced meaning making of themselves through their bodies. Participants' meaning making thus revealed

the importance of embodied learning (Dei, 1994; Shahjahan, 2005) as a means of producing knowledge.

Like Marie and EM, Ax also engaged in self-reflection as meaning during study abroad. Ax, who studied abroad in Ghana, also engaged in a process of critical reflexivity (Grove, 2003) to arrive at her embodied (re)membering of her Black womanhood. Ax is a former teacher and is currently in a graduate program studying education. Ax's trip to Ghana was unique for her because it allowed her to consider how culture influenced teaching and learning processes. She asserted being a descendant of slaves, and that particular history provided her a unique vantage point regarding (re)membering Black womanhood through cultural connections. Ax was encouraged by her trip leader to engage with Ghanaian people. During her visits to cultural sites, she was told to "see what they [Ghanaians] say to you", to think about what she felt from them, and consider, "what do you see in them [Ghanaians] that you see in yourself". She went on to share that meaning felt different for her as a Black woman who studied abroad in a space she could connect to culturally. Finding a connection to a space is a cultural value presented in Black Feminist Epistemology (Collins, 2009). By studying abroad in Ghana, Ax was not only encouraged, but required to consider how she saw connections between being a Black woman in the U.S. from the United States and see Blackness in Ghana. As a result, Ax's (re)membering was influenced by her interactions with herself within study abroad spaces. This new way of looking at the world has influenced how she aims to approach research and teaching in the future.

In this subsection, Marie, EM, and Ax demonstrated how interacting with themselves through critical self-reflexivity (Grove, 2003) provided opportunities to (re)member Black womanhood. Interrogating their lived experiences while also engaged in reflexive practices of

yoga, journaling, and cultural connections expanded participants' understanding of their Black womanhood. Their examples weave together the value participants placed on journaling, yoga, and culture as strategies for utilizing their bodies as sites for meaning making. Further, the Black women in this study affirmed these processes as valuable forms of meaning making in their sista circles.

Healing Through Sistaood and Othermothering

As participants reflected in their sista circles, they emphasized the importance of interactions with other Black women. On one hand, participants who traveled with other Black women expressed feelings of comfort and created sista circles to support and affirm one another while they were abroad. On the other hand, participants who were the only Black graduate student women in their group or who were conducting independent research discussed feeling isolated. Thus, from the perspective of participants in this study, Black women greatly valued studying abroad with other Black women. The relationships developed between Black women often provide safety, affirmation, and support (Dillard, 2000; Henry, 2013; Johnson, 2015; Willis, 2016). Having someone else there who could relate and affirm their experiences helped participants in this study to reflect more deeply on their meaning making as Black women. Lee, a graduate student in education who studied abroad in Indonesia, shared that having other Black women on her trip was invaluable, especially to support one another as they dealt with racism on their trip. She contended, “we [the Black women] kind of formed a community within the group”. Participants in this study argued that community was an important source of support during study abroad (Dillard, 2000; Henry, 2013; Johnson, 2015; Willis, 2016), particularly for them as Black graduate student women. Lee said of the other participants, “they didn’t understand what we were feeling”. The support she received from the other Black women on her

study abroad caused Lee to feel valued and affirmed (Generett & Cozart, 2011; Gildersleeve et al, 2011). Dillard (2000) speaks of Black women's responsibility and relationships to the community in endarkened feminist epistemology. This support is unique because within these smaller circles, Black women can *just be*. The feelings Lee described pushed the notion of needing *to be* as an essential element of her (re)membering Black womanhood. The support the Black graduate student women in this study received from other Black graduate student women caused participants to realize how important supporting one another is to their meaning making.

Lee elaborated more regarding how traumatic interactions with her white peers allowed her to value the influence of her interactions with the other Black women on her study abroad. Lee articulated wanting to talk to her peers about the experiences she was having; however, they were disregarded. She explained, "we were asked to sacrifice to make other people feel comfortable". When she would express her feelings regarding what occurred with the host families she was told to not focus on the bad and to look at the good things that had happened. Lee's example illustrates how Black women are forced into silence and to not share their experiences (Collins, 2009; Fordham, 1993; Mirza, 2015). Participants reported having to put their painful experiences aside to make other participants feel comfortable. Having to do this throughout her life and then on study abroad left Lee tired. In her *sista* circle, she expressed, "I'm tired of people trying to tell me as a Black woman, I should put how I'm feeling aside to make other people feel okay". The Black graduate student women in this study were asked on multiple occasions to not express their feelings, and thus their (re)membering of Black womanhood is tied to this suppression. Consequently, these interactions with their peers allowed the Black women in this study to see how much their bodies valued being connected to other Black women during

study abroad. Participants realized through study abroad they could rely on other Black women for support, affirmation, and validation.

