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Black Women in the African Diaspora Seeking Their Cultural Heritage Through Studying Abroad

Rose M. Morgan
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While African women and women of African heritage share many similar experiences, their continental separation causes them to have many differences. However, examining the collective experiences of African and Black women of African descent can help frame discussions about ethnic, racial, and gender identities. Central to this discussion is the question: How can African and Black American women connect to share their experiences and engage in mutual learning? World travel is one way for women to experience such an identity connection.

The main purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of African American women toward a study abroad program in West Africa and to make recommendations to increase their participation. This paper argues that African American women and other women of African ancestry in higher education can use study abroad programs as a viable vehicle to visit the African continent and share their experiences with African women. Recruitment

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of Black college women and expansion of study abroad programs that specifically target African countries will provide opportunities for Black women in the Diaspora and African women to learn about each other and share experiences that empower Black women who question their racial and gender identities.

The implications of such empowerment are far-reaching. African American, African West Indies, African Canadian, African Mexican, African Latino, African Brazilian and Native American women who have an increased awareness of their cultural roots are more likely to promote the value of sisterhood—sisterhood as it relates to the unity between Black women and their struggle for liberation—and to more fully understand and ultimately connect with the economic, political and social realities of their sisters across the globe.

Introduction

The institution of slavery—coupled with exploratory travels—has deposited Black people in most parts of the world. Yet science states that no matter where Black people are situated globally, their roots are in Africa. Black women share an African ancestry with the women of Africa that is oftentimes misunderstood, unknown or ignored. African women and women of African heritage need to understand the factors that influence their sense of racial and ethnic identity and womanhood. Black women share so many similarities, but their respective cultures affect them in different ways. According to Wallace Yvonne

Note: Throughout this paper, the following terms are used: *Black women in the Diaspora*, *African women*, and *African American women*. African women refer to Black women born in Africa and living on the continent; African American women mean Black women born in the United States, and Black women in the Diaspora refers to women of African heritage born in the United States, Canada, South America, Mexico and the Caribbean. For the purpose of this article, sisterhood relates to the unity between Black women and their struggle for liberation and the notion of connecting with the economic, political, and social realities of women across the globe.

McNair (1997), African Americans' consciousness of their common ancestry, color, culture, heritage, history, and spirituality makes a powerful statement about who they are as people. Gay Wilentz (1992) asserts that we need to focus more on Black women's roles in the creation of a Diaspora culture and what commonalities exist in female customs of cultural production throughout the African Diaspora.

There is a crucial need for African women and women of the African Diaspora (the term "Diaspora" refers to the scattering and dispersion of Africans throughout the Americas after the slave trade) to identify and understand the systems of domination that negate their experiences and leave them invisible in a patriarchal world. Black women's oppression comes from multiple, interconnected levels. Patricia Hill Collins (1990), refers to this as the "matrix of domination"—or the range of inequalities that affects the construction of gender. Black women need to understand the broader dimensions of these systems and how the matrix of domination adversely affects African women and Black women of the African Diaspora.

Black women in America's society must develop theoretical frameworks that accurately capture their differing experiences with oppression and give them voice to tell their own stories in their own words. African American women must learn to look at their lives through a lens that allows them to see the multiple hierarchies in which they are situated. World travel can be such a lens in that it provides perspective from which to examine one's situation in one's current location. To heighten awareness of the generalizations and stereotypes about African women and Black women of African descent, it is essential for college students and faculty to begin to travel more and view other countries as classrooms.

A drawback of world travel is that it can be expensive. One of the most cost effective, creative, and educational ways to travel is through study abroad. Study abroad programs vary in length from a couple of weeks to a semester or year. Study abroad programs allow students and faculty to experience another culture in the location of the host country. Traditional study abroad programs provide an opportunity to spend time in a host country and experience a different way of life, allowing students to appreciate diverse cultures and change their beliefs—all the while earning academic credits. Most researchers agree that expe-

riencing another culture first-hand is much richer than studying that culture in a detached, abstract and distant manner, which is often the case with course-work that relies on textbooks. Studying abroad can be experienced as a search for one's, cultural heritage. Studying abroad may allow students to seek their heritage, delve into family background, learn more about their national origin and religious, cultural or ethnic background. In other words, students are seeking the familiar by looking to their heritage (Szekely, 1998).

