

ABSTRACT

Heritage Seekers Not on Purpose:
A Phenomenological Case Study exploring the lived experiences of African American
Students who studied abroad to Ghana, West Africa

By

Michelle Austria Cade

Advisor: V. Thandi Sule, Ph.D.

In this study, I examined the lived experiences of African American students who studied abroad in Ghana, West Africa. I used two theoretical frameworks. The first, Racial Identity Development (RID) filtered through the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) as the conceptual model developed by Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, and Chavous (1998). In addition, Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) helped explain how adults reinterpret their worldview through a combination of reflection and dialogue (Mezirow, 1991). The primary research question for this study was: What are the racialized experiences of African American students who studied abroad to Ghana, West Africa?

This was a phenomenological case study design. Thirteen participants were interviewed using a modified approach of the Seidman's (2013) model as the method of inquiry and technique for data collection. Qualitative methodology revealed six major themes which became evident and accounted for the participant's experiences: (a) Ghana

Mattered – Past, Present and Future; (b) Racial Realities; (c) Connections; (d) Impacts of Slavery; (e) Personal and Social Transformation; and (f) Value of Heritage Experiences.

There were two primary results. First, there is value in sharing the experiences of African American students who studied abroad in Africa by understanding how to make meaning of their experiences. Second, the study revealed that these opportunities further support the belief that heritage experiences matter, and that people want to know who they are, where they are from, and what stories they can tell of their own cultural imprints. Therefore, I conclude that these cultural and heritage experiences are a basic human need and should be valued and shared as a valid reason to study abroad.