

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: "I'M NOT ENOUGH OF ANYTHING!": THE RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY CONSTRUCTIONS AND NEGOTIATIONS OF ONE-POINT-FIVE AND SECOND GENERATION NIGERIANS

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For many African youth, questions of identity are pressing concerns. Many who were born in, but raised outside of their country of origin, known as one-point-five immigrants, and their second-generation counterparts (Rong & Brown, 2002), often find themselves at the center of several conflicting cultures. These youth are often challenged in their ability to negotiate and reconcile the varying expectations of their respective racial and ethnic groups. While living in multiple, cultural worlds is the experiences of many minority youth (Phelan et al., 1991), it is uniquely challenging for Black immigrant youth as both their blackness and immigrant background make negotiating their racial and ethnic identities more challenging, than non-black and non-immigrant minority youth.

Using qualitative methodology (questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus group), this dissertation explored the manner in which eleven, one-point-

five and second generation Nigerian college students construct and negotiate their racial and ethnic identities. The research was guided by four broad research questions: (1) How do one-point-five and second generation Nigerian college students describe and experience their interactions with Africans and non-Africans (peers, family, and school personnel)? (2) How do they describe and experience their processes of racial and ethnic identity development? (3) How do their interactions with Africans and non-Africans shape their racial and ethnic identity development? (4) How do they negotiate their racial and ethnic identities among Africans and non-Africans?

The results revealed three major findings that characterized the identity experiences of one-point-five and second generation Nigerian immigrants. First, participants often constructed and negotiated their racial and ethnic identities differently within their families, peer groups and the schooling context. Second, participants had to “learn” the meaning of blackness in the U.S. context, which significantly impacted how they experienced their racial identities. Lastly, participants often felt challenged about the authenticity of their Nigerian identity, by both Africans and non-Africans alike. This study provides a significantly more nuanced discussion on the identity constructions and negotiations of one of the fastest growing segments of the diverse black population--African immigrant youth.

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CONSTRUCTIONS AND NEGOTIATIONS OF ONE-POINT-FIVE AND  
SECOND GENERATION NIGERIANS**

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## Foreword

Consistent with recent educational research that emphasizes a reflective introspection of the researcher's position in relation to the "researched", I discuss my standing as an "instrument of research" (Stacey, 1988). This research is more than an academic interest for me; it stems from and speaks to my own experiences as a one-point-five Nigerian immigrant in the United States. Through this written exercise, I acknowledge that my experiences play a role in what I observe, how I respond to my respondents, how they respond to me, and how I report my data.

My domestic and schooling experiences have been influential in forming some of my thinking on how African immigrant youth construct and negotiate their racial and ethnic identities. My family (including three sisters, mother and father) immigrated to the United States from Nigeria in 1984 in search of opportunities that were not available to a family of mostly females. Experiencing several cultures left me struggling to reconcile the various expectations of each. In the home, my parents' expectations of my sisters and I were for us to adhere to the tenets of our Yoruba culture by being humble and obedient to our elders and kind and respectful of our peers. These expectations often clashed with the competitive, individually-centered behaviors of students at school. Attempts to imitate those behaviors from school were met with resistance at home. Thusly, resolving these internal conflicts was a constant struggle as I navigated several distinctive cultural worlds.

As a Nigerian child in Tennessee, I was quite disenchanted with my schooling experiences. With no knowledge of the English language or the American cultures, my first years of school were filled with daily struggles to learn the language, understand the culture, and determine where I belonged within the various social

contexts in which I found myself. Within a handful of black students, my sisters and I were the only Nigerian immigrants attending a predominately white, residentially segregated, southern, school. The teachers' direct instruction and use of traditional Eurocentric texts did very little to validate my identity as a Nigerian immigrant in the school. In fact, I could never understand why my cultural experiences were largely ignored throughout elementary and secondary school, except for occasions where my ancestors were accused of selling their own people to white slave masters. I was asked to bring food for abbreviated, chapter highlighted discussions of Africa, or asked by peers and teachers to translate an African language of which I had no familiarity. For instance, my third grade teacher once asked me in front of my class to translate Swahili. I quietly told her that I spoke Yoruba, and not Swahili, to which she responded, "Oh, I thought you all spoke the same languages." Although I did not expect my teachers to be knowledgeable about my Nigerian culture, I did expect them to understand that Africa is a continent, not a country, and that the languages and cultures there are varied, not uniform.

I distinctly recall the disparaging representations of African cultures and people. In the few magazines scattered throughout the library, African communities were exhibited as primitive and indigent, with people wearing little to no clothing. I remember asking myself, "Why do they represent us like that? I am not like this; my family is not like this." The most painful reality was my peers' internalization of the negative depictions of African peoples, which lead to constant criticism and ridicule about my body, my language, my culture, and my family. On a daily basis I was relentlessly teased about my dark skin, my full lips, and my big behind. Ridiculing and embarrassing questions such as "Why are you so black?" and "Do you all live in

trees and run with lions and tigers?” would be quickly followed with disparaging names such as jigaboo, or African booty scratcher and clicking, animalistic noises to degrade my language. The constant insults encouraged me to hide or to allow them to erase everything that they deemed to be “African”. My name, Tolulope –which means “in anything you do, thanks belongs to God” was shortened and mispronounced to “Tulu” to accommodate the American pronunciation. My accent was steadily eroded by the mandatory speech courses my teachers constantly insisted and harped upon due to my “problematic accent.” To gain acceptance and respect from my peers, I behaved in oppositional and, at times, confrontational manner, particularly in front of my White teachers. I changed everything so that I could fit in. The new behaviors were often in direct conflict with my family’s expectations. I asked them to call me Janet, my British influenced name, begged them to refrain from speaking to me in Yoruba in front of my peers, and refused to eat or learn to cook jollof rice, obe ata or any other traditional Nigerian dishes. The cultural disconnect between my home life and my schooling experiences spurred my alienation and isolation throughout my years in the public school system and eventually with my Nigerian heritage.

As a college student, I desired to reconnect with my Nigerian heritage, because I believed that I had no real connection with Black Americans, Whites, Asians or any group. Connecting with other Nigerians on campus seemed to be a logical starting point. However, my attempts to make cultural connections with my co-ethnics proved to be extremely painful. My “Americanization” in terms of my behavior, my lost accent, and my American accented Yoruba seem to ostracize me from many of the newly arrived Nigerians with whom I came in contact. I often dreaded introductions by friends or family members to other Nigerians because I was afraid that the

“authenticity of my Nigerianness” would be questioned or challenged. In the early stages of seeking out other co-ethnics to affirm my Nigerian identity, I steadily became critical and exclusionary of other Nigerians because I felt that I was being othered because of my U.S. experiences.

These conflicting identity issues and experiences provided the backdrop for my research interests in understanding how one-point-five and second generation Nigerian immigrant college students think about their identities in relation to other Africans and non-Africans. Considering that the college years are a notable period of identity development, I sought to understand, if at all, how current Nigerian college students grapple with these issues.

During the study, many of the experiences that the participants divulged resonated with my own experiences with family, peer groups, and teachers; and others did not. For instance, a common experience that I shared with the participants was that of African-based teasing, particularly during my childhood and adolescence years. Similarly, many participants experienced teasing about their African background during these time periods and dealt with them in a variety of ways. Though I was able to understand many of the challenges participants discussed, I had to continually remind and prohibit myself from making assumptions about their identity experiences by asking in-depth and probing questions to provide informants the opportunity to share their experiences in their own words.

## Dedication

To my maternal grandmother Alice Tinuola Fadeyi who went to be with the Lord on June 6, 2004 and my dear father, John Kunle Awokoya, who left us on November 22, 2008. I thank you both for your unyielding discipline, words of wisdom and constant encouragement. Even though you are not physically here, your spirits live on in my heart, my home and my work. I love you and miss you both.

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## Table of Contents

Foreword.....	ii
Dedication.....	vi
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Table of Contents.....	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction of Study.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Statement of Purpose.....	6
<i>Questions Guiding the Study</i> .....	6
Operational Definitions.....	7
Organization of the Proposed Study.....	9
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	11
Brief African History & International Migration of Africans.....	11
<i>African Migration to the United States</i> .....	12
Race Still Matters.....	16
Empirical Findings on Black Immigrants.....	17
<i>Racialization</i> .....	17
<i>Negotiating Blackness in a Racially Stratified Society</i> .....	18
<i>Ethnic Identity Assertions</i> .....	19
Black Immigrant Youth.....	20
Cross-Cultural Discord within the School Context.....	21
Emergent Scholarship on African Born Students.....	22
Limitations of Reviewed Literature.....	24
Summary.....	27
Conceptual Framework.....	27
Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design.....	31
Research Methodology.....	31
Site Selection.....	33
<i>Participant Selection</i> .....	34
<i>Recruitment and Selection of Participants</i> .....	35
Data Collection.....	36
<i>Questionnaires</i> .....	36
<i>Interviews</i> .....	37
<i>Focus Group</i> .....	40
Data Analysis.....	42
Validity.....	44
Limitations.....	45
Description of Participants.....	46
Chapter 4: Constructing and Negotiating Africanness.....	58
The Family Context.....	59
<i>Comparisons to U.S Society</i> .....	63
<i>Parental Involvement in Social Interactions with Peers</i> .....	66
The Non-African Peer Group Context.....	69
<i>Teasing and Ridicule</i> .....	70
<i>Social Distancing</i> .....	75
The School Context.....	80

<i>Linguicism</i> .....	82
<i>Exoticism</i> .....	83
<i>The Double Burden of Tokenism for African Youth</i> .....	85
Summary.....	92
Chapter 5: Learning Blackness in a Racializing Society.....	93
The Conflicting Constructions of Blackness.....	94
<i>Parental Construction of Race and Identity</i> .....	98
<i>Learning How to Fit into a Racial Category</i> .....	100
<i>Peers Defining and Enforcing Blackness</i> .....	101
Summary.....	114
Chapter 6: Challenges in Constructing and Managing an “Authentic” Nigerian Identity.....	115
(Re)constructing a Nigerian Identity: The College Context.....	115
“You don’t look African”: The Significance of Appearance.....	118
Where Are You From?.....	121
<i>Testing of Identity</i> .....	125
Identifying the Contextually Based Identity Constructions of Nigerian Youth.....	128
Chapter 7: Conclusions & Recommendations.....	134
Contributions to Our Knowledge Base.....	141
Recommendations.....	144
<i>Recommendations for Parents &amp; Schooling</i> .....	144
<i>Recommendations for School Policies and Practices</i> .....	146
<i>Recommendations for Future Immigration Research</i> .....	147
Appendices.....	149
Bibliography.....	165

## Chapter 1: Introduction of Study

The passing of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 unintentionally reversed a trend in the history of U.S. immigration laws that routinely discriminated against groups seeking entry into the United States based on race and ethnicity (Massey, 1995). This shift in U.S. immigration policies led to a radical increase of new people from primarily non-western, developing societies. While a significant number of these new immigrants came from Asia, Latin America and all islands of the Caribbean, an impressive number of immigrants have come and continue to come from various African nations including Nigeria, Ghana, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Cameroon among others.

Most recently, researchers have begun to explore the social, economic, and political experiences of the diverse African population in the United States (Arthur, 2000; Obiakor & Grant, 2005). Though many of these experiences are similar to other immigrant groups, some challenges are dissimilar and distinct. For instance, several book chapters reveal that many African immigrants face challenges that significantly retard their ability to adapt to institutions in their host society (Tettey, 2001; Tettey & Puplampu, 2005). Some of the reasons include the devaluation of “foreign” education and qualifications, which results in African immigrants being placed in lower waged and lower status positions (Batalova & Fix, 2008; Laryea & Hayfron, 2005), negative and stereotypical portrayals of Africa and African immigrants in the media (Traore, & Lukens, 2006), accents and languages viewed as problems (Yesufu, 2005), and tensions with the Black American population (Boorstein, 2001; Jackson & Cochran, 2003; Obiakor, Obi, & Grant, 2000). These and other issues complicate adjustment,

impact self-image, create disorientation, stifle progress, cause emotional and economic distress, and familial breakdown (Kanya, 1997). As such, the challenges facing many African families directly impact the identity experiences of their children.

Researchers often highlight the fact that the home environment is a key context in which identity, particularly ethnic identity, is formed and reinforced (Suarez-Orozco, 2004). Immigrant parents often have a static understanding of their heritage culture and thus attempt to raise their children according to certain traditions and gendered expectations in their home (Lopez, 2003). In the context of the household, Black immigrant youth learn from their parents and extended family members their cultural values, practices, languages, and other ways of interacting with members of their ethnic groups (Suarez-Orozco, 2004; Phinney et al, 2001). These cultural expectations are also reinforced by older siblings, extended family members or family friends that frequently interact with the family. Suarez-Orozco (2004) notes that these expectations are often heightened when parents feel that they are “losing” their children to a new culture, and thus they may try to socialize their children with others of the same ethnic group, if possible. However, the parental expectations from the home environment often directly conflict with the expectations of American society, particularly when children leave the home to attend school.

As immigrant youth construct their identities in the schooling context, they rely heavily on their peers to affirm their self-perceptions (Phinney, 1992). In the case of Black immigrant youth, many are socialized among Black Americans and view Black Americans as a significant source of identity (Gans, 1992; Waters, 1999). As such, many Black immigrant youth adopt the cultural behavior of their Black American peers (Kasinitz et al., 2001; Waters, 1996) and attempt to fit in with Black

Americans by changing behaviors, language, and dress further exacerbating the intergenerational conflict with their parents, who strive to have their children maintain their ethnic culture and behaviors (Bailey, 2001; Fouron & Schiller, 2001; Grasmuck & Pessar, 1996; Stepick, 1998; Suarez-Orozco, 2004; Waters, 1994; Woldemikael, 1989; Zephir, 2001).

Although many immigrant youth are able to reconcile these conflicting differences and successfully adapt to all social and cultural expectations of the different social groups in which they find themselves (Raible & Nieto, 2004), some have more difficulty in reconciling these differences. Scholars have termed this disconnect between traditional culture and adoptive culture as cultural dissonance (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996), and find that the parents' cultural expectations are often met with resistance by their children. For instance, many immigrant youth disassociate themselves from their parents' heritage culture by refusing to speak the language, particularly in front of their peers. Others may discourage their parents from attending school functions for fear of social embarrassment, or refuse to eat traditional foods and instead request more American meals from their parents.

The negative portrayal of Africans in the U.S. also has a profound impact on the racial and ethnic identity development of African immigrant youth. African youth often contend with prevalent ignorance and negative, primitive portrayals of African peoples in the school curriculum, books, and media images (Traore, 2004; Traore & Lukens, 2006). Particularly in educational settings, many of their peers make acculturation difficult by fanning the flame of adolescent angst, racially and culturally (Clemetson, 2003; Obiakor et al., 2000; Traore & Lukens, 2004). Traore and Luken's (2006) work reveals how African students are relentlessly teased for things like

language ability, accents, dress, and skin color and are frequently perceived as living with wild animals and being carriers of the AIDS virus. In addition, the theme of underdevelopment is often used as a base of ridicule by their American peers. To many Americans, the United States is viewed as a superior and more industrialized nation and their perception of Africa is often as an underdeveloped and impoverished *country*. Media images that highlight savage, jungle images of Africa and Africans—portraying children with swollen bellies and flies swarming around their dirty faces—only serve to reinforce these stereotypes. Resultantly, the negative portrayals of Africa and African peoples are seen and used by American youth to hurl insults at their African counterparts and some scholars contend that this is a reason why many Black American youth, in particular, seek to disassociate from all things African (Traore & Lukens, 2006).

Furthermore, while challenging the negative portrayals of Africa, it is not uncommon for African students to hear statements from peers that question the “authenticity” of their “blackness” (Awokoya, 2004). Many are ostracized and accused of “trying to be white” or “not black enough” by their American peers for using standard American English and excelling academically in school settings (Dei, 1997; Gibson, 1989). To avoid social torment, many African youth disengage academically or hide their Africanness in order to fit in with peers (Abdullah, 1999; Diouf, 2005; Stepick, 1998). Resultantly, many African students suffer from identity confusion while trying to be Black American with their peer groups and African with their family members and co-ethnics.

Clearly, the challenges facing African immigrant youth are many and few are systematically or theoretically explored. Though a few scholars have begun to

examine the lived experiences of African youth (Forman, 2001; Harushimana, 2007; Ibrahim, 1998; Traore & Lukens, 2006), what remains unexamined in the scholarship, however, is African immigrant youths' engagement in the complex process of constructing and negotiating a racial and ethnic identity within their own racial and ethnic communities.

### Statement of the Problem

Many African youth raised in the United States are caught between several conflicting and disparate cultures, each with its own sets of expectations and cultural rules of behavior. They find they are challenged in their ability to negotiate and reconcile the varying expectations of mainstream American ideals while maintaining the cultural mores and social expectations of their racial and ethnic groups (Prosper, 2006; Stepick, 1998; Zephir, 2001). As such, their attempts to bridge their worlds are often resisted by Africans and non-African peers who question the authenticity of their ethnic and racial identities.

Tope, a participant in a pilot study about Black immigrants' identity constructions (Awokoya, 2004), captures the frustrations and subsequent sense of unbelonging during her interactions with extended family and a classmate. She states:

When family friends or children say, "Oh, we don't believe that you're Nigerian." It hurts me because I might not have the perfect accent, because I didn't live there all my life, but I'm still as much Nigerian as they are. I still know as much as they do, believe it or not, but it kinds of hurts me sometimes. Because they'll say, "Oh you're American." I'm not going to deny that I have western influences but they want me to act Nigerian, and I don't understand what they want me to do to show I'm Nigerian.