Purpose of the Study

This main purposes of this study are: (1) to explore the perception of African and African American women once their cultures met; (2) to offer testimony to the value of study abroad programs for Black college women as they develop their racial and ethnic identity through experiential learning opportunities; (3) to make recommendations to increase the participation of Black women in study abroad. By this, we are referring to college women becoming familiar with the world-view of African and African American women based on the similarities as opposed to the differences that exist between them and their experiences with racial and gender struggles. Our review of the literature investigates students' participation in study abroad programs in predominately White and predominately Black universities. (For purposes of this paper, we are referring to study abroad programs as those programs in which students attending colleges and universities in the United States complete part of their studies in a country other than the United States.)

Using personal narratives, we share our personal experiences with and perceptions of Africans and African Americans as they are involved in foreign exchange programs. A carefully chosen rhetorical tool, personal experience can offer powerful evidence as to the benefits of African study abroad programs in Africa. These narratives act as a springboard for a discussion about the issues raised for African and African American women when their cultures meet. Our experiences of sisterhood, cultural conflict, gender roles, alienation, religion, and female friendship in our travels help to "put a face," so to speak, on an abstract idea. The theory that grounds the testimonials is the same theory behind studying abroad: one cannot learn everything from objec-

tive data or textbook arguments. To truly learn and understand the power of African study abroad, one needs to hear the voices of African and African American women. Finally, we discuss how directing women to think and learn outside of classroom experiences can help them to arrive at a broader awareness of culture diversity and understanding of Black racial and gender identity.

Method and Research Design

The methodology used was descriptive qualitative research. Research design consisted of a narrative case study approach to uncover the perception, attitude, and world-view of an African woman and two African American women as they participated in experiential learning in cross-cultural settings. A review of the literature was conducted as a secondary method of data collection to gain in-depth description of: (a) United States students' participation in study abroad programs, (b) students' enrollment in Historic Black Colleges and Universities' (HBCUs') study abroad programs, and (c) Black women's involvement in study abroad programs, as it relates to Black women seeking cultural heritage through study abroad.

Literature Review

Over the past sixteen years, there has been a call for college administrators to conduct research, document student participation in study abroad programs, and to determine the impact of such programs on ethnic groups' participation. In the late 1990s, efforts were made to increase the participation of underrepresented students who studied abroad. The Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) (1991) discussed the importance of recruiting underrepresented students in international educational exchange programs. CIEE's action agenda focused on issues dealing with sending Black students abroad and developing models which increase their participation—thus, improving the quality of their learning experience. CIEE also addressed the need for effectively tracking and documenting Black participants and increasing the research with underrepresented student groups in study abroad programs.

A study by Washington (1998) on the attitudes and perceptions of African American students toward study abroad programs identified five factors (finance, family, faculty, fear, and awareness) that contributed to African American students' participation in study abroad programs. These five factors were used to develop the Student Study Abroad Survey. Findings indicated there was a significant difference in the institutional type main effects for the factors finance ($F = 10.4$; $DF = 1,463$; $p = .001$) and awareness ($F = 38.892$; $DF = 1,463$; $p = .000$) sub-scales. In addition, there was a significant difference for the gender main effect for the faculty sub-scale ($F=5.85$; $DF = 1,463$; $p = .016$). From the focus group data, it was determined that the awareness factor was the greatest contributor to African American students' participation in study abroad programs. Awareness represents students' level of awareness about study abroad programs and services and the benefits associated with participating (p. 119).

Farland & Cepeda (1989) conducted a study of study abroad programs at two-year community colleges in California. This study is pertinent because a large number of African American students attend two-year community colleges, and the number of study abroad programs available at the junior college is increasing. The report's findings indicated that there were study abroad programs being offered in community colleges. Furthermore, student enrollment in international education programs has been growing rapidly since 1988. The study found that the enrollment of ethnic groups—such as Asian, Hispanic and Blacks—traveling abroad was less than 12 percent of the study abroad students. According to the findings, between 1984 and 1988 there was a limited scope of options for studying in countries such as the former Soviet Union, Australia, Africa, with practically no options to study in the Middle East.

