

Exploration of Studying Abroad Experiences

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One can study abroad and still feel like they are in their neighborhood. They can be reminded of home by drawing comparisons between their host country and their home country. In so many ways, this is how Doriana Diaz felt when she studied abroad in Rome, Italy in the fall semester of 2019. She is a senior at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, whose major is Gender Sexuality and Women's Studies major. She made an interesting and insightful blog about her experience studying abroad.

In Diaz's first blog titled *Race and Black Identity in Italy*, she opened up about the Black diaspora in Italy and how some people struggle to view and identify themselves. She discussed that is difficult for some people to identify themselves with one culture or race because they do not know where they fit in (Diaz, 2019a). For example, someone born and raised in a different country from their parents may not know which culture to identify with. Another example is biracial and multicultural persons who cannot find a comfortable balance. Diaz said she that too had identity issues in her own life and at times she did not know where she belonged. This topic of *identity* is similar to the textbook discussing the various types of identities such as personal, cultural, and racial found on page 121 (Juang & Matsumoto, 2017). Diaz also noted that it could be harder for some to identify themselves because "race" is rarely mentioned when discussing experiences. What I found intriguing was that words like "black" and "white" are not frequently used to label racial groups of people which is a stark difference to the United States.

As I continued to read Diaz's first blog, I was reminded of the power of nonverbal communication. In a discussion with activist Susanna Owusu Twumwah, Twumwah talked about how white Italian men's gaze can make black women feel uncomfortable. Twumwah said that this occurs because black women seem unique, strange, and different which makes them sought after

by the white men (Diaz, 2019a). The textbook briefly mentions gazing as a cultural context on pages 238 and 239. Gazing can be connected to authority, influence, or hostility in both animals and human beings. Some cultures have rules that govern gazing, while others do not. In some cultures, gazing is a mutual sign of respect. However, it can mean the opposite in other cultures (Juang & Matsumoto, 2017). In this case with Twumwah, gazing is a sign of disrespect as it makes black women feel uncomfortable.

In addition to discussing topics such as race and women, Diaz's blog post also talks about other topics like familiarity and politics in Italy. Diaz talked about a feeling a sense of familiarity while participating in the Migration Walking Tour. The tour includes visiting areas where some migrants were famous for living. Diaz mentioned that she walked near a black hair care and supply store which is not abundant in the city. It was the first time that she saw congregations of black and brown people spending time together which reminded Diaz of her home. She also visited the International Food Market which also reminded her of a local establishment in her home state of Pennsylvania (Diaz, 2019b). Although Diaz was somewhere different, she still felt at home in this part of Italy. She did not feel judged; she felt like she fitted in. In a different blog post, Diaz talked about attending an event where young people discussed about politics and their viewpoints. She saw some similarities between Italian and American politics (Diaz, 2019c). First, she noted that the younger generations are showing more interest in politics and how they want to see their countries run. Secondly, both countries have a tendency of underrepresentation in political positions which can make people feel unaccepted and that they should not be in government.

In comparison to Diaz's first to her last blog, her perspective changed while in Italy. At first, she felt like she did not belong, but as she learned more about Italy and its cultures she grew more comfortable. In her last blog, Diaz reflected on how blessed, humbled, grateful, and

appreciative she is for embarking on this journey of self-exploration and for the opportunity to connect with others. Her takeaway is that she would like to implement a similar structure to safe spaces when she returns home so that other people can explore their identities while interacting with people (Diaz, 2020).

I selected Diaz's blog because it seemed very interesting. I read her first blog and I immediately liked it. Italy, where she studied abroad, also caught my attention because I wanted to learn more about Italy. I have heard about a few Italian cuisines from cooking television shows and games, but I do not know much about its culture. I do not have experience with studying abroad, which is one of the reasons why I was interested reading about someone else's perspective. Currently, I do not know if I want to study abroad. I have to give that idea more thought. In conclusion, Diaz's blog is a very interesting read as she discussed topics that were important to her.

References

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