During the same interview, she also discusses an upsetting experience with a schoolmate:

I was talking to my classmate the other day and she was like, 'So what do you define as African and what do you define as Black American?' And before I could answer, she was like, 'I see you as purely African, not even from

America at all,'even though I've grown up here more than half my life. And she was like, 'I'm Black American. You're purely African! You're African! (sharply) and that's it.' They won't let me be part of any culture.

Tope's experience as a Nigerian immigrant in the United States is at the heart of this dissertation. Several researchers note that for African immigrant youth, there are pressures to both conform to what it means to be African (Awokoya, 2004) as well as challenge mainstream ideals of what it means to be Black (Ibrahim, 1998; Traore, 2006) in the United States.

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to conduct an exploratory investigation of the understudied experiences of African immigrant youth in the United States. Specifically, the study aims to advance knowledge and understandings about the racial and ethnic identity constructions and negotiations of one-point-five and second generation Nigerian immigrants within their own racial and ethnic groups.

### *Questions Guiding the Study*

This study employs qualitative methods to understand the racial and ethnic identity constructions and negotiations for a subset of this population. Specifically, this research study will examine the experiences of 11 Nigerian college students guided by the following questions: (1) How do one-point-five and second generation Nigerian college students describe and experience their interactions with Africans (peers, family, and school personnel) and non-African peers? (2) How do they describe and experience their processes of racial and ethnic identity development? (3) How do their interactions with Africans and non-Africans shape their racial and ethnic identity development? (4) How do they negotiate their racial and ethnic identities among Africans and non-Africans?

## Operational Definitions

In order to ground the research questions in this study, I will clarify important sociological terms that will be used. The terms “race”, “nationality”, and “ethnicity” are viewed as separate and distinct concepts in this study.

- *Race*, for the purpose of this research, refers to a socially constructed identity based on physical characteristics (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998), but has real social consequences.
- *Ethnicity* refers to “perceived common ancestry, the perception of a shared history of some sort, and shared symbols of peoplehood” (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998, p. 32). I also borrow from Alba (1985) and Waters (1990) who argue that ethnic identity is a dynamic, socially constructed and socially negotiated process that is highly dependent on social context. Nationality is a political entity that is often created out of different ethnic communities (Calhoun, 1993; Cornell & Hartman, 1998).
- *Negotiation* is broadly defined as the processes by which African youth transition between ethnic culture and mainstream cultures.
- *Black immigrant* is an umbrella term that refers to those from Caribbean islands and African nations who have voluntarily and involuntarily migrated to the United States for social, educational, political, and economic reasons. It also refers to those who are racialized as “Black” according to normative understandings of race in the U.S.
- *Refugees* are those who seek asylum in the United States because of social and political unrest and persecution in their home countries. Though many

refugees share similar experiences with their immigrant counterparts, this research is limited to voluntary immigrants.

- *Black Americans* refer to Americans whose ancestors were involuntarily forced to migrate to the United States during the transatlantic African slave trade. Black Americans, American Blacks, and native Blacks will be used interchangeably. I use these terms because African-American is becoming a contested term in the U.S. context (Swarns, 2004). Historically it has been equated to Black Americans, however, recent research shows that African immigrants or the children of African immigrants are co-opting the term to refer to those who were born in Africa or have very recent ties to the continent (Awokoya, 2004; Clark, 2006). For the purposes of this paper, I endorse the definition that reserves the term African-American to those who have recent ties to the African continent.
- *African immigrants* will refer to post-1980 migrants from the African continent, who have permanently settled in the United States (Hamza, 2005; Roberts, 2005).
- *First generation* refers to those who were born and raised outside of the U.S., and came as adults.
- The *one-point-five generation* are the children of first-generation adults who came to the U.S. at the age of twelve or younger.
- *Second generation immigrants* refer to the children of immigrants who were born and raised in the United States, with at least one foreign-born parent.
- For the purposes of this paper, *intra-racial interactions* refer to the interactions with members of the same race (e.g. Black immigrants and Black Americans).

- *Intra-ethnic interactions* refer to the interactions within members of the same ethnic group (e.g. newly arrived Yoruba immigrants and Yoruba with extended residence in the United States).
- Africanness is an identity attribute that is associated with the feeling of being born in or being part of Africa with all that it entails politically, economically, culturally and socially.
- Blackness is the extent to which one identifies with the social and political experiences of Black people worldwide. However, in the U.S. context, blackness is often defined by and limited to the experiences of Black Americans.

### Organization of the Proposed Study

Organization of this study is as follows: The first chapter introduces the problem, purpose and significance of the study and provides an overview of its analytic framework. Chapter II includes a review of the relevant literature that guides this research and an explanation of the conceptual framework that guided the study. Chapter III is devoted to a description of the research design, the data collection methods and the procedures that were employed for data collection and analysis. Chapter IV examines how parents, peers and school personnel constructed Africanness for the participants in the study and explores the manner in which the participants reacted to these constructions in various social contexts. In Chapter V, I describe how participants were taught the meaning of blackness by their parents and peers. I specifically highlight how they received conflicting messages about what it means to be Black in the United States. Chapter VI examines the challenges participants faced in constructing and managing an authentic Nigerian identity during interactions with

Africans and non-Africans. This chapter concludes by discussing the different ways in which participants identify themselves in various social contexts. Chapter VII serves as a conclusion of the study, highlighting the contributions of the study and makes recommendations for future immigrant research, parenting, and school policies.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter presents a selected overview of the relevant bodies of literature, which have informed the conception and direction of this study. Since the research questions center how one-point-five and second-generation Nigerian youth describe and experience their ethnic and racial identities, a review of how the experiences salient to Black immigrants in general and African immigrants and their children in particular are discussed. The section begins with a brief history of African migration to western nations, followed by discussion of immigration literature that sheds light on the incorporation of immigrant groups into the United States. Next, is a review of the social science studies on Black immigrants that focus on race, racialization, and ethnicity. This section concludes with a critique of these specific bodies of literature.

### Brief African History & International Migration of Africans

Africa, the second largest continent in the world, is metaphorically speaking a paradox. On one hand the continent is rich with an abundance of natural resources, history, traditions, and multitudes of languages. On the other hand, famine, disease, ethnic conflicts, and stark and jarring poverty continue to cause devastation for many African nationals. Many attribute the postcolonial state of African nations to the legacy of colonialism, although there is little consensus on whether colonialism left a positive or negative mark on colonized nations (Manning, 1974; Ekeh, 1997; Lewis, 1997). In one camp, scholars argue that colonialism was a powerful and driving force in the development of many African nations. They contend that colonialism propelled colonies into the global economy, brought in foreign capital, and modernized colonies which may not have occurred without colonial influence. Others argue that colonialism is the primary culprit of post-colonial underdevelopment and the resulting

detriment and failure of many African sociocultural, political, and economic structures. During the colonial period, many European nations colonized, pillaged, raped, and exploited African nations for raw materials and cheap labor to benefit their industrialized nations (Sachs & Warner, 1997). Distorted social, educational, and political policies only served the needs of the colonial powers and eventually created societies that were highly dependent on colonial masters for survival (Easterly & Levine, 2000).

In the 1950's, a movement for independence began and colonial powers began to physically depart African nations, leaving them to essentially fend for themselves. Many of the most educated and skilled indigenous elites departed from African nations in search of opportunity not available in their native countries. Gordon (1998) explains that the international migration of Africans to the United States was caused primarily by several factors including globalization in the world economy, lack of economic development and political instability, changed immigration and refugee policies in Western nations, Anglophone background, and historic ties to colonial powers. While many African nationals left for the homeland of their colonizers, such as Britain and France, anti-immigrant sentiment and restrictive immigration policies forced a significant number to migrate to Canada or the United States.

#### *African Migration to the United States*

The Hart-Celler Act of 1965 loosened restrictions on immigration from non-European nations (Bean & Stevens, 2003; Kasinitz, 1992; Stoller & McConatha, 2001). While previous policies favored and granted access to predominately white, European nations to the U.S., the radical shift in American immigration policy, specifically the passage of the 1965 Family Reunification and Refugee Law, led to an

unintended increase of immigrants from a host of Asian countries, Latin American nations, Middle Eastern countries, all islands of the Caribbean, and various African nations (Gordon, 1998, Lamphere, 1992; Rumbaut, 1996).

The changes in U.S. immigration policies gave rise to a significant increase in the African population. Between 1971-1980 the total number of Africans admitted to the U.S. was a mere 80, 779. Between 1991-1990, the numbers grew to 178, 893. Between 1990-2000, the African population had increased by 167% (Deane & Logan, 2003). By 2005, the African population had reached an estimated 1.25 million, comprising 3% of the U.S. Black population (Wilson, 2003). According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (2005-2007), the total number of the Nigerian population was 223, 413. This total included the foreign born population and those of Nigerian ancestry.

The top ten primary senders of African peoples to the U.S. are Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Egypt, Liberia, Morocco, Sudan and Cameroon (Hamza, 2005; Taylor, 2007). Though Africans reside in all areas of the United States, a concentrated number primarily reside in metro centers including New York, Atlanta, Minneapolis, Houston, Los Angeles, and Boston. The Washington, D.C. area has the highest concentration of African immigrants in the United States (Deane & Logan, 2003; Selassie, 2003). In this region, Africans comprise 11% of the foreign-born population (Wilson, 2003).

#### Theories of Immigrant Incorporation

Several theories have attempted to explain the adaptation processes of various immigrant populations in the United States. One of the most prevalent concepts is the classical assimilation model. This theory proposes that once people enter the United

States, they gradually, yet inevitably, define themselves as American, shedding any cultural traditions, values, and mores that would distinguish them from other groups (Gordon, 1964; Park, 1950). The underlying process reflected by this theory is to create and defend a nation that conforms, blends and assimilates immigrants into American society. Many authors argue that by assimilating according to the tenants of the classical assimilation model, immigrants would quickly obtain an identity that would move them up the social and economic ladders. The success of linear assimilation was especially noted in the turn-of-the century, European immigrants' adaptability patterns as they lost contact with their native cultures (Gans, 1973), and were totally immersed in American society. Thus, many authors agree that the classical assimilation was specifically applicable to the white ethnics that arrived during the turn of the century. However, researchers began to deconstruct the assimilative goals and legitimacy of the classical assimilation theory as the second wave of immigrants made their way onto American shores (Reimers, 1992).

The arrival of the wave of post-1965 immigrants further diversified the already multiethnic American population by bringing in people from all islands of the Caribbean, different African countries, and a host of Latin American and Asian nations (Reimers, 1992). Researchers observed that these subsequent immigrant groups were not as phenotypically or culturally assimilable as the first wave of immigrants. As such, many scholars argue that the traditional assimilation models that were used to trace and explain the adaptation and incorporation processes of immigrants were specifically created for white European immigrants (Portes, 1995; Portes & Zhou, 1993). Racial and ethnic minorities on the other hand, have historically been unable to assimilate into white society, primarily because of social,

legal, and structural forms of discrimination (Omi & Winant, 1994; Spring, 2006; Takaki, 1993). In more recent research, segmented assimilation theorists (Portes, 1995; Portes & Zhou, 1993) argue that the racial and cultural distinctiveness of immigrants of color defy the applicability of the traditional assimilation models to the reception, incorporation, and economic outcomes of newer immigrants in U.S. society. Thus they argue that assimilating totally into White mainstream society is not necessarily an option for many immigrants of the second generation, and contend that there are three trajectories in which contemporary immigrants may follow. The first trajectory is the traditional path of acculturation and upward mobility by the second generation into middle-class American society and culture. The second option is acculturation into the underclass of American minorities in the inner cities. The last option is retention of the ethnic culture to avoid assimilation into an inner-city culture that may lead to downward mobility.

The trajectory through which immigrant groups assimilate is based on several factors: 1) the socioeconomic status of the first generation, (2) the acculturation patterns of parents and children (3) the second generation's cultural and economic barriers, and (4) family and community based resources to counteract the cultural and economic barriers.

The segmented assimilation theory provides a strong foundation for understanding the adaptation patterns of immigrant youth. It is particularly useful for this study because it supports the idea that various mediating and contextual factors affect immigrants' incorporation into one of the three trajectories (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

## Race Still Matters

Race has been an organizing principle in all historical and contemporary aspects of the U.S society (Omi & Winant, 1986). From the colonization of Native Americans to the forced importation of African slaves, through the pre and post civil rights era, race continues to function as a deeply embedded construct that impacts social interactions and personal development (Steinberg, 2007).

Historically, race has taken on different socio-political meanings and has had various impacts on the social identities and experiences of people in the United States (Brodkin, 1999; Harrison, 1995). Race was initially viewed and perpetuated as a biological construct used to group and categorize people based on physical attributes such as hair, skin color, and facial features (Selden, 1999). For people of African descent, this has often meant being placed in the lower echelons of the political, social, cultural and economic ladders. Since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, scholars have argued that race is in fact a social construction that is fluid, elusive (Omi & Winant, 1986; Yon, 2000) contextual, and relational yet continues to have real consequences for those who have been historically and contemporarily seen as non-white (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Omi & Winant, 1994). For instance, turn-of-the-century, European immigrants were initially considered to be “ethnic” and “inassimilable” by White Americans (Ignatiev, 1995). However, after each generation lost their language, cultural habits, and other identifiers that marked them as “different”, they were progressively “incorporated into the White American mainstream culturally and structurally” (Min, 1999, p. 65). Racial minorities (e.g. Native Americans, Black Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos), on the other hand, have historically been unable to assimilate into white society, primarily because of social, legal, and structural forms of racial discrimination

(Alba & Nee, 2003; Crenshaw, et al.,1995; Omi & Winant, 1994; Spring, 2006; Takaki, 1993).

### Empirical Findings on Black Immigrants

Among the immigrants of color in the U.S., Black immigrants occupy a unique and complex space racially and ethnically. Several scholars argue that the white/black dichotomy that is observed in the U.S. does not recognize the racial understandings that many immigrants of color bring in from their countries. (Candelario, 2001; McDaniel, 1995). For instance, Candelario (2001) explains that in many Latin American and Caribbean nations racial identification and racial identity are fluid, and operate on a continuum that includes black, white, mestizo, indio, and a variety of other combinations. This is not to say that racism and colorism do not exist in these countries, as these issues do play a part in everyday life (Bryce-Laporte, 1972; Doodoo, 1997, Patterson, 1989). However, researchers note that for Black immigrants, race is not always seen in strictly black and white, as it is by North American standards (Candelario, 2001). Many Caribbean, African, and Latin American entering the U.S. do not identify themselves racially, but rather, as part of their particular national or ethnic group. In response, they struggle and at times openly reject the racial labels imposed by the U.S. society.

### *Racialization*

A significant body of literature explores how Black immigrants, who were often racial majorities and ethnically heterogeneous in their home countries, become subjected to homogenizing and disparaging views of blackness in the U.S. (Bashi & McDaniel, 1997). The process of racialization occurs as the cultures and ethnicities of the diverse immigrant population are overlooked, and their phenotypic characteristics,

particularly their race, are viewed as the most salient identifier. Being racialized as “black” is of particular concern for Black immigrants because blackness in the United States is historically and experientially linked to disparaging and negative social stigmas such as laziness, low intelligence, lack of familial ties, hypersexuality, and criminality (Vickerman, 1999; Wright, 2004).

Due to their blackness, many Black immigrants encounter discrimination and prejudices similar to their native Black counterparts (Brown & Rong, 2002; Waters, 1994). Several high profile news reports reveal the victimization of Black immigrants substantiate this claim. For instance, Sofia Salva, a Sudanese woman in Kansas City was arrested, denied medical attention, and suffered a miscarriage after persistently asking for medical care during a traffic stop (New York Times, 1999). In New York City, Amadou Diallo, a Guinean immigrant was violently shot forty times in front of his home by four police officers that mistook his wallet for a gun. In 1997, Abner Louima, a Haitian native was sodomized with a toilet plunger by New York City police officers while in custody. These and other instances reveal the fact that race is central to how individuals and institutions continue to address and react to Blacks and those racialized as black.

### *Negotiating Blackness in a Racially Stratified Society*

In the United States, Black peoples have historically and contemporarily been viewed as a monolithic and homogeneous population. The larger influx of Black immigrants from various Caribbean islands and numerous African nations is challenging the long held assumption that “black” strictly refers to Black American in the U.S. context. Bryce-Laporte (1972) in his seminal piece captures the fact that race, for a long time, has been an externally imposed social identifier for Black

immigrants. Referring to them as the “invisible minorities” in the multicultural U.S. society, he argues that their phenotypic resemblance to native Blacks has historically resulted in their being subsumed their experiences under that of their native black counterparts. As such the experiences and understandings that compound race have been ignored for a long time.

For many Black immigrants, ethnicity is a more salient social identifier than race, prior to and upon immigrating to the United States (Padilla, 1984; Bailey, 1999; Vickermann, 1999, 2001; Itzigsohn & Dore-Cabral, 2000). Ethnicity is also central to how Black immigrants experience and negotiate their racialized experiences within the U.S. society, as individuals and as cultural groups (Duany, 1994; Pedraza & Rumbaut, 1996).

#### *Ethnic Identity Assertions*

Social psychological and sociological theories report that identity labels help foster positive social identities, reflect a comprehensive understanding of ancestry and cultural origins, and portray a political stance among other purposes (Anglin & Whaley, 2006; Cornell & Hartmann, 1998; Ghee, 1990; Larkey & Hecht, 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 2001). In the case of Black immigrants, researchers offer various empirical explanations as to why ethnic identity is asserted by Black immigrants.