A more recent report (Open Doors, 1998–99) on study abroad programs indicated that since 1989, United States student enrollment had increased to 129,770 in 1999. Participation in study abroad programs show the dominated destinations for United States study abroad students are the nations of Western Europe (United Kingdom, Spain, Italy and France). Study abroad to non-European nations (Mexico, Australia, Costa Rica, Israel, Japan, and China) was noted for being on the uprise. Although overall participation of ethnic groups and women in study abroad programs has increased, Blacks' involvement

in study abroad has remained relatively low compared to their White counterparts.

According to Stoop (as cited in Washington, 1998), the underrepresentation of minority students' participation in study abroad programs signifies limited access to the full range of education and career opportunities and is a major concern, even if it occurs unintentionally (p. 4). Further, Blacks' absence in study abroad is a problem because it limits their exposure to diversity and impacts their ability to understand other cultures and experience enriched educational opportunities outside the classroom through experiential learning. Developing an understanding of cultural awareness is the responsibility of both the student and the university, and international education can play a major role.

Study Abroad Programs and United States Student Enrollment

Several American colleges and universities offer international educational studies programs for students to heighten their perceptions. It should be the intent of colleges and universities to make it possible for students to increase their awareness of the fact that the American view of the world is not universal and is often extremely different from that of other cultures. Studying in a foreign country can provide great benefits: undergraduates taking courses in foreign affairs and international studies are more likely to be prepared at graduation for the global work environment. Foreign study programs will ultimately reveal far more to American students about their American values and culture than about the host country's culture (Bowman, 1987). There are colleges and universities that have progressive study abroad programs that focus on minority students going abroad. For example:

The California State University International Program was established in 1983 as the system wide study abroad unit of The California State University... The Program's primary objective is to enable participants to gain firsthand knowledge and understanding of other areas of the world.... In 1998–99 more than 1,800 University of California's Education Abroad Program (EAP) students studied through 112 universities in 32 countries...ethnicity of EAP participants increased, as well as a

participation by women (70%)...African American/Black participation was 2.20%. (Open Doors, 1998–99).

Michigan State University (MSU) is designated by the U.S. Department of Education as a U.S. National Resource Center for African Language and Area Studies. Through the African Studies Center, Center of Latin American and Caribbean Studies and the office of Women & International Development, MSU has linked approximately 120 MSU faculty who have conducted research, taught, and offered development assistance in Africa and the African Diaspora (www.isp.msu.edu/brochure/pages/africa.html).

Hembroff and Rusz (1993) conducted research on MSU's study abroad program. The purpose of this study was to examine some of the factors associated with the underrepresentation of minorities, African Americans in particular, in study abroad programs. The investigation looked at patterns of enrollment and attrition among racial/ethnic groups, attitudes, past travel experience, anxieties, and participation in activities involving international issues and information. The study found significant differential rates of attrition among the racial/ethnic groups. This disparity increased for African Americans during their sophomore and junior years since this is the time most students are most likely to travel abroad. The study also found there were significant attitude differences among those who traveled abroad and those who had not. Other differences among African Americans or other minorities and White students were economic issues, fear of travel to unknown areas, fear of discrimination and anxieties about language difficulties (p. 29)

An investigation of literature on ethnic students' participation in study abroad programs revealed that Black females are still more likely not to be included in the ethnic group of students studying overseas. Importantly, it is believed that study abroad courses dealing specifically with African and Black women are limited in the offerings by Women's and African Studies programs. (By Women's and African Studies, we include Women's Studies, Feminist Studies, Black Women's Studies, African Studies, African American Studies, Black Studies, Ethnic Studies, and similar programs that focus on women and Blacks.) There are other study abroad programs in which White students and minorities may participate. This study explored the lead-

ing majority research universities which enrolled United States students in study abroad.

Table 1 shows that larger research institutions are attracting a large number of students to study abroad. The findings indicate the size of these campuses' student enrollment is indicative of their ability to provide a worldwide program to a greater portion of their study body (Open Doors, 1998–99).