Lee was not the only Black women in this study who was influenced by interactions with other Black women through study abroad. Courtney, a graduate student studying education who studied abroad in Cuba, also discussed how interacting with other Black women during study abroad influenced her (re)membering of Black womanhood. In her *sista* circle, Courtney mentioned interactions she had with three Black women professors in Cuba. She first shared about one Black woman professor who was about 75 or 80 years old, saying “she instantly became auntie”. Courtney shared with us that this woman told them about her life, how she was not able to attend school before the revolution, but after, she was able to get married and go to college to become a professor, concluding, “to see all the things she saw in her life and how she views it and to be Black, it was like major”. Courtney also discussed the two other Black women professors who she said mothered her. She explained, “as soon as they [the Black Cuban professors] saw other Black women [amongst the graduate students], [they asked] do you have fruit in your room? Do we need to bring you some pineapple, some mangoes? Are you hungry? It instantly became a mother/daughter dynamic.” Courtney brings up the notion of *othermothering*, which “grew out of a survival mechanism during slavery when children and biological parents were separated at auction, and ‘fictive kin’ would take on mothering responsibilities for the orphaned children” (Mawhinney, 2011, p. 215). Courtney’s interactions with other Black women in Cuba revealed how important Black women are to one another. Her reflections confirmed the influence of fictive kinships (Mawhinney, 2011) for the Black women in this study.

Courtney went on to express how interactions with other Black women educators in Cuba made her feel appreciated and affirmed. For instance, she said the attention she received from the

Cuban professors was diametrically opposed from what she has felt in the United States.

Courtney elaborated, saying the Cuban professors showed they cared by sharing parts of their lives and how they came to be who they were as Black women. She shared, “why I think Cuba was a great study abroad to be a Black woman because it was just sister girl love everywhere you went. That doesn’t happen in the United States”. Care is essential within endarkened feminist traditions (Collins, 2009; Dillard, 2000). For participants in this study, the Black women they interacted with showed care by sharing stories of their lives. Hearing stories of trauma and joy and seeing other Black women who dealt with pain and yet healed and kept going was motivating. Interacting with Black women while studying abroad stimulated participants’ (re)membering of Black womanhood around notions of care, pride, and affirmation.

Another participant shared how seeing Black women represented on television influenced her meaning making. Ashley, a graduate student in education who studied abroad to Colombia and Panama, spoke of pride and affirmation as she discussed how encountering other Black women during study abroad influenced her (re)membering of Black womanhood. Ashley’s (re)membering was influenced though by who she saw represented on television during study abroad. For example, she explained it was after seeing Black women regularly portrayed on television that she began to see herself more positively. She began to feel like she was beautiful and smart. She shared,

[being] inundated with all of these Black images of women that look like me...all sorts of shapes. And I’m like, is this how white women feel? But seriously, like...you could be the best because you see yourself reflected in the media.

In her reflection, Ashley illuminated the importance of images and how this particular shift in who she saw represented in the media during study abroad influenced her (re)membering of Black womanhood. Hall (1997) argues images constitute meaning and inform the ways we come

to understand ourselves in relation to the world. From interactions with other Black women during study abroad, the Black graduate student women in this study found support and affirmation from other Black women and through the media. These interactions illustrated the importance of relationships between Black women, particularly during study abroad (Morgan et al., 2002). It is within these relationships that Black women learned to see how their collective struggles for liberation are historically and culturally connected to one another (Collins, 2009).

Summary of Thematic Strand Three

To summarize, the third and final thematic strand emphasized how relationships and interactions with other Black women during study abroad influenced participants meaning making of themselves. This process of (re)membering differs from that which is represented in current study abroad literature and what is traditionally seen as Western ways of knowing (Michelson, 1998). A handful of studies have discussed embodied learning (e.g. Grove, 2003; Michelson, 1998; Mirza, 2015; Shahjahan, 2015), transformative learning in adulthood (Dirkx, 2001a; 2001b), and transnational identity development (Biniecki & Conceição, 2014). The experiences represented by the Black women in this study expanded prior notions of meaning making in adulthood the concept of meaning making to a process calling (re)membering Black womanhood. Findings in this chapter demonstrated the Black women in this study healed through 1) expanding their understanding of themselves through their intersecting identities, 2) by engaging with themselves, and 3) through relationships with other Black women. These particular interactions provided participants moments to co-construct meaning with one another as a result of their interactions with themselves and other Black women. Participants' reflections emphasized the importance of engaging in opportunities that expand their understanding of themselves and how they interact with the world. In the following chapter, I present connections

between the findings I presented in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven to implications for theory, research, and practice. I then conclude with my final remarks.