Several scholars note that warnings are often given to immigrant groups who may be racialized as black in the United States (Bryce-Laporte, 1972; Candelario, 2001; Dodoo, 1997; Foner, 1985; Kasinitz et al., 1992; Waters, 1994). For instance, Bryce-Laporte (1972) explains,

Many black immigrants are instructed by persons (white and black) at home and in the United States to emphasize their distinctiveness by use of exotic apparel, display of heavy accents, and avoidance of contact and association with black Americans. (p. 40)

Waters (1994, 1999), a pioneer in the area of West Indian identities, further explains that the negative view of blackness in the United States creates a contentious dynamic between first-generation Black immigrants and Black Americans. Her essential argument is that Black immigrants develop identities in opposition to Black Americans, primarily because the perception of Black Americans is that they are a shiftless, non-ambitious group. Thus, first-generation Black immigrants emphasize their ethnic identities as a means of distancing themselves from Black Americans. Taking a slightly different stance, Vickerman's (1999) research reveals that first-generation West Indian men identify and disassociate with Black Americans under different circumstances. This study is particularly interesting as it reports that West Indians will assert a racial solidarity with Black Americans in the face of white racism. Other scholars note that Black immigrant communities avoid the same form of racial discrimination experienced by Black Americans by socially organizing around notions of ethnicity (Duany, 1994; Pedraza & Rumbaut, 1996; Skop, 2001). The authors find that culturally based practices allow immigrant groups to create and find economic and social opportunities within the greater society that denies them equal access and opportunity because of racial and linguistic discrimination.

### *Black Immigrant Youth*

Researchers have also explored the experiences of the children of Black immigrants in the United States. These researchers who look specifically at the self-identification labels of Black immigrant youth find that racial and ethnic terms are constantly contested and redefined in ways that reflect the shifting, elusive nature of race and ethnicity (Bailey, 2002; Pedraza, 1996; 2000; Portes, 1994; Rodriguez, 1992; Rumbaut, 1994, 1996; Waters, 1994; Yon, 2000). Waters (1994) and Rong & Brown,

for instance, argue that the identity labels used by Black immigrant youth tended to move along a continuum. From this continuum, they argue that Black immigrant students select their identification labels ranging from their “national origin identity to a hyphenated-American or an American identity” (Brown & Rong, 2002, p. 258). Bailey’s (1999, 2001) study on second generation Dominicans reveals that their hybrid identities often cause some to use their language as an ethnolinguistic marker of difference to resist racializing forces. The consensus of these authors is that by embracing their national, ethnic or ethnolinguistic backgrounds when defining themselves, Black immigrant youth strive to reject the binary black/ white constructions and avoid the same form of racial discrimination experienced by Black Americans.

#### Cross-Cultural Discord within the School Context

Schools serve as an entry point for many Black immigrant youth. As such, schools are natural locations to explore how youth construct, adjust and reinvent their diverse identities within social interactions. Although the current focus on intergroup relationships within school settings is primarily on the educational trajectories of immigrant youth, (Ogbu, 1991; Portes & Zhou, 1993) or the academic disparities between groups (Perry, et al., 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995), the research on the intersecting relationships between and among racial and ethnic groups is growing (Brown & Rong, 2002; Olsen, 1997; Sadowski, 2003; Traore, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999; Waters, 1994, 1999).

Several researchers have employed ethnographic methodology to capture the social and educational experiences of immigrants within schools. Using snapshot conversations, anecdotal evidence and lengthy vignettes, these researchers explore the

students' divergent conceptualizations of ethnic and racial labels, the intra-ethnic and intra-racial discord between group members, and the students' struggle of constructing and asserting their racial and ethnic identities (Olsen, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). For instance, Valenzuela (1999) captures the intra-ethnic discord in her study with Mexican youth in the pseudonymously named Seguin High. Although focusing primarily on how schools subtract students' cultural mores, a recurring theme in Valenzuela's work is the students' struggle of constructing and asserting their ethnic identities, particularly with members of their own group. Valenzuela explores the students' divergent conceptualizations of the term "Mexican". She explains that many students of Mexican heritage struggle with their understanding of what it means to be Mexican. She further suggests that the identity issues arise during interactions with Mexicans who recently arrived from Mexico and while visiting family members. Similarly, Olsen (1997) learns that mastering the English language does not result in a welcoming acceptance by members of the American society, but rather, is one of the many hurdles that immigrant students must jump to begin the long, arduous process of acceptance into mainstream society. While all of these studies contribute greatly to the social and academic experiences of immigrant youth, there exists only a small group of researchers that are focused on the experiences of African born students and the children of African immigrants in school.

#### Emergent Scholarship on African Born Students

Several scholars have begun to recognize the importance of exploring the social and academic experiences of African youth in the U.S. For instance, in his study on African youth from Somalia, Djibouti, and Senegal, Awad Ibrahim (1999) argues that in racially stratified society, Black immigrants are expected find and fit

into a particular racial category. In the case of African immigrants, their blackness requires them “to be Black, act Black and so be the marginalized Other” (p. 353). Resultantly, many learn and choose to speak Black English and take up rap and hip hop music. Harushimana (2007) argues that African students have been noticeably unsupported and overlooked by the multicultural education agenda. She refers to the lack of attention to less visible minority groups by more visible minorities as the “majority-in-the minority” paradox. The paradox implies that long-established minority groups, namely Black Americans and Hispanic Americans, have succeeded to negotiate power and exercise influence in policy and, therefore, tend to advocate for the rights and interests of the ethnic groups they represent. In contrast, African-born immigrants are relatively new arrivals and have been unable to integrate fully in the American power structure. As a result, the children of African-born immigrants not only run the risk of being at the bottom of the minority hierarchy order, but also their social and educational adaptation is likely to be negatively impacted.

Traore and Lukens (2006) explore the experiences and perceptions of thirteen African immigrants in a Jackson High in Philadelphia. They specifically highlight African students’ disillusionment in their experiences with anti-African sentiment, marked segregation of their high schools, decrepit conditions of their schools, disrespect towards educators among other issues. Continuing in other articles, Traore (2004, 2006) finds that African youth are struggling to adapt to American society because of the pervasive misconceptions and blatant ignorance about African peoples. African youth, particularly first generation, are particularly vulnerable as they often lack the social and cultural tools to defend themselves against derisive teasing on their dress, their accents, and their language among other things. Traore often calls for

more Afrocentric education in schools and encourages dialogue between African and African Americans in order to correct the negative, stereotypical representations of bridge the social and cultural gap of these groups of students in U.S. schools.

#### Limitations of Reviewed Literature

The general consensus in current theoretical and empirical research is that adaptation processes and personal identity constructions are multifaceted, situational, contextual and partly ascribed processes (Bailey, 2002; Portes, 1995; Vickerman, 2001; Waters, 1999). The theoretical arguments and findings cited above are valuable and can generally be used to explain experiences between and across many immigrant groups. However, there are several limitations when applied to the identity constructions and negotiations of Black immigrants. The next section will explore these limitations.

While segmented assimilation offers a more nuanced view of the incorporation of contemporary immigrants into U.S. society, there are several limitations as it relates to this study. First, segmented assimilation arguments primarily center on the economic and academic adjustment of immigrant youth, thus ignoring the social dimensions that also affect their ability to adapt. Second, it does not account for how these individuals fare within their own ethnic groups. Considering the tendency in academic literature to compare immigrant groups to whites, and more recently within racial groups (intra-racial) (Assensoh, 2000; Djamba, 1999; Dadoo, 1997), intraethnic interactions have been largely ignored. Comparative research on majority and minority groups does reveal how dominant society divides minority groups and institutionally and individually limits their ability to successfully adapt to the U.S. society. However, it does not account for the day-to day experiences of many

immigrant youth. Very few studies explore how co-ethnic members may deny many one-point-five and second generation youth access to and acceptance within the ethnic group because they are viewed as not maintaining their ethnic identity (Stepick, 1998; Waters, 1999). Understanding discrimination as it occurs intra-ethnically can increase our knowledge not only on how those discriminated against respond to and adapt to larger, institutional discrimination, but also within their own groups.

Second, the empirical literature on Black immigrant populations contains some shortcomings that deserve further exploration. For instance, though some Black immigrants in the United States may purposefully assert their ethnic identity to avoid being confused with Black Americans, this single argument does not fully capture the experiences of all Black immigrants. In other words, by simply describing Black Americans and Black immigrants as pitted against each other, the literature fails to recognize that many Black immigrants come into the United States with high levels of national and cultural pride or that they instill in their children once in the United States. In addition, Black immigrants are often the dominant race within their country of origin. Therefore, their views on race relations within the United States may vary greatly when compared with other racialized groups (Ogbu, 1991).

Also, several of the previously discussed readings fail to mention that race is in fact a global issue. Although immigrants that are identified in the host country as “black” may not identify with the racial categorization that is imposed in their adoptive country, skin color is a significant social signifier. According to the Minority Rights Group (1995) people with particularly darker skin tones, are generally placed on the lower rungs of the economic, political, and social rungs of many international societies. Therefore, assuming that being considered “black” is not an issue for these

individuals until they enter the United States is questionable. Thus, more comprehensive arguments that explore ethnic and racial identities pre-arrival should be done to avoid oversimplistic accounts of identity formations, particularly given the colonial legacy in Africa and the Caribbean.

Furthermore, in the current literature on Black immigrants, there is a noticeable concentration of immigrants from the Caribbean Islands and Latin American countries. These immigrant groups may share some experiences to other immigrants racialized as black in the United States. However, there are many factors prior to and after immigration that may affect their adaptation and experiences differently including language ability, immigration status and experiences, and the behaviors and understandings of the receiving contexts among other things.

Another shortcoming in the extant literature on African immigrants is that a significant amount of attention has been devoted to adult immigrant experiences (Arthur, 2000; Obiakor & Grant, 2005) who have spent their developmental years and part of their adult years in their countries of origin and whose identities are generally formalized. As such, their experiences have limited transferability to younger generations who have fewer numbers of developmental years in their nation of origin or were born in the United States.

Lastly, although African immigrants, particularly West African immigrants constitute a large and growing Black population within the United States, there are few empirical studies on the experiences of these Black immigrants (Gordon, 1998; Kanya, 1997) that do not discuss them as a collective group. Researchers tend to place African immigrants under a continental identity that fails to consider the cultural, ethnic, linguistic, racial, and political diversity that exists between and within

different African countries. Even scantier is literature on African youth in the U.S. society and their adaptation patterns. Thus, more studies are necessary to explore the diverse and growing African population and the experiences of their children within their various social contexts.

### Summary

Though extant research shows that identity is fluid, socially constructed, and multidimensional (Waters, 1999; Yon, 2000) more research is needed to understand the day-to-day experiences of individuals who are constructing and navigating these identities among conflicting cultural expectations, misrepresentations, social inequities and divisions. This study aims to respond to several of the limitations in the existing literature by telling a small, but important story about the experiences of African youth in the United States. Given that the U.S. is stratified by race and ethnicity, what factors do they believe impact their racial and ethnic identity constructions? What are some of their experiences within their own co-ethnic groups and African counterparts (Portes, 1994)? How do they make sense of the multiple identities either self selected or dictated by others, such as Yoruba, Igbo, African, Black American, African-American (Waters, 1994, 1999)? And how do these identities and interactions affect their sense of belonging? By answering these questions, we can begin to shed light on the complex identity experiences of one of the fastest growing segments of the diverse black population—African immigrant youth.

### Conceptual Framework

I enter this research with the perspective that racial and ethnic identities are socially constructed, contextually-driven and negotiated processes that impact an individual's sense of self and inter-and intra-group relations. In preparation for this

research, I have analyzed immigration history, race formation theories, and racial and ethnic identity development theories to help me understand how immigrant youth construct and negotiate their racial and ethnic identities in various social contexts. Though I greatly appreciate and utilize the information that these bodies of knowledge impart, I have found fractured discourses on the experiences of immigrants and a lack of theoretical understandings that simultaneously examine the impact that immigration, race, and ethnicity have on the identities of immigrant youth in general and African immigrant youth in particular. Thus, the conceptual framework that guides this study combines theories from immigration studies, my own personal experiences as a Nigerian immigrant, and findings from empirical studies on the racial and ethnic experiences of immigrant youth in the United States to understand the *processes* in which African youth engage in to construct and negotiate their racial *and* ethnic identities among their African and non-African counterparts.

The segmented assimilation theory (Portes, 1995; Portes & Zhou, 1993) is a theoretical framework that strives to explain how the children of contemporary immigrants become incorporated into their host society and the subsequent outcomes of their incorporation. The theory argues that there are three trajectories in which contemporary immigrants may follow, leading to; 1) the white mainstream middle class, 2) the urban underclass, or 3) the ethnic community. Segmented assimilation theory provides a strong foundation for understanding the adaptation patterns of immigrant youth in that it combines the importance of individual (e.g. English ability, age upon arrival, and length of residence) and contextual factors (e.g. racial status, peers, media, family class status, and place of residence) that impact immigrant adaptation to the U.S. society. The theory contends that immigrant youth who are

ensconced in the ethnic community, are generally more successful academically, socially and economically as they are under the social influences and protection of their parents and the larger ethnic community. It further argues that if an immigrant youth is more influenced the inner city population, the immigrant's chances of succeeding will be severely undermined. The segmented assimilation theory is particularly useful for this study as it supports the idea that identities are informed by various factors and may vary across different social contexts. In this study, I will look for the influences of such contextualized factors on my participant's processes of identity development.

While segmented assimilation offers a view of the stratified nature of contemporary immigrant's incorporation into the host society, it does not account for how these individuals fare within their own racial and ethnic groups, nor does it describe the processes and experiences in which immigrant youth engage to arrive at their racial and ethnic identities. Mary Waters' typology (1994) will help me to address this gap in the segmented assimilation theory. The typology identifies three major identities that Black immigrants adopt; African American, ethnic American (hyphenated), or immigrant identity. Waters argues that each identity is highly determined by the individual's race, class status and gender. Immigrant youth that adopt an African American identity generally come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, while those who identify ethnically come from middle class backgrounds. Water's typology is useful as it explains the particular identity labels that Black immigrant youth adopt and the external factors that determine those choices. This study will pay particular attention to participants' racial, socioeconomic and gender statuses and how they influence the identity development process.

What Water's typology does not explain, however, are the day-to-day, and practical experiences that immigrant youth encounter as they construct and negotiate their racial and ethnic identities. The written experiences of one-point-five and second generation Africans (Danquah, 1998; Okere, 2006), my own personal experiences, informal conversations with other African immigrants and their children, and a growing body of literature identifying other influential factors and social experiences, shed light on this dimension of racial and ethnic identity development among immigrant youth. As a Nigerian immigrant, ethnicity has played a major role in my relationships with Africans and non-Africans. In this study, my primary focus will be on ethnic identity construction and negotiations, however, considering the influence race plays within the monolithic understanding of blackness in the U.S., race and racialized experiences will also be considered. Additionally, empirical literature explains how media images, language proficiency, accent/ lack of accent, physical characteristics (e.g. full lips, dark skin, and hair texture), intergenerational conflict, and other factors impact Black immigrant youth's ethnic and racial experiences and the subsequent identity constructions and negotiations. As such, I will pay attention to data related to these issues to understand how, if at all, they impact the participants' racial and ethnic identity constructions and negotiations.

## Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design

In this chapter, I describe the overall methodological approach of this study, including the research design, the setting and participants, data collection and analysis, and the limitations of the study.

This qualitative study was guided by four broad research questions:

1. How do one-point-five and second generation Nigerian college students describe and experience their interactions with Africans (peers, family, and school personnel) and non-African peers?
2. How do they describe and experience their processes of racial and ethnic identity development?
3. How do their interactions with Africans and non-Africans shape their racial and ethnic identity development?
4. How do they negotiate their racial and ethnic identities among Africans and non-Africans?

### Research Methodology

According to Creswell (1998), qualitative study “is an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem based on building a complex, holistic picture formed with words reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (pg. 15). This study uses qualitative methods in order to explore the lived experiences of one-point-five and second generation Nigerian’s identity construction. Qualitative methodology is particularly appropriate for this study for five primary reasons.

First, a qualitative approach is appropriate when examining a phenomenon that is not well understood (Creswell, 1998). Thus far, much of the research on Black immigrants has focused primarily on the social, economic, and political experiences of Caribbean immigrants. There is scant research available on the lived experiences of Africans in general and African youth in particular. Several scholars have pointed out this limitation within the literature and have called for qualitative studies that explore the sociocultural experiences of Africans in the U.S. context (Harushimana, 2007; Kanya, 1997).

Second, qualitative research seeks to answer questions about “how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 8). This requires eliciting the experiences of the participants so others can understand participants’ experiences and perceptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) from their frame of reference. This was important to my study as I sought to understand Nigerian college students’ own perceptions of and experiences with others and how it was connected to the ways in which they constructed their racial and ethnic identities.

Third, qualitative research emphasizes collecting and presenting rich descriptions of the participants’ experiences. In doing so, I describe the perceptions and experiences of my participants by extensively using their voices and interpretations to support my interpretations of the data.

Fourth, contextualizing data is an essential process in qualitative research, which allows the researcher to situate the participants’ experiences in order to make sense of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Contextualization was necessary in this study because I sought to capture the complex manner in which the participants constructed their racial and ethnic identities in their interactions with others. As such,

qualitative data and analyses allowed me to identify, contextualize, and gain a deep understanding of the personal and social processes, and the shifting constraints and opportunities that the participants encountered in these interactions.

Lastly, qualitative research values self-reflection in the research process (Merriam, 2002, p. 119), which compelled me to make sense of my own experiences as a Nigerian immigrant in light of the experiences of my informants. Since I am the primary instrument (Maxwell, 1996) in the collection and analysis of the data, being reflective enabled me to understand my own positionality in relation to my participants' stories and to make my assumptions explicit and to understand how they might influence my interpretations explicit (Schram, 2003).