Table 1
Leading Research Institutions by Student
Participation in Study Abroad Programs

Institutions	State	U.S. Students Study Abroad	% Participation
Ranking Universities			
Yeshiva University	NY	500	35.3
University of Notre Dame	IN	909	32.1
Duke University	NC	888	27.2
Brown University	RI	472	24.7
Brigham Young University	UT	1,862	23.9
Cornell University	NY	868	23.7
University of Pennsylvania	PA	1,349	23.0
Tufts University	MA	526	22.8
Georgetown University	DC	811	21.7
University of Delaware	DE	874	21.6
University of Vermont	VT	422	21.5
Tulane University	LA	507	19.1
Saint Louis University	MO	486	18.9
Michigan State University	MI	1,565	18.8
University of Colorado at Boulder	CO	1,019	18.5
Emory University	GA	529	18.4
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	NC	1,061	18.0
Syracuse University	NY	821	18.0
Lehigh University	PA	251	17.4
Clemson University	SC	582	16.5

Source: Open Doors, 1998–99

One would expect the larger institutions to have worldwide international education programs that offer a female faculty and students, particularly African American faculty and students, opportunities to study abroad and to gain insight into the conditions of womanhood throughout the world. Yet, research on Black women's issues often goes unnoticed. Research has shown that there are more White and middle-class females from highly-educated professional families who take advantage of studying abroad in Western European countries (Johnston & Edelstein, 1993). An important factor in the lack of participation by Black females is their lack of awareness of such programs. If Black women are not aware of such programs, they are also not aware of the breadth and depth studying in another country can lend to their undergraduate experience. That was confirmed in the study conducted by Washington (1998). An important factor could be the institution they are attending, such as a majority research university versus a predominately Black university.

HBCUs have offered exchange programs because these colleges and universities value the link to African culture. To deepen the link of historically Black colleges to exchange programs, the College Fund/UNCF and the Institute of International Education got involved. The College Fund/UNCF is a consortium of 41 private HBCUs. The Institute of International Education (ISEP) was established to ensure that study abroad is available to all qualified participants, regardless of social and economic background. Only a little more than 2 percent of ISEP's 11,000 exchange students have been African Americans. UNCF and the Institute of International education collaborated with the Ford Foundation to strengthen international studies at HBCUs (Williams-Hayes, 1996, p. 27). However, more research is needed to determine the level of participation by gender in study abroad at HBCUs. Below is research on students' involvement based on the enrollment of students at HBCUs.

Table 2 shows that the private Black colleges included in the study recruit students to study abroad programs at higher rates than state-funded HBCUs. The findings also suggest that students attending HBCUs participate in the study abroad programs at much lower rates than Black and White students at predominantly White institutions. According to Hytche (1990), a variety of reasons may account for this absence such as study abroad options, lack of financial support, inad-

equate information and campus support to generate African American students' participation.

Table 2
Leading Historically Black Colleges by Students'
Enrollment in Study Abroad Programs

Institutions	State	HBCUs' Student Enrollment	U.S. Students Study Abroad	Estimated % Participation in Study Abroad
Ranking Universities				
Spelman College*	GA	2,026	57	.0281
Morehouse College*	GA	2,990	32	.0107
Clark Atlanta University*	GA	4,500	23	.0051
Dillard University*	LA	1,625	10	.0062
Florida Memorial College*	FL	1,500	7	.0047
Howard University	DC	10,105	6	.0006
Virginia Union University*	VA	1,548	4	.0026
Bethune Cookman College	FL	2,301	3	.0013
West Virginia State College	WV	4,896	1	.0002

* Private institutions

Source: Open Doors, 1998–99.

Black Women Involvement in Study Abroad Programs

It is essential that both White and Black faculty assist more Black women to experience cross-cultural learning. Studying abroad in Africa would also allow African American women to gain an understanding and appreciation of the diversity of African women's cultures while linking their own identity from racial, gender, and cultural perspectives. Once an African American woman develops a better understanding of her racial and gender development, she may begin to ask important questions such as: How did African American women

assume the matriarchal positions in the Black culture? Why have some African American women aligned themselves with certain aspects of history and the culture of slavery? How have cultural, economic, political, and social factors shaped African and African American roles in the past and present?