CHAPTER 8: SYNTHESIS, RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

What is missing is an explicit attention to the epistemologies of Black or endarkened feminism in an interconnected, intersubjective, and transnational way that renders visible the work of research as sacred work, centered in the spiritual notions constructed by Black women on the continent and in the diaspora.

-Dr. Cynthia B. Dillard (2012, p. 60)

In this chapter, I first revisit my original research questions as guides, aiding in the synthesis of my analysis. I then synthesize my findings in a brief summary. Following the summary, I present recommendations for practice and implications for research and theory. Finally, I offer my concluding thoughts on this study, both as a researcher and as a Black woman.

Synthesis of Findings

I was motivated to engage in this research by my own study abroad experiences. What followed was my inquiry into how other Black graduate student women (re)membered Black womanhood through study abroad. My desire to address this inquiry was led by the following research question: *How do Black graduate student women make meaning of themselves through study abroad?* Two additional sub-questions further guided my study:

- In what ways does transnational movement elicit meaning making for Black graduate student women?
- In what ways do relationships and interactions influence Black graduate student women's (re)membering of Black womanhood during study abroad?

These questions informed my epistemological framework, methods, discussions in the sista circles, and subsequent analysis. As I conclude this dissertation, you will also see how these

questions framed the summary of my findings and culminated to my conclusions and implications for theory and practice.

In the preceding chapters, I presented analysis of Black graduate student women's (re)membering of Black womanhood through study abroad. Participants discussed how interactions with faculty and peers, the study abroad context, and engaging with themselves and other Black women influenced their (re)membering of Black womanhood. Braiding these narratives together illuminated a complex process of meaning making that I call (re)membering Black womanhood. Each chapter builds on the other by adding another strand of meaning making. Interactions with faculty, trip leaders, and peers prompted notions of fear and support; power dynamics; legitimacy of experience; and self-care. In this chapter, what influenced participants' meaning making most was the lack of knowledge held by faculty, trip leaders, and peers regarding issues of power, privilege, and oppression. The next braid also built on lack of knowledge, however the study abroad context was the trigger. There is either a lack of knowledge or incorrect knowledge regarding Blackness in these spaces that influenced participants' meaning making. Conversely though, participants' narratives also reflected feelings of affirmation, validation, and support of Blackness in the African diaspora and on the African continent. The catalyst for meaning making in these contexts was the historical and geographical understandings of Blackness, dictating the meaning participants made of themselves within these spaces. Lastly, the final braid confirms the importance of learning through one's body. What influenced meaning most in this chapter was literally participants' bodies. As the Black women in this study navigated study abroad, they learned more about themselves and their relationship to the world. Interactions illustrated the juxtaposition of privilege and oppression, critical self-reflexivity, and the essence of sistahood during study abroad.

Findings illuminated the importance of returning to their bodies as a site of knowledge. What I mean by this is relationships and interactions during study abroad, triggered emotional and physical responses that participants actually felt in their bodies. As adult learners, “trigger events” are necessary for learning and shaping new identities (Biniecki & Conceição, 2014, p. 39). These events were disorienting, causing frustration, anger, and sadness, but they were necessary for participants learning. These events were also affirming, supportive, and validating. These events challenged former knowledge and prompted the Black women in this study to develop new understanding of themselves in relationship to others. Thus, participants’ narratives pushed the Western notion of meaning making that focuses on cognition. Instead, the Black women in this study emphasized the importance of listening to their bodies responses for their own meaning making. Triggering events prompted physical and emotional responses during study abroad and influenced participants (re)membering of Black womanhood.

Recommendations for Practice

Findings from this study generated multiple recommendations for practice. My recommendations focus on three broad categories – recommendations for trip leaders, higher education administration, and those concerned with graduate education. These recommendations are most relevant to those who coordinate and lead study abroad trips, e.g. institutions, study abroad departments, study abroad trip leaders, faculty.

Recommendations for Trip Leaders

Background Research of Location is Necessary. My findings suggest the importance for those who coordinate and lead study abroad trips to conduct historical research on the study abroad space as it pertains to participants’ social positionalities. What I mean by this is, trip leaders need to have some historical knowledge regarding the diversity of the people in that

space. For example, most of the participants in this study were unaware that they would experience anti-Blackness in their study abroad locations. While some might expect students at the graduate level to conduct their own research regarding the experiences of Black people within that space, I would challenge this expectation and suggest it is imperative trip leaders, first and foremost, have knowledge of this information and have discussions with participants beforehand. This knowledge not only assists students, but more specifically aids the trip leader in their own knowledge and understanding regarding the historical background of the space. Lacking this essential historical knowledge of a space and still yet bringing students along, furthers modern day colonial practices by going in and taking from a space what you want and need, without showing responsibility, care, or respect for the space.