#### Site Selection

The DC metropolitan area is a prime location to study the racial and ethnic identity construction and negotiations among Nigerian immigrants. Washington, D.C., colloquially referred to as "Chocolate City," due to its sizeable black community, has attracted Blacks from diverse social and cultural backgrounds because of its political and economic opportunities, higher education institutions, and its diverse ethnic population (Selassie, 2003). Historically, the black population in the area was comprised mostly of Black Americans. However, within the last decade, Black immigrants from Africa have numerically increased in the area. In fact, of all major U.S. cities, the D.C. metropolitan area has the highest concentration of African immigrants (Deane & Logan, 2003). Though demographers disagree if peoples from sub-Saharan African (Nigerian, Ghana, Sierra Leone) or from the "Horn of Africa" (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia) dominate the area (Selassie, 2003), reports from the 2000 census data and recent news articles reveal that the Nigerian population has increased

significantly in this region of the country and is currently the largest African population in the United States (Baltimore Sun, 2005; Deane & Logan, 2003).

### *Participant Selection*

This qualitative study explored the experiences of 11 one-point-five and second-generation undergraduate and graduate students of Nigerian descent. I choose Nigerians because they represent a significant number of the African population in the U.S (Wilson, 2003). Further, I have a proficient understanding of Nigerian customs, the Yoruba language, and Pidgin English, which helped me to build rapport and communicate with participants (Kamya, 1997).

Participants in this study were young adults between the ages of 18-32. Within this age range, individuals are often engaged in self-exploration and identity issues (Sidel, 1994). It is also a period often associated with establishing independence from family and the co-ethnic community. As young adults, participants were able to reflect upon, describe, and explain a variety of interactions and negotiations with Africans and non-Africans and they impacted their racial and ethnic identity development.

Miles and Huberman (1994), explain that qualitative sampling is often a purposeful and theory-driven process. My rationale for limiting the sample to this particular population is multifaceted. First, while a growing body of literature focuses on racial and ethnic identity assertions among first generation Black immigrants (Candelario, 2002; Foner, 1985; Vickerman, 1999), few studies address this process for younger Black immigrants who have spent most or all of their developmental years in the United States. Even fewer studies on Black immigrants from African countries are available. Second, the sample size is based on McCracken's

(1988) recommendation that in qualitative research, “less is more” (p. 17), and what is most pertinent is having participants contribute to existing literature and allows the researcher to examine their experiences in greater depth.

According to the selection criteria, participants: 1) were between the ages of 18-32, 2) were born in Nigeria, 3) came to the U.S. under the age of 12 (one-point-five generation) or were born and raised in the United States (second generation), and 4) were born to a Nigerian mother and father who have resided in the U.S. for a minimum of fifteen years. Also, the eleven participants chosen for this study were college students, which is often marked as a time period of greater self-exploration.

#### *Recruitment and Selection of Participants*

During the spring 2008 semester, I distributed a recruitment email to the Office of Multicultural Student Education, African Student Association, Black Student Association, Black Engineers Society, Black MBA Association, Multicultural Involvement and Community Advocacy and the Nyumburu Cultural Center (See Appendix A) to invite qualified students to participate in the study. These entities all cater to the needs of historically marginalized and minority students on campus. I intentionally excluded the Office of International Education services because it caters specifically to first generation immigrant/ international students who generally have limited residence in the United States. This email correspondence served as a screening tool that determined appropriate age, national affiliation, and generational status. This strategy yielded five participants interested in the study. I then relied on a snowball sample from the eligible respondents from the initial recruitment email, and also consulted university officials, friends, and acquaintances and asked them to recommend potential participants. Further, I gave a brief presentation to the African

Student Association where I introduced myself, and my research topic. Through the snowball sample and my brief presentation at the African Student Association, I secured an additional six participants from the target university as well as nearby universities.

Interested and qualified participants were invited to face-to-face informational sessions during which I introduced myself, described the research topic, confirmed their interest in participating, ensured that they met the selection criteria, and discussed the logistics of the study. I addressed how I planned to protect their identities through anonymous names of their choosing, identified the risks and benefits associated with participating, and emphasized their right to withdraw from the study at any time. After the presentation, interested individuals were asked to read and sign two copies of my IRB approved, informed-consent form (see Appendix B). One copy was kept in each participant's file and the second was given to each participant. The participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C) to begin the data collection process.

### *Data Collection*

I employed three primary data collection methods to produce the core set of data for this study: questionnaires, interviews, and a focus group. I recorded my personal processes (e.g. questions, reflections, issues, and decisions), reactions to the data, and ideas in a research diary. These different sources of data collection allowed for contextualizing and triangulation (Maxwell, 1996).

### *Questionnaires*

I administered a background information questionnaire to each of my eleven participants (See Appendix C) to solicit basic sociodemographic information such as

gender, age, language ability, family and cultural background. The questionnaire also provided a foundation from which I identified salient topics that would be discussed in the interviews. The items on this questionnaire were adapted from previous questionnaires used in studies of immigrant youth (Clark, 2006; Prosper, 2006).

### *Interviews*

Qualitative researchers agree that interviews are critical in documenting informants' experiences (Patton, 1990; Seidman, 2006; Yin, 2003). While the questionnaire adapted for this study produced descriptive data on the demographics of the participants, interviews helped to illuminate the processes and identify the factors that they believed influenced how they constructed and negotiated their racial and ethnic identities. This study used semi-structured interviews to provide informants the flexibility to relay their experiences as they understood them. The interview included some questions used in other immigrant studies on race and ethnicity, which I believe were particularly relevant to the present study (Kim, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Prosper, 2006). Some questions included "Describe some key experiences with peers in elementary school, high school, and college? How has it impacted the way you see yourself or the way you think about yourself?" To test the clarity of the interview questions, I piloted the interview protocol on family members and friends who met the participation criteria, focusing particularly on language use and structure. I then modified the interview guide based on their recommendations (Patton, 1990).

Interviews were conducted in locations determined by the participants, at their convenience, and were digitally recorded. During the interviews, I wrote descriptive fieldnotes to capture major cues (verbal and nonverbal) related to the research. I also

wrote analytic memos (Maxwell, 1996) to record my interpretations of participants' statements. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), such notes allow the researcher to document the process of the study and to consider the impact of the data on both the study and on the researcher's interpretations. All interviews were conducted in English. However, based on previous studies on immigrant youth, I anticipated that some participants would use a Nigerian language to describe or reference particular topics (Prosper, 2006). In fact, several of the participants in the study did use Yoruba, Igbo, or Pidgin English to refer to a particular concept or cultural expression. In these situations, I asked the participant to translate into English, if I did not understand the language or I did so myself in the transcriptions.

I had originally planned for the interviews to be two, ninety-minute interviews. In discussing the benefit of multiple interviews, Seidman (2006) argues that single interviews do not allow participants the opportunity to contextually ground and construct meaning from their experiences. Thus, I wanted to interview each participant two times in order to provide informants with a contextual foundation and also to gain their trust, particularly when discussing personal subjects such as one's family background, upbringing, and personal struggles. However, participants' time constraints and obligations did not always allow me to conduct the interviews in two separate sessions, or in ninety-minute blocks. Instead the interviews ranged from one hour to two and a half hours. Eight out of the eleven interviews occurred in two different sessions. From a total of 12 participants, one participant dropped out because of personal obligations. The final data set for analysis included 19 interviews.

The interview protocol (Appendix D) included probing questions that allowed me to delve further into responses that required additional elaboration. The interview

began by my encouraging participants to reconstruct their past lives, specifically focusing on their immigration to the United States and/or early childhood and adolescent experiences as a child of African immigrants born in the United States. It began with the open-ended statement, “Tell me about your emigration here? At what age did you arrive in the United States? or Tell me about your experiences in school as a child of African immigrants” (See Appendix D). The goal of the interview was to allow participants to expand on their responses to the questionnaire. The second interview, or the second phase of the interview, focused on participants’ recent and present experiences with family members and peers related to their racial and ethnic identities in various social contexts. In this phase, I sought to understand the types of relational experiences they had which they believe impacted their identities. In the last phase of interviewing (designed to be included in the second interview), I encouraged participants to “reflect on the meaning of their experiences” (Seidman, 2006, p. 18). In this phase, I gave participants the opportunity to identify and reflect upon those factors that they believed had significantly impacted their present racial and ethnic identities and the ways in which they negotiated those identities.

After each interview with the participants, I reviewed each audiotape, taking analytic notes and identifying particular points to be addressed or expounded upon in the subsequent interview or a later phone conversation. I also used the analytic memos to explicate relationships and identify topics to follow up on. In the case of those participants who were formally interviewed only once, I was not able to follow up on issues that arose during the initial interview with a second interview. For these participants, I followed up with phone calls to get further elaboration. I initially began transcribing interviews myself to analyze the data. However, I later hired a

transcription company to transcribe the majority of the interviews. After the transcriptions were returned to me, I read over them two times, while listening to the corresponding audio recording, to make sure that they were accurate.

### *Focus Group*

According to Steward et al. (2007), focus groups are particularly useful in research that is exploratory in nature and when the phenomenon being examined is understudied, as was the case in this study. I conducted one two-hour focus group with seven participants who were interested and available to participate in the session. The focus group had two primary goals. First, I wanted to further explore recurring patterns found in the interview sessions by having participants listen and respond to each other's experiences and perceptions.

Group interactions in focus groups were particularly useful and necessary for this study because they allowed informants to discuss their experiences and thoughts concerning their personal constructions and negotiations of their racial and ethnic identity with other Africans. The focus group allowed me as the researcher to observe how my participants reacted to and built on the responses of other discussants, which in certain cases was not expressed in the one-on-one interviews. Reactions were not limited to verbal responses, but included nonverbal cues (e.g. smiles, frowns, gestures). Furthermore, the focus group session unearthed different views and experiences, helping me to better understand why participants might endorse, be ambivalent to, or reject the experiences of their counterparts.

The second goal of the focus group was to pose "critical incidents" (See Appendix E) to the group. Respondents were given a detailed account of an incident that is 'critical' by virtue of being important to the respondents with respect to the

research topic, as ascertained from the questionnaire and interviews. Erlandson (1993) explains that a critical incident should contain 4 basic elements:

1. It should contain only one event or chief descriptions
2. It should identify persons, locations, and times as specifically as possible
3. It should either be observed by the writer or be verifiably by more than one source
4. It should help define the operation of the organization by focusing on either a typical event or one that is distinctively atypical (p.105).

Based on data from the one-on-one interviews, I constructed four composite incidents and posed and encouraged dialogue around the incidents during the focus group sessions. The critical incidents developed were used to pursue four major goals:

1. To gain more information on a particular theme
2. To further explore a theme that was discussed in noticeably different ways by the participants
3. To further explore experiences that were prevalent across participants
4. To see if participants would give a different response to issues in the group than they did in the individual interview(s) and to understand why that might be.

The critical incidents provided an alternative means to capture participants' stories and experiences. They provided a venue through which participants identified shared experiences, discussed the ways in which they mentally and/or emotionally constructed their reactions to these experiences, and discussed strategies they

employed to negotiate and cope during and after these experiences. In the focus group session, the participants were asked to reflect on experiences and to consider their feelings in that moment. Responses to the critical incidents were used to deepen my understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions and strengthen my interpretations of the data.

The focus group, which included the examination of critical incidents, took place on campus after all interviews had been conducted and transcribed and some preliminary analysis of them had been done. The focus group was video and audio taped and breakfast was provided. Participants were seated in a roundtable format to allow participants to view and react to each other. Participants were informed beforehand about the goal of the focus group and reminded, at the outset of the session, that they would be video and audio taped.

#### Data Analysis

Data analysis was a multi-leveled, on-going and iterative process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Maxwell, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994). As I collected data, I began to transcribe interviews using word processing software as they came in, read over transcriptions, and begin to make initial analyses using preliminary codes. I transcribed two interviews and the remainder of the interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription service. Once I received the transcripts, I reviewed them for accuracy. Transcriptions were stored as digital text files and entered into NVivo for analysis. This qualitative data analysis software assists the researcher in organizing, analyzing and managing data. I also printed backup copies of the transcripts and stored them in files that were dated and labeled using participants' pseudonyms. I viewed the focus group video, took field notes, and transcribed the audio from them. I

also wrote up my field notes from the interviews in narrative form and they were used as additional data. Then I gathered all of the transcriptions, questionnaires, analytic memos, my research diary and the field notes, and read them in their entirety after which they were entered into NVivo for analysis.

I coded all of the data using deductive and inductive strategies. I used deductive codes, drawn from previous studies, to capture factors and experiences that have been found to impact the racial and ethnic identity experiences of immigrant youth. These included racial discrimination (Ahn, 1999; Phinney et al., 2001b), ethnic prejudice (Stepick, 1998; Zephir, 2001), parental acculturation style (Quintana & Vera, 1999), and intergenerational conflict (Zephir, 2001). Inductive codes captured experiences that were significant to the participants themselves which at times were not accounted for in existing literature (Maxwell, 1996). For instance, several participants discussed being viewed as ‘exotic’ within the schooling context and during one-on-one interactions with non-Africans. Another example was participants’ discussion of the racialized obligation they felt to identify and associate with their black peers. This coded for example, as “the force.” I looked for patterns among the codes both within and across participants’ data.

I first coded data by participant to understand how each participant experienced their interactions with other Africans and how they perceived their own race and ethnicity. For instance, Ama explained that the college context gave her an opportunity to interact with other second generation Nigerians that shared her identity experiences. As such, she found herself very active in the African Student Association (ASA). In contrast, Uzoma found that the authenticity of her Nigerianness was often questioned during interactions with other Africans,

particularly when she joined ASA her freshman year in college. Her discomfort during these social interactions influenced her leaving ASA to join the Black Student Association (BSA). She believed that BSA was more open to Black people of various ethnicities and experiences.

Next, I examined the data across participants. The goal was to identify similarities and differences and interpret any patterns or themes across informants' data. It was through cross case analysis that I analyzed differences in experiences as found in Ama and Uzoma's experiences. For example, several other participants shared similar experiences of feeling excluded during their participation in ASA. One pattern that emerged that was significance of ethnic identity exploration and affirmation through ASA.

Then, I arranged the patterns into broader preliminary categories and placed them on matrices. At this point, I worked with my dissertation committee members and other doctoral students to examine the validity of the patterns I identified and categories I developed. Murphy (1980) argues that feedback from a neutral colleague is helpful in uncovering biases, identifying discrepant data, and sharpening arguments that someone steeped in the analysis may not readily see. The final steps of data analysis involved determining themes, to further explain the phenomenon.

### Validity

According to Merriam & Associates (2002), the quintessential question in discussions concerning internal validity is; "How congruent are one's findings with reality?" They assert that qualitative research assumes two major ideas in addressing internal validity. First, reality is shifting, dynamic and individually constructed. Second, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection and

analysis. Considering that these two ideas are intricately related, the findings are essentially the researcher's interpretations of the participants' realities. In reflecting on this, I believe that a potential threat to the validity of my study was my difficulty in separating my own assumptions and experiences from my participants' realities and its potential to influence my participants' responses to the interview questions or my interpretations of the data. To address this, I employed three strategies: triangulation of multiple forms of data, member checks and peer review.

According to Merriam & Associates (2002) "multiple methods of collecting data can be seen as a strategy for obtaining consistent and dependable data as well as data that are most congruent with reality as understood by the participants" (p. 27). In my study, three data collection methods were used: questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. Information from the interviews was checked against information provided in the focus group and reported in the questionnaire to confirm emerging findings and interpretations. I also conducted member checks, asking participants to review interview transcriptions and comment on my interpretations of the data to ensure that my interpretation "rings true" (Merriam & Associates, 2002) to their experiences. Lastly, while analyzing the data, I consistently discussed my interpretations of the data with my dissertation committee and incorporated feedback as necessary.

### Limitations

Although this research contributes to the empirical research literature on African immigrants, it has several limitations. First, the sample size in this research investigation is relatively small (N=11), which is common in qualitative research. Thus, the findings of this study are not generalizable to one-point-five and second

generation immigrants in general or one-point-five and second generation Nigerians, in particular. A second limitation is that the participants were volunteers attending various universities and not randomly selected from the greater population. By focusing on this specific population, this study captured experiences specifically related to college-going Nigerians, whose experiences may not be shared by others. Thus, this research project might produce different findings, given a larger and more diverse sample of participants.

### Description of Participants

#### *Ngozi*

Ngozi is a 24 year old second generation Igbo currently residing in the Washington DC Metropolitan area. She is in her second year of doctoral program in a predominately black university. She spent most of her childhood years in multiethnic and multiracial neighborhoods in California and has attended both predominately white and predominately black schools. Her father is from Enugu, the capital city of Enugu State, Nigeria and her mother is from Nri, in Anambra State Nigeria. Both cities are located in eastern Nigeria. Ngozi's parents are college graduates and hold professional positions in the health care industry in California. Together, her parents earn over \$80,000 before taxes. During the interview, she shared that her mother will be returning to Nigeria upon retirement and her father will join her within the next few years. Ngozi also plans to visit Nigeria for the first time this year and is very excited about the opportunity.

Ngozi was an extremely quick-witted, articulate and opinionated participant. She wears dreadlocks in her hair and is very casual in her dress, but does accessorize with large earrings and necklaces. Externally, Ngozi appears to be a serious militant

and describes herself as such, however upon talking to her, I found that she was very intuitive, caring, and family-oriented. She is an avid reader of Black and African histories and is trained to teach secondary history. She was very eager to answer all of the interview questions and did so providing clear examples of her experiences as Black and African in the United States.