Experiential Learning of African and African American Women in Cross-Cultural Settings

Author X

In June 1998, as a 47-year-old African American administrator, I traveled to The Gambia, West Africa as a representative for a university and as a member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. (Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., is an organization committed to Service, Scholarship, Sisterhood, and Finer Womanhood locally and internationally). I accompanied students from several American universities as part of a summer study abroad program sponsored by a historically Black university. For years, I had been on a personal journey for a better understanding of Black womanhood. My journey to Africa was a continuation of a search that began with many expectations. One expectation was to link to my African ancestral roots. Another expectation was to provide service to the West African community and to become enlightened about the ethnic groups of Senegambia. Most important, I wanted to find sisterly love among my African sisters. I kept a daily journal to record my growth and learning experiences.

As the airplane landed in Dakar, Senegal, there was a great deal of excitement in the plane. However, this excitement turned into an adventure as we took a bumpy bus ride to the coast of The Gambia. I became aware that all the comforts of home were left behind. My first encounter with the women in West Africa was during our ferry boat ride to Bakar, Gambia. Colorfully dressed sisters greeted us selling African garments. At some point, I realized a few of the young African American females from the group appeared disturbed with the aggressive selling (bartering) behavior of the African women. These young American women reported that they had expected their initial meeting to have been more of a welcoming home from the African women. Some female students stated, "I feel as if we are being exploited by the Africans because of being Americans." The female students related the

behaviors of the African women to stereotypes these women must hold of most Americans having money. The African American women could not understand why the African women had not viewed them as disenfranchised women of African descent looking to Africa for understanding and linkage to a lost culture and Black womanhood. I, too, was overwhelmed with the African women's behavior. Later, we were told African women are aggressive in providing for their family, but most Gambian women are passive in nature otherwise. At this point, we began to realize we had unrealistic expectations of African women and them of us. The question arose: Could women who have common historical ties, but appear so drastically different, come together and determine that they have similar needs?

During this visit in The Gambia, West Africa, I learned several things about the culture of African women. Being a West African, Gambian woman is not about wearing the African style of clothing, the braiding of the hair or being a Muslim. I learned as an African American woman seeking womanhood through another culture that one must be willing to live the values and customs of the African people.

Having had an opportunity to observe the traditional roles and family structures of African women, I recognized the strong ties and bonding relationships (sisterhood, friendship), and the generosity among the Gambian women. The values and customs that stood out among the African women were family, a sense of community, respect for their elders, respect for motherhood, a strong belief in God, and a sense of humility. According to Lee (1976), the roles of women in Africa, Arab, and American societies are similar at a preschool level. The learning of gender specific roles becomes more formalized when schooling begins and, by the age of puberty, greater differences are found.

Also, I found the changes that women in West Africa were seeking parallel those many Black women in the United States of America are seeking. Black women in the Western World and African women in a Third World Continent desire economic change to be able to provide for their families. Black women in the America community and African women in the African communities want a quality education to improve the future situations for their children. In examining womanhood in The Gambia, West Africa, I discovered that Black women in Africa and Black women in America share similar experiences.

Nevertheless, we must first discover our womanhood through self-reflection based on one's own world-view.

Author Y

As a 23-year-old African woman born in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, a Republic in East Africa, I was raised to believe that the bond between friends is sacred. It is because of this that the majority of African women would do anything to ensure their friends' happiness. Where two (or more) African women are friends, there is unspoken trust between them. They will do unto each other as they would want others to do unto them. I have a best friend who knows me better than most (if not all). We trust each other with our deepest, darkest secrets and know that if the world were to turn against us, we would still have each other. For those who know us, one thing is clear: we help each other be the very best we can be. When I hurt, she hurts, and when I am happy, she, too, is happy. This is essentially how most African women interact with each other. From observation and personal experience, I have learned that this is not necessarily the case with African American women. My experience suggests many of these women do not fully respect the relationships they have. I have come to learn that in such friendships it often is more about "me" as an individual than "us" as a collective whole.

Relations between African and African American women do not have to be stressful. Attending college in the United States, I have learned that communication is very important. Being able to express your feelings is vital if any relationship is to last. When you have self-respect, are considerate of other peoples' emotions, and keep the communication lines open, the way you interact with other women is bound to improve. If both parties were to learn (as well as to understand) each other's culture, they could find common ground. The best way to bridge the gap between African and Black women of African descent is by spending time together and getting first-hand experience on how the other reacts in different situations.