Conversations Regarding Global Power, Privilege, and Oppression. Related to the previous point, it is essential for trip leaders to have conversations with participants regarding global power, privilege, oppression, and how those structures play out in the spaces participants are traveling. Critical conversations such as these challenges much of what is discussed in the literature regarding study abroad trip preparation. Minimal research examines the importance of engaging in critical conversations regarding power, privilege, and oppression *before* studying abroad to set the tone for such conversations *during* study abroad. Study abroad trip leaders are in a unique position to expand participants' knowledge of the US (as a part of the global West) and its relationship to the world. Discussing how global power, privilege, and oppression connect to the US as a nation state and other countries (e.g. Collins, 2009) would provide graduate students the opportunity to see themselves more clearly in relationship to the world (Chernilo, 2011; Shahjahan & Kezar, 2013). Conversations such as these are important for any study abroad trip, but as indicated by participants in this study who are older graduate students, they are up for

the challenge of these conversations. Further, as indicated by the Black women in this study, they are used to dealing with such structural issues in their daily lives. Thus, being candid with how power, privilege, and oppression has impacted that particular study abroad space and potentially them when they travel there, is an essential critical conversation for graduate students of color.

Transparency and Communication. Building on the previous point, the Black women in this study articulated the importance of trip leaders being transparent with them as issues arose on the trip. More specifically, participants said open and direct communication were essential to the trust they had for their trip leader (e.g. Davis; Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003; Popp, Donovan, Crawford, Marsh, & Peele, 2003). Here is where participants' age and professional experiences are important to consider when coordinating and facilitating trips for graduate students. Graduate students are different from undergraduate students, as they are often older, have children, have experience taking care of family member(s), and a variety of work experience, to name a few. As such, graduate students are more likely to be more comfortable and more equipped to deal with complex issues that often arise during study abroad. Further, trip leaders need to be aware of varying forms of cultural communication expressed by their participants. Doing this research for all participants might be too much; however, being aware of how participants communicate with you as well as other participants may reduce communication issues during the trip, allows trip leader to get to know participants on a deeper level, and most importantly, provides trip leaders to expand their knowledge regarding there being multiple ways of communicating beyond their own.

Influence of relationships and interactions. During the *sista circles*, I asked participants to share where they traveled, the focus of the trip, who they traveled with, and any additional background information they thought would be important for us to know. I then asked each

participant to share what it was like studying abroad as an African American woman.

Participants briefly discussed the background of their study abroad, but spent a majority of their time discussing the trigger events I shared in the findings chapters. Interestingly, despite asking participants to share about the day-to-day aspects of study abroad, they made most meaning from relationships and interactions during study abroad. Scholars interested in meaning making of study abroad are often focused on the influence of the daily activities (e.g. Rodriguez, 2014; Twombly et al, 2012). However, participants in this study illustrate that the relationships and interactions were more important to their meaning making than the day-to-day content. Therefore, study abroad trip leaders need to make sure they are not just paying attention to daily activities, but also to how *relationships and interactions* during study abroad influence participants meaning making.

Influence of Sista Circles. Findings from my study suggest participants from similar identities valued being able to discuss their experiences with one another (e.g. Johnson 2015). Even being from different institutions, studying abroad through different programs and locations, the Black women in this study were eager to meet with one another and share their experiences with other Black women. They found the sista circle space to be therapeutic, affirming, and supportive. Thus, providing spaces for participants from the similar identities to process their experiences after trip (regardless of study abroad location) is an activity trip leaders should consider as they think about debriefing during and after study abroad.

Technology During Study Abroad. Participants in this study expressed multiple reasons why being connected to people at home was important to them on study abroad. First, adult students are more likely to have family responsibilities at home while on study abroad. These responsibilities are more than likely different than undergraduate students, for instance. Second,

some of the Black women in this study expressed being the only Black person or person of color on their trips. Participants shared how utilizing technology allowed them to find community by connecting with Black people and other folks of color at home and who were also abroad. These connections allowed participants to cope with some of the trauma they were experiencing while studying abroad. Trip leaders need to consider how connecting to community via technology might assist with participants' ability to deal with the trauma that often arises for minoritized participants during study abroad.

Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions

Increase Trip Leaders of Color. Most of the Black women in this study were led by study abroad trip leaders who were white. However, a few participants were led by trip leaders of color and revealed they were the ones who challenged their critical thinking most and presented opportunities to for participants to interrogate their social positionalities related to the study abroad space. One could assume trip leaders of color are faced more often with –isms in their daily relationships and interactions and thus may be more inclined to discuss such issues as they coordinate, prepare, and facilitate study abroad experiences. Further, participants shared having a trip leader who could identify with some of the issues they were experiencing as a minoritized person, made them feel more comfortable expressing themselves as cultural beings (e.g. Brown 2002; Penn & Tanner, 2009). Thus, an increase in trip leaders of color may positively influence the meaning making participants have of study abroad. As institutions continue to consider increasing student of color participation in study abroad, it is important to consider how who is facilitating these trips, influences participation. Increasing the amount of faculty of color trip leader might increase the student of color population.

Trip Leader Training. Participants in this study shared trip leaders were not prepared to deal with the issues of power and privilege that arose during study abroad. In my own research, I have seen little, if any, information regarding study abroad trip leader training around issues of power and privilege. Based on the experiences of participants in this study, it would be integral for institutions to train trip leaders regarding engaging participants around issues of power and privilege. Further, it may even be advantageous for trip leaders to interrogate such issues with graduate student participants prior to, during, and after study abroad. Returning to my earlier point about graduate students of color being more critically minded and having more professional experiences trip leaders may be able to learn quite a bit from graduate student participants by engaging in this form of training with their study abroad students.

Recommendations for Globalizing Graduate Education Curriculum

Graduate Education Curriculum. Graduate study abroad programs are increasing (Dirkx, J. M., Spohr, R., Tepper, L., & Tons, S., 2009), however not all students will be able to participate. Thus, a question remains: In what ways can faculty globalize graduate curriculum for students in the absence of study abroad? Findings from this study suggest graduate students in this study appreciated opportunities that expanded their understanding of themselves in relationship to the rest of the world. Therefore, faculty teaching graduate students should consider infusing global perspectives into their curriculum. Some examples for including these perspectives are: including course readings from scholars outside the US, providing opportunities for students to interact with scholars who engage in research that uplifts transnational perspectives, and infusing multiple ways of learning into classroom space.

Transformative Learning in Study Abroad. Space exists within the body of transformative learning literature where we can further explore how one's social positionality

influences learning. There is a body of literature examining how emotion and intuition as transformative learning processes influences learning in adulthood (Dirkx, 2001a; Dirkx, 2001b; Dirkx et al, 2009; Freire, 2000). From the narratives expressed by participants, returning to their bodies as sites of knowledge revealed the importance of emotion and intuition in their learning. Graduate student professors could provide more learning opportunities for students that encourages learning through emotions and intuition.

Implications for Scholarship

Based on the findings from this study, I present multiple implications for future scholarship. The first two recommendations call for expanding adult meaning making to include additional social positionalities. The third centers Black women's experiences in higher education literature and suggests future scholarship examine their experiences during study abroad. The fourth and fifth suggest theoretical and methodological perspectives for understanding meaning making as new knowledge and by expanding methods related to data collection. Lastly, recommendations are made for future study abroad literature to examine the influence institutional type and length of program on students meaning making. Where relevant, I highlight limitations of my study prompting continued inquiry.

Adult Meaning Making Through International Travel

A handful of studies have examined the notion of meaning making at the graduate level (e.g. Dirkx, Spohr, Tepper, & Tons, 2009) and adult meaning making of international travel (e.g. Biniecki & Conceição, 2014). These studies argue graduate students, "sense-making process reflects a complex relationship between academic or professional goals and self-formative processes that seem inherent to adult learners participating in formal education" (Dirkx et al, 2009). Further, authors argue international travel influences participants understanding of

themselves, contributing to their transnational identity (Biniecki & Conceição, 2014). This study adds to this conversation by examining meaning making through the lens of participants' social positionalities. Findings demonstrate how examining meaning making at the intersecting of social positionality and study abroad, would further the scholarship on meaning in adult students.

Transnational Context Expands Understanding of Intersecting Identities

There are current debates in higher education research regarding Black women's intersecting identities (e.g. Collins, 2009; Harris & Patton, 2016; Jones 2009; Porter & Dean, 2015). Further, Black women's lived experiences are most often influenced by their race, class, and gender (Collins, 2009). However, narratives presented in this study demonstrate that as Black women move beyond the boundaries of the US, interactions elicited aspects of participants' national identity, which influenced their meaning making. This study extends the scholarship regarding transnational identity development (Biniecki & Conceição, 2014). What I am suggesting is participants' social identities influenced their identity development in transnational contexts. Further, scholars need to move beyond examining experiences solely from the perspective of race and gender (e.g. Bruce, 2012; Cheppel, 2012) as this inquiry limits understanding of meaning making.