### *Dayo*

Dayo is a 24 year old second generation Yoruba currently residing in the Washington DC Metropolitan area. He is currently finishing his senior year at a predominately white institution majoring in Computer Science. He spent most of his childhood in predominately white suburban areas. His father is from Ijebu Ode, Ogun state, which is a city located in the southwestern part of Nigeria. His mother is from Ibadan, Oyo State, and the third largest city in Nigeria. Dayo's parents are both college graduates. His father works as an engineer in the DC area, and his mother is a nurse for a government research facility. His family earns over 80,000 before taxes.

Dayo spent most of his childhood in racially diverse neighborhoods and attended predominately white institutions. He was very shy and reserved during the interviews and focus group and required a great deal of prodding to answer questions. His interviews focused mostly on his lack of self-esteem and his racial experiences in schools. Dayo admitted that he believed he was ugly for a long time, which was fascinating to me as I saw him as a tall, dark, and very handsome young man with a dazzling smile. He explained that he often felt like a cultural outsider with Whites, Blacks, and Nigerians when he was younger but is beginning to accept his hybrid identity as an adult.

## *Emeka*

Emeka is a 25 year old second generation Igbo currently residing in the Washington DC Metropolitan area. She recently graduated from a predominately white institution with a degree in Criminal Justice. Her parents are both from Anambra State, which is located in southeast Nigeria. Both parents are college educated. Her father worked as a teacher in Nigeria, but in the U.S. is a tax collector for the state of California. Her mother is a certified nursing assistant in a California hospital. Her parents have been divorced for seven years. Her mother earns between 20,000 and \$39,000 before taxes, she is unsure of her father's income.

During the interview, Emeka described a very close and positive relationship with her mother, and described her relationship with her father as very tenuous and in her adult life non-existent. She explained that her father left her family when she was younger, even though many members of the Nigerian community tried to convince him to stay.

Emeka spent the majority of her schooling years in racially diverse schools and neighborhoods. However, she often socialized among black students in her school. Her experiences with her Black American peers served as the primary focus in our interviews. Emeka was very direct in her conversations and expressed great frustration about her experiences with Black Americans in her schooling life. She consistently talked about being "black by default." By that, she means that she often felt forced to socialize with her Black American peers because of her skin color. She explained that she was often referred to as "the white girl" and regularly accused of "acting white." She shared that she struggled with these labels in middle school, and high school and as a result, was intentional in her decision to attend a predominately

white university. In the university setting, she joined a white sorority and surrounded herself with individuals with various racial and cultural backgrounds.

### ***Remilekun***

Remilekun is a one-point-five generation Yoruba who is currently residing in the DC Metropolitan area. She was the only participant who came to the U.S. at the age of six. She is 23 years old and recently graduated from a predominately white institution. She is currently working full time as a statistician in the federal government. Her father is from the Kogi region, which is located in the north-central part of Nigeria and her mother is from the Delta Region, an oil-rich part of Nigeria. She is unsure of her father's educational level. Her mother attended nursing school in Nigeria. Together her parents earn between \$60,000 and \$79,000 before taxes. Her mother and siblings joined her father in 1991 for economic and educational opportunities.

My first interview with Remilekun was very interesting and humorous. She spoke a great deal about her transition and adjustment to her new life in the United States, particularly focusing on the expectations she had about her new home. Some of those expectations included believing that her life would be perfect in the U.S., that she would have servants waiting on her, and the roads would be paved in gold. The most interesting expectation was that she would turn white upon entering the U.S. Remilekun's expectations of the U.S. is consistent with the understanding that many Africans have of the U.S., as a wealthy and white nation. She explained that her perceptions were primarily based on media depictions as well as the information she gained from family members and friends who lived in the U.S. and returned to Nigeria with gifts and stories of America.

Throughout the interviews, Remilekun shared her frustrations and disappointments with trying to adjust to life in the U.S. She discussed her personal and familial struggles to adjust to poor, black urban neighborhoods when her family first moved to the United States, as well as her challenges and successes in predominately white, suburban neighborhoods and schools.

***Uzoma***

Uzoma is a 23 year old second generation Igbo. She is currently pursuing a masters degree in education at a predominately white institution. She spent most of her childhood in ethnically and racially diverse environments. Her father is from Lagos, the largest city in Nigeria, and her mother is from Benin, a neighboring nation to Nigeria. Both of her parents are college graduates. Her father is currently unemployed, but ships items abroad part-time and her mother works for a department store. Her family earns between \$20,000 and \$39,000 before taxes.

I found that Uzoma was the most difficult participant to interview. I had great difficulty securing a mutually convenient time with her and we often had to reschedule our appointments. During the interview, Uzoma was very reluctant to discuss her experiences as a child of African immigrants. She was very bitter about the fact that her parents did not teach her and her siblings traditional Nigerian customs and were not afforded the opportunity to interact with other Nigerians or visit Nigeria. She also explained that her parents did not share their native languages with her and her siblings and believes it was because they both come from different ethnic groups.

Uzoma spent the majority of her schooling years in predominately Black American schools. While she did share some experiences about her African identity, the majority of her conversation focused on class and racial issues that she

experienced in her academic life. Uzoma was the only participant in the study who strictly identified as Black American.

### ***Bunmi***

Bunmi is a 26-year-old second-generation Igbo currently residing in the Washington DC Metropolitan area. She is currently a doctoral student majoring in political science. She spent most of her childhood years in multiethnic and multiracial neighborhoods and schools in Massachusetts. Her father is from Umuahia, which is the capital of Abia State in southeastern Nigeria. Her mother is from Imo State. Both of Bunmi's parents are college educated. Her father earned a Ph.D. in higher education and her mother worked as nurse. They are both now retired.

Within an hour of emailing my research study to campus organizations, Bunmi called to ask if she could participate. She was very excited about the subject matter and shared that the research topic was very relevant to her own life as a child of African immigrants in the United States. She also informed me that she was researching the same topic for her future dissertation. I had originally told Bunmi that she was not within the target age group to participate in the study; however, she asked if I would consider extending the age limit so that she could participate. After getting permission from my advisor, I increased the age limit to thirty-two, thus allowing Bunmi and Ama, another person who showed interest in the study, to participate. I called Bunmi to inform her and she came to interview the very same day.

I enjoyed interviewing Bunmi. She had a great deal to contribute in the individual interviews as well as the focus group. She initially presents herself as a very shy and timid individual, but I found that she would become immediately engaged and outspoken on particular topics. She was most animated during

discussions on her parents' struggles in the U.S. as African immigrants, the lack of discussion on the diversity within the African Diaspora in the political arena, and her struggles in gaining validation on her Nigerian identity. She admitted that she did not experience identity issues until she attended a college in which there was a significant African population. She shared that though she still finds herself having to explain her Nigerian identity, she is much more comfortable with the process and strongly believes in educating others about the diversities within and among the African Diaspora.

### ***Kunle***

Kunle is 25 year old second generation Gokana currently residing in the Baltimore Metropolitan area. He is currently working on his bachelor's degree at a predominately white university in the DC metropolitan area. His parents are from Rivers State, Nigeria, which is located in the southern part of Nigeria. Both parents are college educated. Kunle was born and raised in Bronx, New York and grew up in neighborhoods and attended schools that were ethnically and racially mixed. His parents urged him to relocate to the Baltimore area to live with his sister, Ama, after experiencing many problems in New York.

After learning about my research topic from his sister, Kunle expressed a great deal of interest and enthusiasm in participating in the study. In fact, he asked to participate in the study on several occasions. Ama shared and Kunle later confirmed that the reason Kunle expressed such interest was that he had been waiting for someone to do a study that addressed the experiences of African youth in the United States.

I found Kunle to be one of the most interesting, funny, confrontational and animated participants. He had a reaction, an opinion or a story to practically all of the interview questions. During the interview, he often imitated his parents' accents and told long, elaborated stories that made you feel as if you were in that particular moment. My interview with Kunle ran for over 3 hours and 30 minutes.

While Kunle has never been to Nigeria, he was quite articulate when it came to Nigerian politics and the experiences of Nigerians/ Africans in the United States. In fact, he talked a great deal about his family's challenges in the U.S. as Africans. In these discussions, he often highlighted the challenges he had with traditional Nigerian expectations and the contentious interactions he had with Black Americans.

### *Ama*

Ama, is 31 years old and was the oldest participant in the study. She is a second generation Gokana and is a doctoral candidate at a predominately white institution majoring in Pharmaceuticals. Her parents are from Rivers State, Nigeria, which is located in the southern part of Nigeria and are both college educated. She is Kunle's older sister and they are currently living together. She was also born in Bronx, New York and has visited Nigeria one time. She would like to go back to Nigeria to visit, but her parents discourage her from going because of the oil conflicts that is currently happening in the Rivers State region.

She was very interested in participating in the study, but her coursework made it difficult for her to meet with me. I eventually had to drive to her home to interview her. During the interview, Ama vividly discussed her home life as a Nigerian growing up in the United States. She offered interesting stories of her parents' expectations of

her, her responsibility for her younger siblings, but the most consistent topic was her personal battles with her African identity.

Ama is an attractive, dark-skinned woman with large, bright eyes, long dread locks, soft dimples and a dazzling smile. I found her stunning to look at. The topic of colorism was a constant theme in my interview with Ama. At first she was very hesitant to introduce and discuss her skin bleaching, but later became very open, comfortable and emotional about her experiences with colorism as the interview continued. I felt very sad for Ama as she described her experiences because I saw her as a very beautiful young woman. However, listening to her talk, I could just imagine the pain and ridicule that she endured because of her skin color. It was one of the most difficult interviews for me to conduct, because her description of her experiences was so touching and real.

### ***Femi***

Femi is a 21 year old second generation Yoruba. Femi, is currently enrolled in a predominately white institution majoring in marketing. He grew up in predominately Black American neighborhoods and attended school in racially diverse settings. He currently works at a fast food restaurant and lives with his mother and sisters. Femi's father is from Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State, a city located in the southwest part of Nigeria. His mother is from Ibadan, Nigeria the capital of Oyo State and the third largest city in Nigeria. His father received a Ph.D. in theology in the U.S. and his mother finished secondary school in Nigeria, but has attended trade schools in the U.S. His parents are currently divorced and his mother makes between \$20,000 and \$39,000 a year before taxes.

I found Femi to be a cocky and proud individual. This was interesting, because he also described himself the same way. His responses were brief and to the point, and at times it seemed as if he did not like the questions asked. His interview was relatively short, lasting approximately forty-five minutes and I had to do a great deal of probing to get him to elaborate on his thoughts.

An interesting topic in Femi's interview involved his feelings towards the Nigerian traditions observed in his home. Femi shared that his parents enforced traditional customs in the home, however, he expressed a disdain for practicing these expectations with other Nigerians. He explained that his dislike stemmed from his parents forcing him to demonstrate respect in ways in which he felt uncomfortable. He specifically expressed that bowing to adults showed reverence to a point that was unnecessary and undeserving to a human being. He shared that his intention in staying away from first generation Nigerians because of his experiences with their emphasis on maintaining tradition and respect. Interestingly enough, Femi's friends are primarily other one-point-five and second generation Nigerians and Black Americans. He identifies himself as an authentic African-American.

### ***Abimbola***

Abimbola is a 21 year old second generation Yoruba. She came to the United States when she was less than a year old. Abimbola grew up in racially and ethnically diverse neighborhoods and schools. She is currently a junior at a private, predominately white institution in the DC metropolitan area majoring in Psychology. Her parents are from Lagos, Nigeria and both graduated from universities in Nigeria. Abimbola's mother passed away when she was 10 years old, and her maternal grandmother relocated from Nigeria to help her father raise her and her three sisters.

Her father remarried approximately five years ago and together he and his wife earn between \$60,000 and \$79,000 before taxes.

Abimbola was a very engaging young lady. I liked her immediately when I first met her. She carried herself in a very mature and responsible manner. It was obvious while talking to Abimbola that she had to grow up rather quickly to help her father and grandmother raise her younger sisters. She explained that although her father tried to allow her to enjoy her childhood after her mother's passing, she felt an innate obligation to help the family. She also shared that although she had opportunities and scholarships to attend a university outside of the DC area, she chose to stay nearby to continue helping her father and grandmother.

During the interview, Abimbola shared that she is now witnessing her sisters go through some of the same challenges she had with her racial and ethnic identity. However, she finds that they are handling the process much better than she and attributes their success to two reasons. First, is that she believes her father is a bit more relaxed with his expectations because of his experiences with her as the oldest child and his extended residence in the United States. The second reason is that she actively supports her sisters by advising them on how to deal with issues that they have with their parents and peers.

### ***Adesina***

Adesina is a 22 year old second generation Yoruba. She is a senior at a predominately white institution majoring in Public Health and is considering a graduate degree in the same field. She spent all of her childhood in predominately Black American neighborhoods and schools. Adesina's parents are from Ondo State, which is located in the southwestern region of Nigeria. Both of her parents are college

educated. Her father works in real estate and her mother works in the social services industry. Her parents have a combined income of \$60,000 and \$79,000 before taxes.

I met Adesina at my presentation at the African Student Association (ASA). After the presentation, I saw her looking at me and so I approached her to ask if she would be interested in participating. She explained that she was interested, but her busy schedule would make it difficult for her to participate. In fact, Adesina was very reluctant to do so because it was her final semester of school and she was working many hours a week. I gave her my contact information, requested hers and eventually she called me and agreed to participate in the study.

I truly enjoyed my interviews with Adesina. She was very opinionated, expressive and had a great deal to say about her identity experiences. In fact, she would begin talking about the research topic as we walked to the interview room to begin the session. She also expressed to me that the reason that she ran for positions at the university was because she wanted the opportunity to positively address some of the intra-ethnic and intra-racial issues she experienced as well as saw others experiencing. For instance, Adesina ran for president of the African Student Association after experiencing and witnessing the marginalization of other one-point-five and second generation students by members of the ASA. She decided to run to encourage communication and relationship between the various generations and found that she was very successful in bridging the different generations within ASA. Eventually, under Adesina's leadership, ASA began to create programs and engage in volunteer activities that fostered collaboration with students from the Black Student Association and Caribbean Student Association.

## Chapter 4: Constructing and Negotiating Africanness

Immigrant identity literature has consistently argued that socio-cultural contexts significantly impact how identity is constructed and mediated for immigrant youth (Waters, 1999; Yon, 2000). This chapter examines how participants experienced their Africanness in a variety of social interactions with others in their families, peer groups, and schools. I show how others' perceptions of, about and responses to participants' Africanness, within these three intersecting contexts, had significant social and personal consequences for the participants as they constructed and negotiated their racial and ethnic identities as African immigrant youth.

First, I examine the familial contexts in which participants were raised and elucidate the ways in which participants were ethnically socialized by their parents and extended family members. This section focuses on parental cultural expectations that often required high demands for respecting adults and observing cultural norms and traditions that are often reinforced by extended family members.

Second, I focus on the peer group context and the ways in which the African immigrant youth participants interacted with their American peers; this interaction was often described as contentious. This section examines participants' understandings of how ignorance about and negative portrayals of African peoples in the Western media impacted how Black American youth, in particular, responded to them. For most participants, Black Americans comprised the makeup of their peer groups in their

schools and neighborhoods and were often the main source for friendship networks (Bailey, 2002; Halter, 1993; Portes et al., 2001). However, most of the participants discussed interactions and relationships with their black peers as often fraught with feelings of isolation and marginalization.

Third, I examine the school context and, particularly, the manner in which race and racism played out in the lives of the participants in this context. The study found that in addition to having to reconcile the anti –African sentiment, as *Black* immigrants, participants had to contend with racism like their Black American counterparts. This is specifically addressed in a discussion about participants’ interactions with teachers that highlights three major ways in which participants were othered by white teachers and students, through exoticism, linguicism, and tokenism.

The participants in this study described how they negotiated both their Africanness and their Blackness, while simultaneously navigating multiple contexts and the challenges that arose within them, which made their identity constructions complex and multilayered.

### The Family Context

As Nigerian families adapt to their lives in the United States, many parents maintain the cultural traditions, values, and expectations of their respective ethnic cultures. These cultural ways of being are transmitted to their children (Livingston & Sembhi, 2003). Parents’ insistence on constructing and maintaining African identity and passing down cultural norms and traditions were significant in the lives of participants and they talked very candidly about the culturally based rules and expectations that their Nigerian parents held for them.

Participants were consistent and unanimous in their perceptions of their parents

as strict. Ama described her parents as, “strict in raising me” and Remilekun elaborated on her parents’ strictness saying, “They don’t take any.. B.S....and they will lay down the law... You better not disrespect that, and so I think they’re very, very strict.” Parents’ authoritative child rearing practice reflects the importance of respect found in many African families.

Participants illustrated strictness in various ways in their discussions of their home lives. Specifically, they explained how their parents enforced cultural traditions in the home. A common experience among participants was the expectation that they properly greet individuals, particularly their parents and other adults. For many Nigerian families, traditional greetings are demonstrations of respect and concern for others (Adeleke, 2006). Within conversations, several participants commented on how they were expected to greet their parents first thing in the morning, Femi explained, “When we woke up in the morning we’d have to greet our parents by like kneeling down, saying good morning.” Others reported that failure to properly greet their parents would lead to tensions in the home. For example, Emeka recalled, “They [my parents] wouldn’t even acknowledge you if you didn’t say good morning first thing in the morning. Or, my mom would be like ‘Good morning!’ very hostile if I didn’t say anything...” This suggests a child who does not greet her parents is regarded rude and unappreciative. Participants also discussed other expectations by their parents like being responsible for younger siblings, respecting parents and older siblings, and participating in household chores.