This is why I would recommend that African American women study abroad in Africa and see how the bonds among their African sisters are created and maintained. It also would prove beneficial for African women to study abroad in the United States and see how their African

American sisters live. This will ensure a better understanding of the cultural diversity found in both regions of the world, while at the same time cementing that bond among women of color.

Author Z

As a 22-year-old African American southern girl coming from a small town called Somerset, Kentucky, there were not many opportunities for me to embrace other cultures. Often, I felt secluded from my own Black race. The most significant difference I remember was between the Black and White dichotomies surrounding religion. As in many Black communities, there are different denominations represented. In my community, there are three denominations represented—African Methodist Episcopal, Baptist, and Holiness. Being a member of an African Methodist Episcopal Church founded by a historical figure such as Richard Allen gave me a foundation for exploring my identity and a notion of what womanhood meant in the Black community. Growing up, I learned churches were different in denomination practices, but shared a similar philosophy.

Attending college opened me to other religions, cultures and ideas about womanhood. My first encounter with female students from other countries was exciting and educational. The more ethnic groups I met, the more I wanted to learn about their culture, and experience what it would be like to live and study abroad. At this point in my life, I have many friends who are international students from African countries. I have established relationships with African women from Kenya, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe who have inspired me to learn more about my own family's roots. Through my relationships with these women, I have learned that living in different geographic areas in the world does not mean we cannot share common experiences. Also, I have learned to appreciate the differences among the traditions of Muslim and other religious practices.

I feel there is a strong bond between African women and African American women and that studying abroad can enhance our knowledge of each other. If possible, I would like to trace my family's roots back to Africa. While at the university, I plan to continue connecting with African female students to broaden my understanding of our similarities and differences. At some point I want to find an opportunity that will allow me to participate in a study abroad program.

Gender and Ethnic Identity Development as It Relates to Black Women Seeking Cultural Heritage through World Travel

Institutions of higher education can play a major role in the development of knowledge by and about Black women. Critical to understanding the traditional notion of the production of knowledge is the idea that the White male is often considered the center of the world-view. Positioning the White male as the norm means all non-White males and females relate to the White male as "others." (Isabelle R. Gunning, as cited in Wing, 1997). In the social construct in which all non-Whites are perceived as "others," Blacks and White women are forced to redefine their knowledge of self and their world-view.

Black women of African descent must engage in a variety of constructive ways to foster the development of knowledge reflective of their experiences in the world. This is necessary to ensure that their experiences are shared in the world. Furthermore, it is essential that such sharing be in Black women's voices. One concedes power when she allows others to interpret her experiences in the way he or she chooses and disseminates such information as an authentic representation of Black women's experiences.

In order to engage in a dialogue about Black women of African descent, African and African American women must learn more about each other. As Author X's narrative demonstrates, African and African American women hold unrealistic expectations of each other. African American women immediately expect to feel a sense of sisterhood, while African women are grounded in the economic reality of providing for their family by selling to American "tourists." As Author's Y's narrative suggests, African American women do not fully understand the way in which African women relate to each other and the intense bonds of friendship they develop. And African women may see America's consumer capitalism as precluding any kind of bonding or sense of collective identity among African American women. These mutual stereotypes are roadblocks to productive dialogue and sharing.

Slavery is also a key issue in the way it has affected and shaped each culture. African women must learn about the institution of slavery and its legacy in the lives of African and African American women. Understanding this legacy will help to explain the need of many

African American women to come to grips with the importance nationality plays in their lives. Also, African American women must not evaluate and judge the lives of African women based on Western standards. Location is an important variable to consider when analyzing the experiences of African women.

Author Z talks about feeling secluded from her own Black race because she lacked a framework for understanding the cultural differences of Black people all over the world. That feeling of alienation is only multiplied for African Americans as they live out their “otherness” in American culture. Establishing a cultural connection with their African roots can be a source of strength, especially for African American women who are marginalized under the matrix of domination.