Black Women's Experiences in Higher Education Literature

Current scholarship examining Black women's experiences in higher education focuses on identity development identity of undergraduate students (e.g. Henry, West, & Jackson, 2010; Porter & Dean, 2015; Watt, 2006; Winkle-Wagner, 2009; Zamani, 2003), Black women's experiences at predominantly white institutions (Carter, 2001; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Williams et al, 2005), and Black undergraduate women's study abroad experiences (Chapman, 2007; Henry, 2014; Sol, 2014; Willis, 2012). This study contributes to current scholarship by focusing on

Black graduate student women's experiences during study abroad. Black graduate student women's meaning making of study abroad is a largely overlooked phenomenon despite the growing number of Black graduate student women who engage in it. This finding suggests current literature on Black women could improve by including the context of study abroad to the discussion.

Theoretical Implications

Embodied Nature of Knowledge. Participants narratives illuminated the importance of returning to the body as a site of knowledge. Their reflections indicated that paying attention to the body's physical and emotional responses to daily interactions, expands how meaning making occurs. A handful of studies have discussed the importance of embodied learning (e.g. Grove, 2003; Michelson, 1998; Mirza, 2015; Shahjahan, 2015). Additional scholarship examining Black women's bodies as sites of knowledge production could expand on the narratives expressed here to include other academic spaces.

Use of Culturally Relevant Theories in Research. Findings from this study provide support for the use of culturally relevant theories to examine and understand the lived experiences of participants of color (e.g. Abes, 2009; Baillargeon, 2013; Collins, 2009; Dillard, 2000; Johnson, 2015; Madriz, 2000; Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2012; Rodriguez et al., 2011; Wilkinson, 1998), particularly Black graduate student women. In the case of this study, participants shared their experiences were the result of them being Black women, which necessitates a need to utilize theories centering the ways of knowing and meaning making for Black women. For instance, I began this study utilizing Black Feminist Thought as my epistemological framework and while this study is still grounded within it, while analyzing my data, I found it to be limiting. Black Feminist Thought centers the experiences of Black women

in this US and thus its tenets focus on understandings of experiences informed by the US. During analysis, Black Feminist Thought fell short as a theoretical foundation to understand the meaning making of participants' experiences outside of the US context. Thus, a framework informed by US understanding of meaning making, but that considers notions of nationality would expand current literature.

Methodological Implications

Use of Technology for Data Gathering. I utilized Zoom for data gathering my dissertation and it was essential in this study for two reasons. First, Zoom allowed me to meet with participants from a wide array of backgrounds, institutional types, programs, and who studied abroad in a variety of countries. Second, even though Zoom meetings were preset, participants could select an option most convenient for them and they could participate in locations most comfortable for them. Participants did not have to travel to and sit in spaces they were unfamiliar. Future researchers should consider using a technological program, as it provides a variety of experiences, allows participants from all over the world to connect with one another, and allows the researcher to audio and video record meetings for transcribing and data analysis. Utilizing Zoom in future scholarship may provide more rich data by examining more diverse experiences rather than from one institution or program.

Influence of Sista Circles. Participants in this study really appreciated being able to connect with other Black women and discuss their study abroad experiences. The women in this study shared they had not been able to reflect in this way and so they enjoyed the space. For instance, they liked just being able to talk and not feel like they had to perform like they have had to do in formal educational settings (e.g. Carter, 2001; Collins, 1990; Edwards, 2014; Johnson, 2015; Williams et al, 2005). Additionally, as I mentioned in chapter 4, I conducted a

one-on-one meeting with each participant before the sista circle. I was initially going to conduct a one-on-one interview, but as I read more about sista circle methodology, I felt the informal conversations would align better. I think it is also important to mention my positionality and how I believe it influenced the data gathering. Sista circle methodology was created by a Black woman and for Black women, so it should not be used by anyone except Black women. Further, I do believe data was enriched because I also identify as a Black woman and have also participated in study abroad trips. Because of these two facts, I was more easily able to contribute to the conversation and share my own experiences. Lastly, since sista circle methodology is a culturally relevant method, future scholars need to create and/or utilize methodology that is culturally relevant for the population with whom they are researching.