Another theme that emerged around parental expectations involved culturally-based norms of child-adult interactions. Participants discussed their interactions with other Africans, particularly other Nigerians, within their parents’ social networks. All

recalled that at various points in their childhood and adolescence, extended family members would visit their homes for short visits lasting from one to three months or for extended periods, sometimes years, to begin their own lives or to help the family in the U.S. The practice of extended family members living with a nuclear family is discussed by many immigrant scholars who explain that through family and friend networks many new immigrants to the U.S. find housing, employment, and other opportunities (Bashi, 2000; Pedraza & Rumbaut, 1996).

In my experiences as a Nigerian immigrant, it is also common for families and friends to visit each other for birthday parties, naming ceremonies, holidays, and other social events to show support and reinforce community. Participants explained that during these visits they were told family stories, and parents' recollected their childhoods in Nigeria and discussed and emphasized customs and traditions. Adesina described the significance of such gatherings:

...there was a sense of the African community working together, so I was – even though we didn't live near a lot of Africans, we were exposed to a lot of Africans. I guess this is when everybody was in the struggle coming up together, but – as a result of that, I was exposed to the get-togethers, so I heard the Yoruba music, Sunny Ade and Shina Peters, the food, the way to greet your elders, kneeling down and things of that sort.

In addition to hearing their parents' and extended family's stories about Nigeria, some participants shared their own lived experiences during visits to Nigeria. Participants whose families were financially able to visit during school breaks positively described their experiences in Nigeria by saying, "It was amazing," "I had a lot of fun," and "I loved being home." Ama described being very comfortable when visiting both the modern cities and her family's village in Nigeria. She said, "When they took me away from all the richness and everything, they took me to the village, I was very much comfortable... I want to go back."

Participants also discussed how certain cultural expectations were heightened during interactions with extended family members in Nigeria and the U.S. They specifically referenced the African practice of demonstrating respect for and establishing familial ties with biological and non-biological adults. In many African cultures, maintaining cultural connections requires the individual, particularly children, to honor adults in the community as their kin (Adeleke, 2006). Essentially, children are expected to embrace adults as extensions of their immediate family and, thus, must practice behaviors that demonstrate commensurate respect in a variety of ways. One way is by referring to these adults as “aunt,” “uncle,” “mommy,” or “daddy,” even though they are not biologically related. The reference is generally based on the perceived age of the adult. When an individual refers to a non-biologically-related adult with a familial title, it is assumed that they will relate to and care for that adult as if they were a blood relative.

Another demonstration of respect for adults in Nigerian culture is gender-specific. That is, upon entering the presence of an elder, women are expected to genuflect, which is to bend their knees or kneel down on the ground and men are expected to bend at the waist in an informal meeting and, on more formal occasions, to lay prostrate on the ground. In the following quote, Remilekun discusses how her parents transmitted the importance of proper greetings. She said:

...we genuflect when people would come that were elders as a sign of respect, and they (her parents) just always made sure to instill those African values in us because that was something that was tradition, and that was something that they wanted us to know so we could teach our kids later on. So, all that stuff ... was definitely still maintained every though we were here.

Likewise, Dayo shares the male experience with formal Nigerian greetings when he says, “My parents, they taught us to greet our elders properly ... you bend down and you greet your elders, you respect your elders.”

Raised among Nigerians, I often witnessed that properly greeting adults through words and behaviors is expected to extend beyond the home, particularly in the presence of other Nigerians. According to participants, even if their parents did not enforce traditional behaviors in the home, the expectation that they observe these behaviors existed within the larger Nigerian community. For instance, Abimbola explains that although she was not expected to genuflect to her parents in the home, it was still expected by other Nigerians outside of the family unit. During the interview, she recounted an incident where she did not greet a woman in her church according to tradition. The woman later reported Abimbola’s disrespect to her mother, “Abimbola never greets me properly. Do you know how old I am? ... I have children that are older than her.” Abimbola’s mother later reinforced the importance of following tradition, particularly with other Nigerian adults. Abimbola recalls, “After that, my mom emphasized that when I see people, I should kneel down or salute them in some type of way...” Similarly, Ama explains that in her particular cultural group, Ogoni people were not expected to genuflect. However, her mother did encourage her to do so when she was around other Nigerians who did observe the practice. She explains, “She just wanted me to respect the traditions of another tribe even though it's not embedded in ours. In addition to display that I was brought up in a respectful manner.”

#### *Comparisons to U.S Society*

Many scholars have explored the challenges immigrant parents face raising

their children in the U.S. context. A general consensus in the immigrant scholarship is the “Americanization” process that happens with immigrant children is often in direct conflict with the expectations of the ethnic culture. Oftentimes, tensions arise in the home when immigrant children resist their parents’ heritage culture and traditions (Murray, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Similar to the experiences of many immigrant youth in existing literature, maintaining Nigerian traditions and values in the U.S. context often proved to be very difficult for the participants in this study.

A common discussion point in the interviews was the comparison of their home life to their observations of and experiences in the general U.S. society. Participants noted and elaborately discussed the stark differences between the ways in which they and their American counterparts were raised. They often commented on the representations of American life that was presented on television as well as the observations and interactions they had with their American peers. The cultural disconnect that they witnessed and frustrations that accompanied that disconnect jointly served as the basis of some conflicts and tensions that occurred in the home.

Many of the participants compared their lives to their American counterparts. This was the basis of much conflict in the home. One level of insight into the family context came from the ways in which the students discussed their relationships and interactions with their parents, and the perceptions they had of how Nigerian families versus American families behaved towards one another. Several participants shared that the relationships they observed in American families on popular TV shows ran counter to their own experiences. This was illustrated by Dayo’s comment, “I guess like American fathers, they seem to be more like friends and more buddy-buddy...but I would say that I didn’t have that type of relationship with my father.” Ngozi also

shares similar interactions with her mother. She explains that parental love was not expressed as freely as she observed with her American peers. In fact, she felt that there was a line of respect that she could not cross with her mother. “I was intimidated by my mother. I wouldn’t just sit down, “hey Mom!” and crawl in her lap and do things that American kids would.”

Other participants shared that the behaviors they saw on television and tried to emulate were not met well by their Nigerian parents and their reactions were strikingly different from television parents. Here, Bunmi described an event that occurred when she was younger and influenced by a popular television show. “On the *Brady Bunch*”, she explained, “they (the actors) used to always slam the door and talk back to their parents. But when I tried to do those things, my parents wouldn’t come and hug me or stroke my head, instead they’d punish me.” She further explained that cultural behaviors were also reinforced by others. For instance, in the absence of her parents, her sister would remind her that she was not American and therefore could not conduct herself in particular ways. “I even remember like slamming the door once, and my sister just yelling at me and laughing, and being like, “You’re not American. You can’t do that.” Similarly, Abimbola explained that on the occasions when she tried to cross the cultural lines she was quickly reminded by her parents “...you’re Nigerian even though you’re in America.” I definitely would hear things like that...”

As participants discussed the issues in depth, it was clear in hindsight that they all felt that they were loved by their parents. Although their parents’ physical contact was not as evident as is often seen in American families, the Nigerian parents’ expressions of parental love were different and yet still valued by these participants.

### *Parental Involvement in Social Interactions with Peers*

Several scholars have argued that African parents have a significant influence on their children's peer interactions (Okpalaoka, 2009; McAdoo et al., 2007). For instance in her study on Nigerian and Ghanaian girls in the United States, Okpalaoka (2009), found that the parental involvement in peer relationship was used as a means to ensure that their children behaved in respectful ways and maintained the cultural expectations that were taught in the household. Participants in this study shared similar experiences of their parents being actively engaged in their peer relationships.

When asked if they believed 'African families in the U.S. have a different way of raising children than other American families do?', several participants responded by discussing how their parents closely supervised their peer social interactions. Ama offers her perspective on the child rearing practices of African parents. She said:

I think African families are more involved in their kids' lives than American parents. They don't let their kids stray as much. If there is something that is going on with their child, they tend to nip it in the bud, now. Right away. They don't wait.

Ngozi echoes Ama's thoughts when she said, "I do believe that African parents tend to be a bit more strict. Expectations that are much more narrow as far as ... what's socially and culturally acceptable. Ama and Ngozi's sentiment on the role of African parents in peer interaction was shared by all of the participants in the study. The data reveals several examples of parental attempts at influencing the participants' choice of peers and interactions within peer groups. The two most common attempts, discussed by the majority of the participants, were during phone conversations and sleepovers.

During phone conversations at home, several participants discussed that their discussions were often monitored and/or interrupted by their parents. Emeka and

Kunle offered examples of how their parents, and their fathers in particular, would not hesitate to get on the phone and listen in on their conversations.

*Emeka:* ... he'd monitor the phone so he would know when I was on the phone. So, five minutes into the conversation he'd be like, "Okay, it's time for you to get off." Things like that where I was just like, "Okay. Nobody else's dad does this."

*Kunle:* Even when I was younger, and I was on the phone or, like, I'd be on the phone, I think I'm talking to a girl or something, and I hear somebody breathing on the other line. "Hello, Dad, what are you doing for?" "Shut up! Get off my phone! It's my phone!"

For all of the participants, there was a non-existent or very limited sense of privacy that many African parents extended to them as children. In West African cultures, many parents believe that they have the right and the responsibility to monitor their children to protect them from actual or perceived dangers. For the participants however, they often felt that their parents negatively reacted to their interactions with their peers based on stereotypically-derived fears.

For instance, American children often participate in sleepovers, which basically involve friends sleeping at each other's house for a short amount of time. This practice is not common in West African societies, and is generally discouraged if at all allowed by Nigerian parents. Ama shares her experiences, "I couldn't do a lot of things that other kids could do. I couldn't sleep over in other people houses."

Adesina elaborates on Ama's experiences when she says:

... there would be birthday parties and sleepovers. My mother was like, "You can't go. You don't know what they're doing." ... So while some of my friends were bonding and making friendships that would last forever, I was in the house...

Most Nigerian parents considered sleeping over at others' homes unsafe because they often do not socialize outside of their ethnic groups. As such, not

personally knowing the parents of their children's peers creates a sense of mistrust in allowing them to care for their children. Furthermore, permitting their children to interact with parents whose customs and childrearing practices with which they are not familiar is generally not considered safe parental practice. However, several participants shared that on the rare occasions that they were able to visit their neighborhood peers, their parents had several requirements that had to be met. They wanted detailed information about where the child was going, who was going to be there, and if there was going to be supervision. Remilekun elaborates on her parents' insistence of having supervision when she visited her peers, "There had to be some type of supervision, so it wasn't like, "Just go to your friend's house, it's just you guys alone." No. Adesina agrees when she says, "You're like, "Oh, I'm gonna go over to so-and-so's house." There was none of that."

Though the majority of the participants were limited in the social interactions they had with their peers, Abimbola mentioned that her parents were much more lenient about her peer interactions when a Nigerian family moved next door. She said:

...luckily, a few years after we moved here, our next door neighbors were also Nigerian, so they just automatically became our best friends... I spent most of my time at their house because they're a Nigerian family, they had daughters also, and they went to our church. It was easier. I could go there without having to call first and ask. They came here. We slept over each others' house. It was just easier... There were definitely the same cultural expectations.

As shown in Abimbola's quote, her parents were less concerned about her during her interactions with other Nigerians, thus allowing her to freely visit her Nigerian friend's home. It is important to note that the participants' complaints about their parents' involvement in their social interactions are really about the parents' interference with their non-Nigerian peers. None of the participants discussed their

parents complaining about Nigerian peers, but rather focused mostly on the parents' concerns about their American families and peers and the influences that they could have on their children. The fear that immigrant parents have in losing their children to American ways, which is often perceived as negative, is well documented in the literature of immigrant families (Abdullah, 1999; Suarez-Orozco, 2004).

The African parents' involvement in their children's social interactions was their attempt to ensure that their children develop friendships with peers of similar values and cultural backgrounds. Unfortunately, many participants did not have significant numbers of African peers in their schools. As such, they relied heavily on their American peers for friendships. In contrast to the family's pride in teaching and imparting Nigerian customs, traditions, and norms to their children, outside Nigerian-centered contexts, participants often felt bombarded by a contradictory and distorted views of their culture, particularly within their peer groups.

#### The Non-African Peer Group Context

All of the participants very clearly connected stereotypes of Africa and Africans to how they were treated by their non-African peers. Participants felt that their non-African peers often associated Africanness with backwardness, primitiveness and ugliness. They described being persistently stereotyped and derisively teased about their African background and mentioned that they commonly heard the word "African" slung as an epithet. They discussed being taunted with derogatory names like "African booty scratcher" and being asked hurtful questions like, "Do you live in trees?" or "Do you wear clothes in Africa?"

According to participants, much of the teasing and ridicule came from Black American youth who, for many, comprised the majority of their classmates and

children in their neighborhoods. Participants highlighted two distinctive ways in which negative perceptions were manifest in their interactions with their non-African peers; 1) teasing and ridicule and 2) social distancing.

### *Teasing and Ridicule*

Mass media is a powerful and persuasive force in the U.S. society. In this study, participants discussed how their non-African peers learned, internalized, and often drew upon media depictions in interactions with them, belittling their backgrounds and depriving them of their humanity. Some of their peers' mischaracterizations of Africanness reflected exotic aspects of Sub-Saharan life portrayed in the media, like the safari, wildlife, the Bushmen of the Kalahari, the pygmies, and the Massai. Participants felt that these portrayals reinforced stereotypes and were used by their non-African peers to question and ridicule them. For instance, Abimbola explained that she was often asked questions like, "Do you live in a jungle?" and "Do you live in huts?" Likewise, Kunle recalled being asked questions about African food and living habits like, "Do you have to go catch your food? Do you drink the same water the animals bathe in?" Several participants also discussed that when they tried to correct negative perceptions about Africans, it often did not result in meaningful conversations. For example, Kunle described being approached by a neighbor inquiring about African cooking. "What's that stuff the African cooks?" the neighbor asked. Kunle, seeing an opportunity to educate his neighbor about Nigerian cooking, asked in response, "What's it smell like?" The neighbor responded, "It smells like human being," reflecting images of cannibalism portrayed in media images of Africa.

Racially-, ethnically-, and culturally-based denigration is particularly consequential for minority youth during their adolescence because it is a direct attack on the fragile identities that they are in the process of creating in relation to their peers (Graham & Juvonen, 2002). Specifically for African youth, research reveals that cultural abasement evokes individual shame and makes their social interactions much more complicated (Harris & Byrne, 2001).

All of the participants talked about how they were teased about what several referred to as the “African jokes”. Ngozi offered some examples, “I mean, everyone heard the African booty scratcher jokes. Living in huts, you know, your food stinks, your name is weird, things like that.” In this example, Kunle shared some of the African jokes he heard relating to the low waged jobs many Africans, despite their advanced degrees, are relegated to in the United States (Batalova & Fix, 2008). He said, “Oh, your dad’s a cab driver ‘cause he’s African.” “Oh, my mom took a cab this morning and your dad was driving it.” Participants also discussed how they were constantly teased about other characteristics like their style of dress, personal smell, hairstyles, dark skin color, their accent, language, the pronunciation of their name, and their cultural traditions (food, tribal dancing, wearing of sandals, etc.).

Physical Characteristics. Several participants discussed how having “African” physical characteristics was problematic for them particularly during their younger years as they were still developing their identities. They talked about how their dark skin, full lips, and broad noses, were often targets of ridicule by their peers. As Kunle stated, “It’s never popular to look like an African.” Participants described how physical characteristics that in some way distinguished them from their Black Americans peers were often the target of ridicule.

Several scholars note that oppression over time often results in the duplication of racism and discrimination (Feagin, 2000; Omi & Winant, 1994). For instance, the Western standard of beauty, which privileges whiteness, has a significant impact on how People of Color view their own physical characteristics. Research consistently shows that, in the U.S., Eurocentric features are often viewed as more superior, attractive, and pure than African features (Hall, 1992; Russell et al., 1993). Eurocentric perceptions of beauty have been internalized by many members of the Black American population in the U.S. (Hall, 1992) and in this study, participants who possessed pronounced African features described being teased about their physical characteristics by their non-African peers. Ama, for instance, recalled how she was subject to such teasing, which included being called degrading epithets and insults like, “Black spook. Black widow. Bubble lips. African booty scratcher...” “I used to get teased,” she said, “about my lips, about my eyes, about my complexion.”

Skin color was an issue consistently raised by participants and the legacy of aversion to dark skin and preference for light skin in the Black American community (Hall, 1992; Russell et al., 1992) appeared to be significant in their lives. Several darker skinned participants lamented that their skin color was often viewed as a mark

of ugliness and a characteristic to be ashamed of by, particularly, their Black American peers. Ama shared, “It bothered me to be dark skinned, because I used to get teased so much.” Femi recounted some of the names used against him, related to his skin color saying, “Because I’m dark skin they might say something like chocolate ... tar baby, ... streetlight, midnight, .. 2:00 and 2AM...”

Ama revealed that the ridicule she endured for being dark skinned became so excessive that she felt the need to lighten her skin. She said, “...I would actually use it [bleaching cream] to lighten myself because I didn’t like the kids teasing me alot. I felt I was too dark.” She shared that she bleached her skin, particularly her face, from sixth grade through her freshmen year in college and, over time, her skin lightened. As a result, the ridicule abated and she began receiving compliments on her skin, as exemplified below.

Interviewer:            Now when you saw the results, did that make you happy? Did you feel better about yourself?

