

Black Women in Japan



- 
1. Changes over time
 2. Racial minority/ racial majority difference
 3. Life is good



Masters Dissertation title

‘Japanese Perceptions of the Black
Other and the Role of Blackness in
Japanese Society’



“Blacks are good at singing and dancing, a little wild and ...lazy I guess.”

(3rd Year female Japanese university student,
English major)



Attitude Survey One - Top five traits assigned to black men

Musical

Athletic

Big

Scary

Violent



Attitude Survey One - Top five traits assigned to black females

Musical

Athletic

Big

Sexy

Violent



Chris Hart



<http://chris-hart.net/yoyaku/>

Dante Carver



<http://remix-model.co.jp/talent/dante-carver/>

Michelle Obama



<https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/ミシェル・オバマ>

Venus & Serena Williams



<http://www.zimbio.com/photos/Venus+Williams/Serena+Williams/Marc+Jacobs+Spring+2006+Front+Row/blhcn-olie>

Dr. Wangari Maathai



<http://www.tottenhamtrees.org/wangari-maathai.html>

Black Feminist Theory

- Lived experience as a criterion of meaning
- Use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims
- An ethic of caring
- An ethic of personal responsibility

Collins, P.H. (2000), Black Feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness and the politics of empowerment



Research Questions

- How do Black women living in Japan perceive their experiences?
- How have these experiences changed over time?

Data Collection

- Questionnaires
- Interviews (1-2 hours long)
- Terminology
 - ‘Black’ as an all encompassing term
 - Any black women of African descent, including biracial people

Name	Age	Length of time in Japan	Age	Country of birth	Occupation	Type of Location
Stacey	31	6 years	31	Jamaica	English Teacher	Urban
Violet	32	4 years	32	Jamaica	English teacher/ Wellness coach	Urban
Bintou	40's	23 years	40's	Gambia	Hair stylist/ model	Urban
Camille	27	3 years	27	England	English teacher	Urban
Theresa	26	1 year	26	England	English teacher	Urban
Laura	36	3 years	36	US	Mother/ Homemaker	Rural
Ann	38	13 years	38	US	Charity worker	Urban
Annabelle	43	10 years	43	US	English teacher/ Charity worker	Rural
Karen	20	5 months	20	US	Exchange student	Rural
Angela	37	10 years	37	US	English teacher	Rural
Carol	40's	17 years	40's	US	Writer/ Teacher	Rural



Reasons for coming to Japan

Interest in culture and language (8)

Work (6)

Family issues (3)

Study (3)



Concerns prior to coming to Japan



Racism

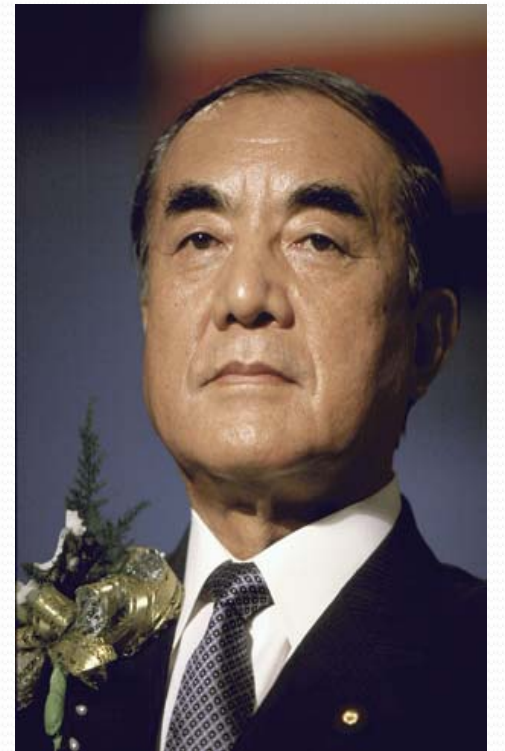
“I was worried I would be viewed and treated the same way as I was treated in America; basically having the same stereotypes forced upon me.”

(Karen, US, 20, Exchange student, 5 months in Japan

Comments made by Nakasone

“Since there are black people, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans in the United States, its level of intelligence is lower on the average.”

(September 28, 1986; Clarence Page
Chicago Tribune)



Reaction to Nakasone comments

“As a child I had seen news stories about blacks being seen as inferior but it didn’t bother me.”