Recommendations for Study Abroad Literature

Comparison of Institutional Types and Programs. Participants in this study attended multiple institutional types and participated in all different type of programs. While these differences did not present significant findings, there were elements that may be worth taking up in a future study. For example, two different participants attending different institutions traveled to Cuba. The relationships and interactions with trip leaders and other Black women influenced how these participants (re)membered their understanding of Black womanhood. Thus, centering institutional and programmatic differences may elicit interesting findings in a future study. This data coupled with participants meaning making may yield interesting results regarding how the creation, coordination, and implementation might influence participants meaning making.

Short-Term Versus Long-Term Programs. Of the 23 participants, 3 were engaged in either independent research abroad or were pursuing graduate degrees abroad. The remaining participants engaged in a structured short term study abroad program. Most Black students are

opting for short-term study abroad programs (e.g. Bruce, 2012). Further, many graduate programs are offering short term study abroad programs, however minimal research as examined the influence of these experiences on students, their education, and pursuits after graduation (e.g. Dirkx, J. M., Spohr, R., Tepper, L., & Tons, S., 2009). Participants narratives suggest though that there may be differences between the meaning making of short term structured programs versus a participant engaging in independent research or a degree. However, there were limited opportunities in this study to explore these differences.

Conclusion

Findings from this study illustrate the process of (re)membering Black womanhood through the experiential learning of 23 Black graduate student women through study abroad. Within the context of study abroad, Black women's bodies became the site of knowledge where truth was both experienced and affirmed. Contrary to Western notions of what is considered truth and how one arrives at it, the Black women in this study confirmed that our ways of knowing are not only important, but essential. Dillard (2000; 2012) contends Black women are not necessarily more awakened by their transnational experiences, but that through their experiences as Black women, they gain a deeper understanding of themselves. The deeper understanding of which Dillard referred is woven throughout Black women's lived experiences and ways of knowing that is deeply rooted in culture, the spiritual, and Black women's bodies.

I shared in my introduction how the personal experiences I had during my first study abroad to Vietnam motivated my inquiry into this topic. It was in this first journey of my own (re)membering of Black womanhood that I began to wonder how other Black graduate student women made meaning from study abroad. The dearth of literature regarding the topic left too many unanswered questions to ignore. On my second study abroad to Ghana, my (re)membering

of Black womanhood brought to the surface ways of knowing, unique to Black people from the African diaspora. As I reflect on the past three years, I am once again struck by how meaningful these experiences were for me.

I have been asked a few times for whom did I write this dissertation. As this study has evolved I have had the opportunity to present different aspects of this research at varying conferences. As such, many people concerned with study abroad have expressed interest in the results of this study. I do hope these they find answers in these pages and are also motivated to pose new questions. Yet while I am grateful for their interest and support, I embarked on this journey for Black women. As Black women read this, I hope throughout they are responding with, “yessssssssss” and “snaps”, as I so often do when something I am reading touches my soul. If they respond in that way, then I have achieved my goal. In a world where Black women’s ways of knowing are often silenced and marginalized, the women in this study chose to resist and scream to the world that returning to their bodies was an essential site of learning that was not only relevant, but also truth. I conclude here with a quote by Lilla Watson, an Indigenous Australian artist, activist, and aboriginal epistemologist, which has guided much of my doctoral journey: “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting our time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Participant Solicitation

Greetings,

My name is Qiana Green, a PhD candidate at Michigan State University in the Department of Educational Administration in East Lansing, Michigan. I am conducting a qualitative dissertation study titled *(Re)learning to be. Understanding African American graduate student women's meaning making of their study abroad experiences*. The purpose of my study is to examine how graduate level African American women make meaning of their study abroad experiences. The aim is to expand current study abroad higher education literature to include graduate level African American women's experiences. For my doctoral dissertation, I am looking for participants who meet the following criteria:

- 1) A U.S. American citizen;
- 2) Identify as African American or Black American;
- 3) Enrolled full-time in any graduate program at a higher education institution (regardless of degree type or institutional type);
- 4) Participated in a study abroad, learning abroad, or education exchange program outside of the United States **during** your graduate program. *Study abroad experience prior to graduate school and/or multiple times prior to or during graduate school does not impact your participation this study.*
- 5) Have access to a web camera

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and will include the completion of a 1-page demographic questionnaire, a brief introductory meeting with me before the sista circle, and a 90-120 minute online sista circle. The sista circle will allow African American graduate student women to dialogue with one another about their study abroad experiences to understand what meaning they made of the experience. Sista circles will consist of 4-5 participants, including myself. Questions focus on aspects of your study abroad experiences and what meaning you made of them through the lens of being African American graduate student women.