Ama:                        That’s a good question. I felt happier. I felt better about myself. I would get compliments about my complexion more, too. I noticed that I would get more compliments about my complexion when I used to bleach my skin. When I was young, I would get more compliments. So I did notice the difference. I wouldn’t get teased about how dark I was...

While perhaps not teased directly about their skin color, one participant with a lighter skin tone described suffering color prejudice as a biproxy experience. That is, experiencing and being negatively impacted by color prejudice through the teasing of others. For instance, Ngozi explained that her sister’s darker skin was an object of ridicule by their peers and she discussed how she felt she was able to escape the ridicule experienced by her sister “I never got the criticism for being dark, you know...my medium, somewhat medium to dark complexion, and my hair texture was

thicker...it saved me.” However, Ngozi experienced guilt and embarrassment as a result of her sister’s experience. She said, “And I remember developing for a long time, and having a serious guilt conscience even as an adult, that I didn’t suffer through that with my sister.” Not only did Ngozi have a sort of “survivor’s guilt” about not having to suffer through this ridicule with her sister, she also felt guilt about her inability to stop the teasing despite the fact that she often engaged in physical confrontations to defend her sister. As she alluded to previously, despite the guilt, Ngozi felt a sense of gratefulness for having lighter skin, saying, “I was too busy thanking God... I wasn’t that girl, you know... I appreciated that I wasn’t dark, and I won’t lie about that.”

Another less significant, but noteworthy issue raised in the interviews was hair. This is pertinent to the discussion on skin color because often times “the politics of hair follows the politics of skin color” (Russell et al.,1992, p.82) as kinky hair, which is associated with dark skin, is viewed as “bad” while straight hair, generally associated with light skin, is viewed as “good.” Bunmi shared how she was often questioned by her peers about her natural hairstyles, “Why can’t you perm your hair?” Several female participants discussed how their hair and their hairstyles were noticeably different from their Black Americans peers. Remilekun explained, “...when I was younger, I had low cut hair.” They explained that others often made fun of them because their hair was short and/ or not chemically relaxed unlike some of their Black American peers, because their mother used bright barrettes and/or “uncoordinated” hair accessories, or because they wore African hairstyles. These noticeable differences, they felt, were often viewed as ugly and were subject to ridicule.

Ama discussed the Nigerian practice and school policy of cutting school girls' hair short and not chemically straightening young children's hair. These practices, observed by her mother who was trying to maintain and pass on the traditions of her culture to her children, caused Ama a great deal of shame and frustration in the U.S. context. She shared that excessive teasing about her hair would often lead to fights with her school peers. She explained that she begged her mother to stop cutting her hair. "I was like, 'Ma, I can't go to school like this because I'm being teased.'" She went on to explain how after substantial protests from her and incessant calls from a teacher who was concerned about her declining academic performance and her contentious interactions with her peers, her mother eventually stopped cutting her hair.

Participants, interpreted teasing and ridicule, which occurred on so many levels, as an attack on who they were as human beings. As Ngozi stated, "it's not just, 'Oh, stupid insults.' I mean, it hurts, because it's also a part of your identity." Although many participants could and did change more "superficial" features, like hairstyles, the core characteristics that defined them (e.g. physical characteristics, cultural traditions, language) could not be changed. Most participants felt that the teasing went far beyond individual insults and was an attack on their culture and their people, as Ama aptly stated. "We used to get teased because of who we are, because we're African."

### *Social Distancing*

In addition to the painful experience of being teased, a few participants talked about peers distancing themselves upon learning of their African background. As Ama stated, "if they [non-African peers] found out I was African, then they just stay

away from me.” Social distancing resulted in two primary outcomes: peer isolation and the undercover response.

Peer Isolation. Participants described being isolated due to the fact that their peers’ distanced themselves to avoid being subjected to negative treatment. Distancing oneself from those who are viewed as outcasts is particularly significant during adolescence when youth experience peer pressure to interact only with those who are seen favorably by others (George & Hartmann, 1996). Both Ama and Kunle gave examples of the distancing they experienced with their peers and how it played out in their lives.

Ama described having a group of friends with whom she socialized during school, particularly at lunch. However, according to her, upon learning that she was African, they began to treat her differently. She explained, “

...you guys go to lunch together or as a group or whatever, and then they find you’re African, and all of a sudden you’re like, “Are you going to lunch?” [and they say] “Oh, no.” They start making excuses and stuff like that.

She described how her peers’ negative reaction to her African identity was very painful and isolating saying, “That stuff hurt me, and I used to keep it to myself.” She felt that she could not share this pain with others, particularly her parents, because she did not want to “add to their problems.” She explained,

I didn’t go home and tell my parents. I used to just keep it all inside. I didn’t tell them what I would go through, like, “Today I ate lunch by myself because the people don’t wanna go eat lunch with me because they know I am African.

Kunle also experienced distancing from his peers, particularly his Black American peers. He pointedly argued that he often felt that Black Americans had a “disdain and dislike for Africans” which in turn impacted how they viewed and interacted with Africans. He said, “Everything will be nice and cool until they find out

you're African...and then their whole demeanor changes and you have a problem with them." He went on to share how a girl he liked changed her behavior and feelings toward him once she learned of his background, saying,

So, like, even when I was younger, like, certain things would be said, like, say I really liked a girl or something. And everything was fine until she found out I was African, like, "Oh, my God. Eew. He's African.

Notable is the manner in which Kunle discussed the distancing he experienced and his subsequent reactions, as compared to Ama. While Ama placed herself squarely in the situation she described and openly revealed the pain it brought her, Kunle appeared to not fully claim his experience of distancing as his own. For instance, he began the story the girl who rejected him when she found out he was African, "Say I like a girl..." posing the experience as hypothetical and, thus, somehow distancing himself from it. This may have been a way for Kunle to make himself less vulnerable. It is important to consider that Kunle may have distanced himself from his own experience (discussed the experience as if it may or may not have happened to him) as a way of dealing with the pain that the experience caused him.

Also notable was how Kunle and Ama reacted to their peers' distancing. Both admitted that, initially, their peers' negative reactions to their African background caused them pain and embarrassment and they described strategies for dealing with the pain. For example, Kunle, describing himself as "an emotional chameleon," explained, "Like, I just – it bothers me at first, and I adapt to it, you know? Like, 'cause I have no other choice, you know what I mean?" In reference to the girl that rejected him he said,

Well, to hell with you! ...Better for me to know something like that now than to find out later.' Like, 'Yeah, you're that stupid and simple-minded that you wouldn't want to be my friend because I was African. Like, your household is messed up.' You know what I mean?

As evidenced by these quotes, Kunle's strategy was to identify the source of the problem in the other person's shortcomings and limited understandings.

Ama described being affected more emotionally and also attributed distancing to others' personal shortcomings. She said,

Sometimes I felt bad about it, and sometimes I just didn't care. I was like, okay – I just learned to develop like a wall, like, "Oh, okay, whatever." Then you're just not a true person. You talk to me now, but then you found I'm African, and you don't want to talk to me," so – I think I became a little more mature about it, just a little bit, about my identity and how people's reactions were, so I was like, "Oh, okay, whatever." I don't – "If you don't want to be affiliated with me, that's fine." That was my attitude, sometimes.

Kunle and Ama both implemented strategies to avoid internalizing others' negative perceptions of them by telling themselves that there was something wrong with the other person and/or that the distancing did not bother them. However, these coping mechanisms did not always make them feel better especially in the case of someone they genuinely liked. Despite the strategies they implemented to protect themselves, it was obvious that their peers' distancing hurt them.

These participants generally understood distancing as a result of the fact that Africans are a socially stigmatized group subject to teasing and ridicule. Therefore, they felt that associations with them may have caused their peers' social discomfort, which can be particularly difficult to cope with during adolescence,. Ama explained that her peers distanced themselves from her to avoid being subjected to the same negative treatment she received. She said, "they would get teased if they knew they were being affiliated with someone that's African... That's what I think it was all about in high school."

The Undercover Response. Most participants in this study implemented various strategies to avoid the negative perceptions of and stereotyping and teasing by

their peers. One of these strategies was *the undercover response* (Prosper, 2006; Stepick, 1998; Zephir, 2001), or hiding their African background from their peers in various ways. Some participants discussed changing their African names or using their English names instead of their Nigerian names. Tunde described using a different name in the company of Americans, saying, "...growing up, I wouldn't wanna say my middle name or anything. I just wanted to be Dayo. ...Well, not just be Dayo, but be Dayo to Americans." Similarly, Ngozi recalled begging her father to change her name to "Beth," a name she read in a science book, to avoid teasing and the mispronunciation of her name. "I didn't like Ngozi, I hated it..." she said. Abimbola and Remilekun discussed downplaying their African heritage by claiming and asserting an American identity in the presence of their peers. Abimbola shared her behaviors:

... I would try to be as American and make myself as American as I could possibly be... when people would ask me where I'm from I would try to find a way to make it seem like I was American as possible...

Similarly, Remilekun discussed highlighting her more Westernized characteristics to be accepted by her peers:

... I would try and probably play out my Westernized side more. I'd definitely try and play that out more, cause that was like cool. Boy, that was the in thing. You know, like culture wasn't really cool. It wasn't cool to be really different. And, so I definitely put out my Western parts more, you know, in elementary school, middle school, high school.

Other ways of hiding their African background included denying their place of birth, intentionally losing their accents, and emulating their peers' language patterns and styles of dress.

Scholars argue that many immigrant youth from developing countries tend to dissociate themselves from their culture to avoid ridicule and to fit in with their peer

groups (Stepick, 1998; Zephir, 2001). These “undercover” or “cover-up” practices involve deliberate acts of shedding signifiers of all things foreign. This may include modifying the pronunciation or the spelling one’s names, emulating others’ speech patterns, dress, or social behaviors, refusing to speak one’s native languages, and withholding or lying about where one is from. According to the research on the undercover phenomenon, these practices are particularly prevalent in the first generation immigrant population because of the noticeable cultural signifiers that show their foreignness. These scholars argue that one-point-five and second-generation immigrants are not as susceptible to teasing because their foreignness is not as obvious. Furthermore, one-point-five and second generation immigrants often possess the social and cultural tools to defend themselves against derisive teasing. However this study strongly suggests that one-point-five and second generation African youth are subjected to social ridicule like their first generation counterparts and that, in response, some hide their African identities.

### The School Context

The majority of the participants’ discussion about their experiences with their identities occurred within the school context. While participants had interactions with a variety of races and ethnicities throughout their educational lives, most of the participants felt they were discriminated against and stereotyped by their White peers and teachers. They explained that Whites often held simplistic, patronizing, and sympathetic views of Africa and Africans that were, for the most part, informed by the media. Dayo offered an experience with his white peers,

Growing up, a lot of white people ask me the same type of things. They’d ask me like if I shampooed my hair or like if I comb my hair. “You brush your

hair? Why do you brush your hair?” Like...they think you’re different...like exotic.

Likewise, Bunmi offered an example of how she was viewed differently by her white peers because of her Nigerian background. She said,

I remember one time ... somebody asked me if I was regular black. And, to me, I didn’t know what that term meant. So, I had to ask them. They let me know that I wasn’t regular black because my family is from Nigeria and so that makes me, I don’t know, irregular, I suppose.

Although participants felt they were derided by their Black peers in a direct way, they felt that Whites derided them in a more subtle way, using descriptors like “exotic”, “special” and “different” to describe them.

Participants’ frequently commented that one-on-one discussions about their African backgrounds often evoked moralizing and paternalistic reactions from Whites. Ngozi, for instance, recounted a conversation with a geography teacher that left her stunned and speechless. The teacher said, “You know, the problem with Africa is that they keep sending food instead of birth control,” inferring that Africans need to be taught to control their birth rate to avoid problems food shortages. In addition, according to participants, White teachers who attempted to sympathize with and understand their backgrounds often asked questions like, “... your parents were refugees? How did you come here?, Why don’t you have an accent? You’ve been here a long time? or How is your family surviving in Africa?” Participants felt such questions were laden with negative assumptions and misinformation about Africans in Africa and the United States.

Participants offered many examples of how discrimination played out in the school context, particularly among Whites, which occurred in primarily three distinct ways—through linguisticism, exoticism, and tokenism.

## *Linguicism*

Linguicism is the practice of assigning power and privilege to language (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988). Participants' described experiencing linguicism in the ways in which Whites emphasized English language mastery as a means to success in the United States. Several participants recounted that their parents were advised by White professionals to speak only English at home for various reasons. For example, Ngozi said that her mother was instructed by a pediatrician to cease the use of the Ibo language with her children because of her sister's delayed speech. Ngozi said, "... a doctor told her it was because, 'You're speaking that gibberish to them and really told her you have to stop speaking Ibo to them because they'll never understand English and they won't do well in school.' And my mother didn't know any better." Bunmi said that her teachers encouraged her parents to speak only English to her at home so she would not confuse languages at school and at home. She lamented over the fact that, "unfortunately, I lost the ability to speak Ibo, but I still understand, and that's something that my parents definitely wanted to maintain." Even though teachers encouraged Bunmi's parents to speak to her strictly in English, her parents insisted on speaking Ibo but with modification. "They made sure to speak to me in Ibo," Bunmi said, "but I had to respond in English."

In addition to Whites emphasizing English, participants also discussed a pressure for linguistic assimilation. Several of the participants spoke of how their parents' struggles with their accents often resulted in their discouraging their children from maintaining their African accents. Bunmi for instance, believed her mother discouraged the use of accented English because, "she realized I would be less limited than her, because I didn't have that accent." Adesina echoed Bunmi's thoughts but

with more elaboration when discussing her own mother, saying, “she felt as though I was hurting my chances in America because I was gonna have an accent. Cause I feel as though they feel if you have an African accent your opportunities are limited because people will box you in into a certain category and automatically think that you’re, you know, slow or stupid, or you know, uneducated because you have an accent.”

### *Exoticism*

Exoticism is the tendency to associate and reduce Africa and Africaness to a touristic construct whereby Africa is a place where people can experience safaris, see wild animals in jungles, buy prints and masks and dance to traditional native music (Ukpokodu, 1996). While the majority of images of Africa and Africans were overwhelmingly negative in schools (Harushimana, 2007; Traore, 2004), participants pointed out instances of being exoticized by White teachers. Such instance occurred during discussions of Africa in the classroom, Black History Month, Cultural Awareness days, discussions on civilization, or during some interactions or discussions with White people. For instance, Kunle recounted an incident in a classroom interaction with a white teacher in high school when he was exoticized.

I remember one time, my global studies professor in high school, I mean teacher in high school gonna tell me, “Where you from?” He said, “I know you’re not from this country, ‘cause of your last name.” I said, “Oh, ‘cause I have a last name, like, I can’t be from this country?” He was like, “Yeah. Plus you look a little bit exotic.” So I looked at the stupid man in his face...

While the teacher seemed to have some positive things to say about Kunle, being viewed as exotic made Kunle feel like he was different and othered.

According to participants, exoticizing also occurred when Whites learned participants’ names or learned of their background. Participants explained how, in

these instances, Whites wanted them to demonstrate and express their “Africanness” by speaking their native language, performing a tribal dance, and bringing native clothes to school among other examples. Kunle offered an example of how he was asked to demonstrate his native language proficiency by a peer, he said: “Like people ask you stupid stuff like, “Speak African.” Participants varied in their responses to these requests. Some were comfortable with sharing their background while others were not. A notable response came from Uzoma who said,

Well, it’s frustrating because I don’t want to be an ambassador of something I don’t know.” .. I don’t wear any of the Nigerian attire, nothing, because it’s just not something that I can relate to myself, but other people put it on me because of my last name or whatnot.

This exoticization appeared particularly problematic for Uzoma, who did not identify with Nigeria but whose name forced her to associate with the country.

Other times that exoticism was strongly felt by participants occurred during the celebration of Black History Month. Ngozi explained that during, “Black history month, people always wanted to borrow outfits. You know that was the time, that was a month, you know, we were popular.” Ngozi describes her peers and teachers’ interests in Africa as generally superficial not as genuine attempts to understand African culture in a complex way.

Although many of the participants experienced exoticism negatively, others perceived it as an opportunity for them to give a different perspective of Africa and to have their African identity affirmed. Bunmi explained that, during her elementary years, she appreciated cultural awareness days, particularly when her mother visited her classroom, because her classmates were given a better, more positive view of Africa, specifically Nigeria. She recalled, “I remember being excited whenever she [her mother] would come in just because people would kind of get to see another

country, another side to it, and understand that I was from another place.” Likewise, Dayo looked forward to his parents coming to school and sharing their background with his peers. “They came to my first grade class,” he recalled, “and taught us about Nigeria so I do remember that, and they dressed some of us up and stuff like that.”

### *The Double Burden of Tokenism for African Youth*

Participants felt that, in the eyes of their white teachers, they were expected to be both role models for the black race and/ or ambassadors for Africans. Whereas tokenism has traditionally been defined as the practice of using a member of a minority group to represent the larger group (Steele, 1997), I argue that tokenism is particularly nuanced and complicated for African immigrants. In this study, through tokenism, the behaviors, academic performance and resiliency of these African immigrant participants was juxtaposed to that of their Black American peers who are often associated with behavioral and academic deficiencies. This captures how Africans can be viewed as new model minorities, which Black Americans should emulate (Obiakor & Grant, 2005). Participants shared that White teachers often saw African immigrant students as different or in some cases better than Black American students. They gave insights into how they were viewed as stellar Black students, used as role models, and given extra attention and encouragement in front of their peers. Participants focused on two aspects around how this occurred, academics and behavior.

