

Research visit to the University of the Western Cape
March 27, 2022- April 10, 2022



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As an African American woman, having the privilege to travel to the motherland and conduct relevant as well as impactful research was something I never saw myself doing. I have always known that I wanted to attend graduate school, but I never knew about the possibility of research, or that it was a possibility for myself. After getting the opportunity in my undergraduate program to work in my advisor's lab, I gained a love for research as well as developed my personal research interest, which is broadly the African American family unit racial socialization colorism. I then came to The University of Missouri to pursue my PhD. In Human Development and Family Science and joined Dr. Antoinette Landor's research lab. In the fall of 2021, I was presented with the one in a lifetime opportunity to accompany Dr. Landor and three other members of the lab on a research trip to Cape Town, South Africa. I knew this was an experience that I did not want to miss, so I began the process of applying for the Henry Mitchell Scholarship and was graciously awarded the scholarship that funded this life changing research trip. I was then able to spend two weeks in Cape Town, South Africa and, assist Dr. Landor and her collaborator Dr. Nicolette Roman with her project Perceptions of Physical Appearance in Africa: Skin Tone and How it Shapes Dating in Health in Young Adults at the University of the Western Cape.

The trip was originally planned for the spring of 2020 but due to the Covid-19 pandemic the trip as well as the rest of the world were put on pause. As things began to go back to normal, we got approval to travel and departed for South Africa on March 27, 2022. This was an extremely long trip, but it was a great chance to bond with other members of the lab as well as experience different cultures and customs. We departed from the Columbia Regional Airport and began our long journey to Dallas, Qatar and finally 27 hours later made it to South Africa! When we landed I was flooded by so many emotions and was so grateful to have this experience.

This trip was the most impactful personal as well as research experience I have ever had. I gained valuable first-hand experience conducting focus groups, taking notes as well as learned the intricate details that are involved behind the scenes of research. We also unexpectedly needed to recruit, and this was a challenging experience because of the language and cultural barrier. We were able to recruit roughly 74 participants by going around high volume campus spaces . Even in moments that seemed discouraging or challenging we still learned valuable lessons about research. I learned that as a researcher you have to be adaptable, because things don't always go according to plan. Being able to pivot in tough situations, is a necessary tool that we learned first-hand on this trip. As a future qualitative researcher this also gave me perspective of what my career will potentially look like. I have a newfound appreciation for qualitative research because it is a lot of work, but what I have gained from this project outweighs all the difficulties we encountered.

Having the opportunity to be fully immersed in African culture was also a priceless experience from this trip. I felt like I was where I should have always been. It was a full circle moment to return "home". Every day that I woke up on the continent of Africa made me feel rooted in a place that was foreign yet so familiar to me. We like to think we're so different but, being in such a sacred place made me realize we all have more in common than we actually realize! I found myself trying new foods that tasted like something my family has prepared, I saw traditional dances, that I've seen performed in hip-hop dance and I could see how music like jazz and rhythm and blues have connections to African beats. No matter how far-removed African Americans may seem to be from their African Heritage, our culture, traditions, cuisine, dancing, and other practices are proof that we are closer than we ever thought.

I have provided some photos that highlight some of my most memorable moments on the trip! I have organized them by category. The four categories that I will highlight are the cuisine, the artwork, the nature and lastly will be the research team!

Cuisine

We were able to try some of the most amazing food! One place that we loved was called Fatima's, this was traditional African restaurant that many tourists did not know about. We gained an authentic dining experience, as well as the best food that we had the entire time we were there! Another spot we went to was Gold, this was a restaurant that served 13 courses of traditional meals from three different regions in Africa. Along with the amazing food, the restaurant also had African dancing and painted our faces with paint normally done to welcome visitors.



Artwork

Throughout Cape Town we saw so much street art and it gave the vibe of New York City. The artwork felt authentic and represented the voices of people who are normally not given a voice. I loved it because we were surrounded by high end boutiques and restaurants and, the street art in my eyes was a form of resistance from the people in that community. In my eyes it was a push back to the gentrification that was occurring downtown, it was a sign that the community that they're still here.



Nature

The nature was absolutely breathtaking. We took so many pictures of the views and would often pull over on the side of the road and just take in the scenery. When we were not doing research we were able to go to Cape of Good Hope which is the most south-western point of the continent. It was incredibly windy and surprisingly cold, but it was a great experience. We also got to go to the beach and that was one of my favorite moments. I am from Connecticut right on the coast, so I love going to the beach, unfortunately because I went to college in Alabama and now Missouri I don't get to go to the beach often. I felt like I was at home when we were on the water.



The Research Team

Myself as well as two other graduate students and one undergraduate accompanied Dr. Landor on this research trip. We gained research experience and learned about each other on a more personal level. This trip would not have been as fulfilling or successful research wise without each one of them. Everyone brought something unique to the group if I say so myself are a great team!



I want to give a final thank you to the Henry Mitchel scholarship committee for funding this opportunity. This trip expanded my horizon to the vast field of research, provided me valuable experience with qualitative research, as well as alleviated all of the cost that I would have otherwise not been able to afford. Thank you so much again, for supporting and believing in students like me.

Sincerely,

Jasmine Godwin