There are several benefits to taking part in this study. First, each participant who completes the entire research study (demographic questionnaire, introductory meeting, and sista circle) will be given a \$20 Amazon gift card at the end of the study. I also believe this opportunity will give you a chance to get more out of your study abroad experience than you might normally, as you will have a chance to reflect on your study abroad experiences in more depth with other graduate level African American women.

If you meet the above criteria and this project sounds like it may be of interest to you, or if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email at greenqia@msu.edu. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Qiana Green
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Educational Administration
Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education
Michigan State University

APPENDIX B

Participant Consent Form

African American graduate women's meaning making of study abroad

Dear Participant:

This research study is intended to investigate the study abroad experiences of African American graduate women. Your participation in this study will help me better understand how African American graduate student women collectively make meaning of their study abroad experiences. This is an invitation to participate in one introductory conversation with me (no more than 30 minutes, one 90-120 minute online sista circle with no more than four African American women, and the completion of an information sheet. Data analysis will follow standard qualitative procedures and will be conducted by me, Qiana Green. As a token of appreciation for your time, you will receive a \$20 gift card to Amazon.com at the conclusion of your participation in the study (introductory conversation, demographic questionnaire, and sista circle).

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time, with no penalty for doing so. However, if you are under the age of 18, you cannot participate in this study. You can choose not to participate at all, or not answer some or all of the questions. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study. With your consent, the sista circle will be audio taped and visually recorded utilizing Zoom technology. If this is an issue, you can choose to not turn on your video camera, choose at any time to turn off your video, or not participate in the sista circle. Digital recordings will be kept in a secure location until the study is completed, at which time they will be erased. The information form, on which you indicate your name, contact information, and chosen pseudonym, will be maintained by the researcher in a secure location until the end of the study, when it will be destroyed. The information form will be kept in a separate secure location than that of the digital recordings.

Your identity will remain confidential in all transcribing, analyzing, and reporting of data. Because the study involves face-to-face interactions amongst participants, I cannot provide anonymity. However, your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. Participants will pick a pseudonym (if you desire) prior to the start of the sista circle and analysis, and all identifying information will be removed from transcripts prior to analysis.

It is possible that you may become uncomfortable discussing your experiences. I remind you that you may, at any time and without penalty, elect not to answer a question or terminate your participation in the sista circle.

Please indicate on the information form if you would like me to provide you with a copy of the findings of the study, a bibliography of resources for further reading on the topic, or both. If you have any concerns or questions regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact the researcher: Qiana Green, 517-355-6458, greenqia@msu.edu or my dissertation advisor Dr. Riyad Shahjahan, Assistant Professor in

Educational Administration, College of Education, Michigan State University at 517-355-4539 or shahja95@msu.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at: Human Research Protection Program, Michigan State University, 408 West Circle Drive Room 207 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Signature of Participant

Date

Name of Participant (please print)

APPENDIX C

Demographic Questionnaire

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Exploring African American graduate woman's meaning making of study abroad

All information on this form will be considered confidential, and the form itself will be stored in a secure location.

Do you have access to a web camera? _____ Yes _____ No

Pseudonym (optional): _____

Participant Name: _____

Email: _____

What email do you want your \$20 Amazon gift card be sent to (at the completion of the study)?

You and I will have a brief introductory conversation to get to know one another and to briefly discuss the study prior to the sista circle. How would you prefer this occur (i.e. phone, Skype, Google hangout)? Please provide the mode to contact you based on your selection.

How do you identify (e.g. race, ethnicity gender, age, national identity, etc.)?

What institution are you attending? _____

What graduate degree are you pursuing? _____

What year are you in your program? _

In what country(ies) did you study abroad during graduate school? _____

How long did you study abroad (if multiple, indicated how long for each)? _____

Did you take any photos, share experiences on social media, and/or obtain cultural artifacts that were significant to your experience? _____ Yes _____ No

Are you willing to share and discuss in the sista circle? _____ Yes _____ No

Would you like a copy of the research findings, bibliography of resources or both at the completion of the study?

_____ Yes _____ No

Appendix D

Sista Circle Questions

Questions below indicate topics to be addressed, and do not reflect exact wording or order in which topics will be addressed during the sista circle.

1. Tell us about your study abroad experiences.
 - Where did you travel? What was the focus of the trip? Who were you with? And anything else you think is relevant.
2. What was studying abroad like as an African American woman?
3. As graduate student, how did your experiences abroad compare to those in the US?
4. Do you have an item of cultural/person significance you would like to share with the group (e.g. pictures, social media posts, journal entries, memories)?
5. How was the sista circle experience?

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