The only way to truly transcend geographic barriers is through travel and firsthand experience of another culture. African and African American women can learn certain things about each other’s cultures in books, but textbook learning cannot provide true personal connection. Maria Lugones (1987), asserts that world traveling is one method by which women of color can learn and identify their connectedness. World travel allows for the continued respect for independence while appreciating cultural differences. Isabelle R. Gunning (as cited in Wing, 1997) developed a three-pronged approach which modifies world traveling to a methodology for research purposes. She states that it is necessary to (1) see yourself in historical context (in our case the African American female); (2) see yourself as the other see you (i.e., seeing yourself as an African woman sees the African American female); and (3) see the other in her own context (i.e., seeing African women where they are situated). Each of the narratives in this paper moves through these different “stages” of cultural perspective, and as Author X’s experience with unrealistic expectations points out, this can be a painful process.

The college and university programs that target Africa for study abroad opportunities have proven fruitful for students and educators. An interesting feature of many study abroad programs is the fact that participation is not limited to students attending the host institution. This allows students attending colleges and universities without adequate resources to participate in a full-fledged study abroad program.

Conclusion

The main purposes of this study were: (1) to explore the perception of African and African American women once their cultures met; (2) to offer testimony to the value of study abroad programs for Black college women as they develop their gender and racial/ethnic identity through experiential learning experiences; (3) to make recommendations to increase their participation in study abroad. A survey of the literature was conducted to identify African American students' participation in study abroad programs.

Several themes were presented throughout the paper regarding the need for Black women to seek a common African heritage with African women. According to Wilentz (1992), cross-cultural experiences between the African culture and the Black women of a Diaspora culture are significant because those experiences aid in the development of an ideology of the shared values, cultural traditions, and racial/ethnic identities. Using world travel and study abroad as a vehicle can begin to bridge gaps between African women and Black women in the Americas. Study abroad courses (e.g., African and African American Studies, Black Women's Studies and courses such as "African and Caribbean, and Black Women of the Diaspora") focusing on the relationships and commonalities will help bring women of African descent together to reclaim their heritage, explore their identities, and question and redefine what sisterhood and womanhood mean to them, and empower them to take action and make changes in their communities.

The literature review indicates that African Americans and other minorities are underrepresented in study abroad. The research attests to the importance of recruiting underrepresented students in international educational exchange programs. It was also determined from Washington's (1998) study that awareness of programs was the greatest contributor to African American students' participation in study abroad programs. In addition, this research indicates that Black students' absence in study abroad is an ongoing concern because it limits their exposure to diversity, familiarity of other cultures, and experiential learning outside the classroom. African Americans (male or female) who traveled abroad developed a different attitude and perception from those who did not travel abroad.

It was established in the literature that there are progressive study abroad programs and courses available. However, we must continue to encourage universities to promote ethnic participation in such programs. Further, institutions with study abroad programs must do a better job of reaching other minorities, particularly African American women. These institutions must also be willing to develop recruitment plans aimed at increasing the number of underrepresented participants. In addition, adequate (and in some cases increased) funding must be made available to students seeking a study abroad experience. Creative programs must be developed, such as partnerships with HBCUs, Black sororities, and other organizations. Finally, institutions offering study abroad need to increase the number of countries as sites of study that have a connection to the African Diaspora. Faculty, staff, and students must encourage these institutions to establish such programs as a way of allowing students to interact with people in other parts of the world.

Regardless of the status of study abroad programs in higher education, institutions need to engage in creating an environment advantageous to Black women and further develop study abroad courses that offer Black women a wide range of experiential learning opportunities about places in the world other than Western society. Black and White faculty must be encouraged and rewarded for their efforts in promoting African Americans and women to study abroad. Conducting cross-cultural research will facilitate the deconstruction of stereotypes about both African and African American women. The result will be a heightened political awareness and a deeper appreciation of cultural differences and similarities for all involved, as well as the strengthening of Black women as a collective presence all over the world.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations for increasing African American women's and other underrepresented groups' participation in study abroad programs:

- a) Conduct creative and cultural sensitive outreach programs for African American women and other underrepresented student groups.

- b) Promote stronger marketing strategies within the university community, minority community, and make programs more accessible to African American women.
- c) Offer diverse and relevant program curricula in host countries that attract African American women and minorities to study abroad.
- d) Involve more minority faculty and student affairs people who work with African American women and help them identify resources and funding for traveling abroad.
- e) Gather data that monitors African American women's and other underrepresented groups' involvement in study abroad programs to determine their level of participation, and use the information for developing a program model that increases participation.

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