(Angela, 37, English teacher, US, 10 years in Japan)



Staring



Career Options



Language




Distance from Family



Hair and beauty care



Interactions with Japanese people



“It was so hard for me... When I had my son I was pregnant and anywhere I go even the hospital they were not so nice to me...”

(Bintou, 40's, hairstylist, Gambia, 23 years in Japan)




“...because I’m from Africa maybe,
and they look down on Africa.”

(Bintou, 40’s, hairstylist, Gambia, 23 years in Japan)



“They always tell me, you are
lucky to be in Japan.”

(Bintou, 40's, hairstylist, Gambia, 23 years in Japan)



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(Bintou, 40's, hairstylist, Gambia, 23 years in Japan)

広河隆一責任編集◎世界を視るフォトジャーナリズム月刊誌

DAYS

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特集

エイズ

猛威にさらされた中国の村。
そして日本は

中国・難民・絶望の国境
熱帯セラヒー 絶望の子ともたち
熱帯セラヒーの元氣想 さらさら
とて子 事故下の子ともたち
岩合光昭の南極

一枚の写真が
国家を動かす
こともある



Bintou reflecting on arriving in Japan 23 years ago:


“ You know in those days black women were very rare. Everywhere I went people would stare at me and ask me too many questions, laugh and point at me, so that was a big problem for me, it was hard at the beginning.”

(Bintou, 40's, hairstylist, Gambia, 23 years in Japan)




“I was obviously gawked at (stared at) but I ended up living in a city that’s quite notorious for foreigners so for the most part, I felt that I was treated fairly well.

(Theresa, 26, English teacher, UK, 1 year in Japan)




There were the occasional few people who didn't know how to behave however. They would fall silent when serving me, or feel the need to revert to what little English they possessed to accommodate me. Some people would even pretend that I didn't exist."

(Theresa, 26, English teacher, UK, 1 year in Japan)



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(Theresa, 26, English teacher, UK, 1 year in Japan)




“Compared with how African Americans are treated in America I was treated relatively well...ultimately when I was treated differently, for the first time I felt like it had nothing to do with skin and just the fact that I was not Japanese. It was honestly refreshing.”

(Karen, 20, Exchange student, US, 5 months)




Once I was turned down for a job in an English school because they wanted a white person. But that experience just made me try harder to succeed.

(Camille, 27, English teacher, England, 3 years in Japan)



So I'm sitting down and folks are talking to me about their travel experience about 45 mins ago and this Japanese lady says she really enjoyed Los Angeles because she stayed there for a month

(Kadeidre, 30's, U.S, 3 years in Japan)




Her (34 years old) : I stayed there for one month

Me: oh okay nice, what did you do?

Her: I did a lot and I made a lot of friends from all over.

Me: that's nice



Her: but my host mother said it's a lot of native African Americans near so maybe I should stay away because they are very dangerous people so when I heard the police in my neighborhood she said...

...the "native African Americans" are doing something, wow kadeidra! I was so scared of them. I was thinking ooooooh! don't kill me no, no, don't talk to me!

(everyone nodding and agreeing) so, so, so, so.



Me: Are you scared now?

(Blank stares) from everyone.

Guy: why , what?

Me: I'm African American too, you didn't know.



Room Quiet for 2 mins everyone staring at me very intrigued and child like.

It seemed they were in awe I was black. As if I was in a BLACK costume. Mind you they know me very well and know I'm from the States.

People have no filter with Black people, they say whatever the hell they want.

(Kadeidre, 30's, U.S, 3 years in Japan)



Interactions with other foreigners



Positives

“I have made some amazing friends from around the world from living in Tokyo. From Nepal, New Zealand, Germany to South Africa and many countries in between. I have met such a diversity of interesting and passionate people.”

(Annabelle, 43, English teacher, US, 10 years in Japan)

Negatives

I never experienced overt racism nor white supremacy before I moved to Japan. So, I never knew I could be viewed as inferior or unworthy because of my ethnicity. Most of the Caucasian foreigners I've encountered are confused or uncomfortable with my bearing.

(Violet, 32, Jamaica, 6 years in Japan)

Negatives


Without a doubt, the staring, the pointing, the looks of discomfort, the licking, (it was a little kid who thought perhaps I taste like chocolate), etc. Can be disconcerting but from my experience the most off-putting and bordering on racist comments I have received while living in Japan have not come from Japanese people.

(Ann, Charity worker, US, 37, 13 years in Japan)

Child Rearing



Mothering in Japan



Very hard not easy at all... you know how kids are they want to move around and play. I took them to a park once to play and the other kids, they ran away from them. They took time to play with them because they are different. Some even cry and some of the good mother try to talk to their kids to play with them, but some of the horrible mothers just took their kids away.

(Bintou, Gambia, 40's, mother of two children now in their 20's, 23 years in Japan)



My kids make friends so easily. Whenever I take them to the park I feel I can take a rest because they just run off and play.

(Laura, 30's US, Mother of two boys 3 & 5, lives in rural Japan, 3 years in Japan)



Children's cultural identity



“I don’t know how to teach my son to be a black man.”

(Laura, 30’s, US, mother of two boys 3 years in Japan)

...but my daughter- she doesn't think she is Japanese, but the way she does things is really Japanese. For seijinshiki I wanted her to wear traditional African dress, but she said no mummy, because I'm a foreigner I will stand out and kimono will look more cute. The Koreans wear their traditional dress but she doesn't want to, and that bothers me... I worry that my kids will lose their culture.

(Bintou, Gambia 40's, mother of two, 23 years in Japan)

Black Female Beauty: Changing Perceptions





What is the image of a beautiful woman in Japan?


What kind of features (hair, skin, etc.) are seen as beautiful?

Do you think that the image of female beauty is changing in Japan?

Bintou: An early modeling experience

“Though I have some jobs in some places, many companies they reject me because I’m black and I remember one company told me I would look beautiful if I was white. Yes I experienced this a long time ago, ‘Your face is so beautiful and small, if you were white you would be more beautiful’.

(Bintou, Gambia 40’s, 23 years in Japan)



“Japanese seem stuck in an image of beauty that is based on their image of Caucasian looks: white skin, blond, straight hair, “big” blue eyes, thin body, etc. I have none of the looks that many Japanese seem to find beautiful but never have I been more proud or happy with my beauty and how I look.”

(Ann, 38, US, 10 years in Japan)








Changing Attitudes

“Because of my job, men and women they will talk to me and many of them say they wish they had been born black. They say black people are good, black people are beautiful...”

(Bintou, Gambia, 40's, 23 years in Japan)



“You know I think the problem was a long time ago these Japanese people they didn’t know about black people because of what white people were teaching them about black people ... But now they’re (Japanese people) are travelling and they know different.”

(Bintou, Gambia, 40’s, 23 years in Japan)

Feelings about life in Japan

“I love Japan! From the opportunity to discover an entire culture on a daily basis.”

(Annabelle, 43, US, 10 years in Japan)





“I love who I am even more living in Japan”

(Ann, 37, US, 13 years in Japan)

“More sure of myself as a person and as an American.”

(Carol, 40's, 17 years in Japan)

Opportunity

“I love the independence I have here...I’m living the life I’ve always wanted really and I wouldn’t have been able to get that back home because the standard of life back home is really expensive. Living in Japan feels easy, despite the language barrier.”

(Theresa, 26, English teacher UK, 1 year in Japan)



Opportunity

“I have my own business here. I could never have done that in my country.”

(Bintou, Gambia 40's, 23 years in Japan)

A sense of freedom

“ In Japan I feel like I am characterised by my foreign-ness but that’s a pretty broad category so I feel more free.”

(Theresa, 26, English teacher UK, 1 year in Japan)



Safety

“Peace! Nobody stealing, no guns. Rape unlikely. I am from a big city and to worry about my purse... every 5 minutes was draining.”

(Laura, 37, US, 3 years in Japan)



Online Community: Black Women in Japan

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/322557231281481/>

“One of the most vital ways we sustain ourselves is by building communities of resistance, places where we know we are not alone.”

(Bell Hooks)



❖ Nina Cornyetz, (1994) Fetishized Blackness: Hip Hop and Racial Desire in Contemporary Japan

❖ Ian Condry (2006) – Hip Hop Japan and the paths of Cultural Globalization

❖ John Russell, (1991), Race and Reflexivity: The Black Other in Contemporary Japanese Mass Culture



http://parasolsandwellies.blogspot.jp/2013_07_01_archive.html



<https://jp.pinterest.com/camouflage44/natural-hairstyles-for-black-women/>



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<http://paposeriodemulher.blogspot.jp/2014/07/mascara-de-hidratacao-caseira-para.html?spref=pi>



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