The majority of the participants reported being placed in advanced or honors courses in which they were often the only Black student or one of few Black students in the class. Ama and Ngozi explained that most of the Black students in their honors classes and programs were either of recent African or Caribbean descent. Ngozi said,

“...the black kids who were in those classes were mixed, they were Africans, they were Caribbean.” Ama found this in her own honors program, saying, “honestly, most of those students of color tend to be African, that were in those programs with me.”

Participants’ academic placement often separated them from the larger black population in school, resulting in differential treatment from teachers. Participants discussed how they were defined and regarded as the “good black students” in the school. When asked to define the “good black student,” Bunmi responded, “...the black student who’s in these advanced classes, and doing well, and not getting into trouble, and all that stuff, and having very engaged parents who would come in.” Other participants discussed how teachers noticed and often commented on the behavioral differences between the African and Black American students, describing them as “respectful,” “respectable,” “disciplined,” and “hard working.” Ngozi recalled how one told her, “I could tell immediately that you guys were African kids.,, you’re not like those Black American kids.” Likewise, Emeka explained how she was differentiated from her Black peers, “I’ve had a time, a teacher saying, well, you know, she could tell that my parents were Africans because I was disciplined and well-behaved...and I felt at times that I’ve been used as kind of that example, that black example.”

Participants who were seen and used as tokens shared that they often felt an immense amount of internal and external pressure to behave “appropriately” in front of White people because of the negative perceptions many believed Whites held of Blacks. Emeka shared her understanding of white perceptions towards Blacks. She said, “I know that white people tend to have this view of a black person that’s very

negative. Especially, don't let them see somebody on a bus, talking loud, and she's black..."

A few respondents talked about how they became hyper-conscious of their blackness in predominately white contexts and often tried to avoid the negative stereotyping often directed towards Black Americans. Ngozi explained how she conducted herself in white contexts. She said, "It was important for me that I did not show out in this white neighborhood, in front of the white people. It was important that...we were great kids. Not show[ing] out." Likewise, Adesina found that she was conscious about her behavior in class because she did not want to be labeled. She said,

Because there were times when we would be in class...some things that came out of some people's mouths were very offensive. But, I was like – as you can tell I'm outspoken – so, I was like, "OK, Adesina, calm down. You don't want to be the angry black girl." 'Cause you feel as though you're constrained, you're constrained.

Although many participants were aware of racial stereotypes and at times behaved in particular ways to avoid white discrimination, they learned that sometimes it was out of their control. For instance, Kunle offered an example of when he was teaching kids how to play chess, a white counselor came to comment on his playing chess. He said,

One of them actually came up and said, "Ken, you're black. What are you doing playing chess?" And, I thought about like, "Well, what do you mean? Well, what do you mean I'm black, I'm not supposed to play chess?" And, he actually told me, "You don't want to go to the gym and play basketball." I said, "Wow, wow."

Other examples that participants highlighted that White people commented on directly and indirectly included their refusing to skip class, their engagement in extra-curricular activities that Blacks generally did not participate in, their enrollment in advanced courses and their quiet demeanor in public spaces.

Participants were not only conscious of their behaviors in predominately white contexts, but also of their academic performance. One participant in particular, Remilekun, vividly recalled often being the only Black person in her honors classes, and being one of the few academically astute Black students in her school. As such, she often felt a responsibility to demonstrate that Black people could be academically successful. She said,

I look around and I'm the only black person here and the only African. ... I knew I was the only black girl so I always wanted to excel and be different... I always try to be in honors reading, honors spelling, things like that because I wanted to also be different. I want to be distinctive.

The difference and distinctiveness that Remilekun strived for came from her realization that she was the only or one of few academically successful Black students in her school and she described working excessively to prove that Blacks can be academically successful. When asked if there was external pressure placed on her to succeed, she responded by saying, "I think I followed my environment and I knew that I was the only black kid in the class so I wanted to excel." This suggests that Remilekun's motivation stemmed from being set apart from her Black peers in her predominately white school environment; their relative underperformance encouraged her to do exceedingly well.

Participants also expressed frustration about feeling like they had to play the role of ambassador in their classroom and to represent the continent of Africa and African people by dispelling myths, explaining negative media images of culture and life, and correcting the misunderstandings. Some discussions with non-Africans revolved around explaining the diversity of the African continent as Abimbola did when describing language diversity on the continent. She recounted,

We would watch something about South Africa and they would ask me if I understood that language. I had to tell them Africa is a whole continent; there are many countries in it. I don't understand every language in the whole continent.

Another student talked about educating her teacher about African immigration to the US. When asked, "...your parents were refugees?" she responded,

No. You know, because there were two waves of, you know, immigration. There was one in the '80s and there was one that was kind of in the 90's. You know, he thought, I'm sure, that my parents were wrapped in swaddling cloth with one beat- suitcase, you know.

Several participants mentioned discussions on Africa in their classes that caused them embarrassment and discomfort. Abimbola shared her experience:

... I did not want to get to Africa because they would say a statistic and, lucky for me, it would be about Nigeria (sarcastically). "Nigeria is extremely dangerous and the poverty level is a hundred percent.

Abimbola's reluctance to discuss Africa and to view documentaries about Africa arose from three particular conditions that she and other participants highlighted. First, the participants were often the only African in the class and, thus, they felt the responsibility fell solely on them to explain the images displayed. Second, based on prior experiences, they anticipated negative portrayals of Africa and African people. This is because the vast majority of African documentaries focus specifically on tribal life without providing cultural significance and context. In addition, the documentaries fail to capture other African realities such as modern, vibrant cities, the wealthy middle and upper classes, and the abundance of natural resources (Michira, 2002). Third, they felt that, particularly through documentaries on African, their non-African peers' negative perceptions of Africans were confirmed and would be used to ridicule them. Femi shared an example of this, saying,

Like if we were watching National Geographic movie or you know how they, they try to show Africans having those bones and stuff in their faces and all

that paint and they're naked and like bush village people. And they'll be like there's John's people right there or there's Femi's people right there...

Emeka and other participants expressed anguish and shame about classroom depictions of African, which were markedly different from their own understandings and experiences. In the following quote, Emeka described the common images of African life shown in her classrooms. She specifically mentions her concern about the practice of highlighting the sociocultural experiences of non-representative groups and ignoring modern lifestyles in Africa. She said,

...when I was growing up, in school, when they had something about Africa, it was always like some tribe in Mali that do live in huts or do live in - You know, they never show the city... It's the type of films that they show too ... that plays into this whole stereotype of what Africa is. I mean, they don't know that Lagos for instance is a sprawling area, it's huge, it's city, there's houses. Some of the houses are even more extravagant than houses here, you know? So, I think it's that type of stuff that they chose to show in schools at that age that contribute to ignorance. I mean, not that that's not real. I mean, that's true of course. Those people do live like that. But, I mean, there's other stuff that goes into that.

Likewise, in describing depictions of Nigeria in her classroom Abimbola said,

I knew that wasn't what Nigeria was because I had been to Nigeria to visit... I knew that's not what I saw when I went there. I knew that's not how my parents lived when they were there. It made me very upset to see this image that these people were getting about my country.

Both Emeka and Abimbola quickly learned, however, that their first hand experiences in Nigeria was not enough to counter the massive amount of negative and one-dimensional images and experiences of African life that were constantly portrayed by the media and accepted by their teachers and peers.

Many participants in the study often found themselves representing two major identities in the school context, the African identity and the Black identity in the U.S. Representing both identities individually and sometimes simultaneously proved difficult for many participants. Adesina, for instance, provides the general sentiment

discussed by several participants about managing both an African and a Black identity in the classroom context:

...when I'm in class, whenever I speak, first of all it seems like I have to speak for the whole- First thing is they knew I was African- so I'm speaking for the whole continent of Africa. Then I'm black, so I'm speaking for all of black America...And whatever I said might be misconstrued because they already placed me in a pigeonhole of being too black. So it was kind of frustrating...

Likewise, several participants also discussed that they often felt they had to explain, defend or positively characterize both identities, particularly in the presence of their White teachers and peers. Ngozi elaborates on her experiences of defending both identities:

...I'd see how white people would react watching them (Black Americans), and it embarrassed me. And then I had to be in class and hear a comment that they might not even realize it was an insult, and I'd have to defend them, you know...I also had to deal with the African image in the classroom, but that was more of a covert issue, it was in the air, in the rhetoric. The questions that would arise were, "How come they (Africans) can't get it together? Why are they so poor? "You read everything, and those connections about colonialism and exploitation aren't made in class, none of that is discussed. So you always try to be the good (African) example. The African kid who is educated, smart, upper middle class. When things would come up on Africa I would always try to insert that, "Not everyone is like that." It was a reflex.

Both Adesina and Ngozi's quotes directly illustrate the double burden, experienced by many participants, of being both the African ambassador and the Black representative in their classrooms. As African students, they often had to challenge and explain the monolithic and disparaging portrayals of Africa shown in the classroom. Ngozi, for instance, often highlighted the class differences among Africans to quell the constant discussion of African poverty that she experienced in the classroom. As Black students, however, they experienced and/ or were subjected to the same stereotypes as their Black American counterparts, to which both responded differently. Adesina found herself cautious and mindful of her participation in class in

order to avoid the stereotype often placed on black people. Ngozi, on the other hand, often challenged the negative stereotypes stated about her black peers.

### Summary

As shown by the data, participants negotiated their ethnic and racial identities in multiple social contexts including in their families, peer groups, and schools. Whereas, parents tried to positively reinforce and maintain their traditional cultural norms, their efforts were contradicted and likely diminished by negative portrayals of African cultures in the media and by negative perceptions held others with whom the participants interacted.

Negative perceptions held by non-African peers often reflected and were undoubtedly influenced by media depictions of Africans and African life and, according to participants, shaped how these youth interacted with the African immigrant youth. Drawing on negative construction of Africanness in defining themselves, for the participants the process of negotiating race and ethnicity was conflictual. Within that process, they had to adopt strategies to deal with the social harassment they faced because of their African heritage as well as their blackness. Participants also faced school personnel's ideas about what it meant to be African, particularly the White teachers they highlighted in their interviews. In their interactions with these teachers, participants often felt exoticized, tokenized and linguistically disadvantaged, which profoundly shaped their perceptions of themselves as Black and African.

## Chapter 5: Learning Blackness in a Racializing Society

The previous chapter argued that the combination of three major themes significantly impacted the construction and negotiation of Africanness for the participants in the study. The first theme explored how parents constructed and emphasized traditional norms in constructing their children's Africanness. The second theme contextualized how the one-dimensional portrayals and narratives of Africans and African life that was perpetuated by the western media impacted the participants' social experiences. The second and third themes explored the interactions and relationships between the African youth and their Black American peers and white counterparts respectively. The themes examined how both groups often used the media's portrayals of Africans to characterize and treat members of the one-point-five and second generations.

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which Blackness, as a racial and social category, was constructed for the participants in the study. The primary contributors of the participants' construction of blackness were their African born parents and their Black American peer groups who gave conflicting and imbalanced messages on the meanings of blackness. The participants' learned view of blackness impacted how they viewed and experienced their racial identities. Next, I discuss participants' description of their parents' and peers' discussions on race as a concept that can be learned and understood. The last two sections provide a separate examination of culturally based understandings of race by first African-born parents followed Black American peers, respectively. While parents vary in their ability to convey the significance of race to their children, Black American peers seemed well equipped to

define and police the meanings and expectations of what it means to be Black in the United States.

### The Conflicting Constructions of Blackness

As it was indicated in this study, one-point-five and second generation African youth are likely to experience a conflict in their process of constructing blackness based on the perspectives of their African born parents on one hand and the expectations of their American born Black peers on the other. For African born parents who are the racial majority in their home countries, blackness as a physical trait, is often a non-issue—a non-racialized characteristic that has no or limited negative connotations (Bryce-Laporte, 1972, Rogers, 2006). Because the parents draw from and attempt to pass on to their children the values and understandings that they inherited from their home culture (Suarez-Orozco, 2004), parents' discourse on identity revolves mostly around adhering to cultural norms and traditions. The peers, not from the same cultural background of the African immigrant children, base their understanding of Blackness on their experiences in the U.S., and often serve as the students' primary social network (Waters, 1994; Woldemikael, 1989). As such an imbalanced input from parents and peers causes conflicting understandings of the children's constructions of Blackness when the children begin to learn from their peer network. Though parents expect to be listened to and expect to be followed, peers take precedence because of the students' need to fit in.

This study found that African parents' varied in their awareness of race and ability to communicate issues of race to their children, challenging existing research which argues that black immigrants downplay their racial identity in favor of their ethnic identities (Foner, 1985, 1987; Kasinitz, 1992; Vickerman, 1999; Waters, 1999).

In this study, some participants revealed that their parents discussed discrimination, race, and culture in a variety of ways. For the majority of the participants, their parents' discussions about discrimination focused primarily on their status as foreigners. For instance, Kunle shared his father's experience in the workplace. He said:

Like, even with my dad, at his job, like, he has problems. Like, he had this one supervisor who really didn't like him because he was African. Like, he said it out of his mouth, like, "I hate you Africans. You guys come here and think you can do everything." "So I'm not supposed to come here and work? It would be another problem if I just came here and stayed on the system, or, so, like, what is the problem? I don't understand, like, what the problem is. I'm working, I'm not bothering anybody, but it's a problem for you. So I'm taking jobs. I'm taking jobs because I'm trying to feed my family, so that's why I work one to two jobs. I'm not asking you not to do the same thing. I did nothing to you.

Likewise, Adesina offered her mother's experience when she says, "I remember one lady saying to my mother, "Go back to Africa. You're taking the jobs away from us."

Several participants' talked about how their parents were passed over for promotions, relegated to low-paying positions because they lacked American credentials, or were discriminated against because of accent. Bunmi shared that even though his father possessed a terminal degree, he still faced challenges because of his accent. She said, "He received his PhD and there was a lot of issues about his accent and whether he'd be able to teach, whether people would understand him."

Other participants discussed their parents' experiences with the xenophobia of their native Black counterparts. For instance, Uzoma shared a scenario she often witnessed when she accompanied her father to work. She said, "My dad sets up at a flea market and if people didn't like the price of something, they always made

comments about him being African or ‘Go back to Africa,’ or things like that. So just very ignorant comments."

Some participants believed that their parents were aware of racial issues in the United States and tried to pass their racial consciousness, as well as their ideas about culture and national identity, on to them. For these parents, their residence and experiences in white dominated countries (England, Canada and the United States) and their experiences with and as racial minorities in these countries raised their awareness of the issues related to race and culture in each context. Regarding race, Ngozi and Uzoma explained that their parents' experiences with racial discrimination taught them that their skin color placed them in the lower echelons of society. Uzoma illustrated this, reflecting that her mother let her know that the U.S. "was a racist society and that whites have always thought that they were superior here." Furthermore, participants learned from their parents that dark skin color could limit them in ways that they had not imagined. As Ngozi explained about her mother, "She went to school in London, she went to nursing school where they were very openly racist to her, which was what she never expected." According to Ngozi, her mother's experiences with overt racism left her with blatant mistrust of and ambivalence towards whites, which she often communicated to her children. Ngozi summarized her mother's attitude and response to her and her sisters when they complained about white racism.

My mother, she was very clear about how she felt about white people which was you will deal with them in the world. Do not trust them. They don't like you, you don't have to like them, but like them enough to work with them. Basically don't expect good things from them but expect to work with them in this world...My mother's position was, "You never let white people upset you for doing what they do, which is be white....The way she talks about them is like, "God made them white so you could see the dirt on their face.

These types of statements served as a warning to Ngozi about her interactions with Whites; she should be cautious of Whites' actions and expectant of their wrongdoings.

In addition to learning about race and racial discrimination, all of the participants were also taught about cultural difference and the role it played in social interactions. Several of the participants' parents shared with them that their cultural distinctiveness often impacted their interactions with others, specifically referencing the self-segregating patterns of Blacks and white favoritism that they experienced in the workplace. Most of the participants explained that their parents were often excluded by Black Americans who viewed them as "stuck up," "different," "proud," and "argumentative." They also discussed how their parents would refer to Black Americans as "akata," a derogatory word used to describe Black Americans, suggesting that they are "loud," "disruptive," and "lazy." Ngozi described her mother's feelings by explaining:

She [her mother] would comment on... how they separate themselves. She would comment about their behavior. About how they don't know how to conduct themselves at work. She would comment on the comments that they would make towards her. She had a co-worker once that would leave anything negative about Africa in the news, they would leave a clipping of it on her desk. And do things like that to her. A lot of them said she was stuck-up or you know, things like that. A particular co-worker made a comment to her, you know, 'Go back to Africa!' or you know something like that.

The mutual distancing that often occurred between Blacks and the African parents in the workplace generally resulted in Africans having more positive and favorable interactions with Whites. Ngozi reflected on her mother's experiences at work by reflecting:

I think at work, too, a lot of her white coworkers or supervisors favored her at times, because she didn't do that [loud, lazy and self-segregating]. And so it was almost like a pat on the back, like, you know, "You're black but you haven't been 'Americanized' to, you know, you're not like them." So basically, it was, I think, affirmed and reaffirmed.

The favoritism that immigrant scholar, Mary Waters (1999) acknowledged is bestowed by Whites on black immigrants contributed to many of the African parents seeing themselves as different from and in some cases culturally superior to their Black American counterparts in the workplace. These types of experiences were also communicated by parents to their children when emphasizing the importance of maintaining cultural integrity by not behaving like Black Americans.

#### *Parental Construction of Race and Identity*

Data from this study suggests that participants' perceived their parents' teachings on blackness as nuanced and multilayered. Participants identified two major narratives that they often heard from their parents concerning their Africanness and their Blackness. In the first narrative, parents identified and emphasized cultural differences between African immigrant youth and their Black American peers. Participants shared that their parents would make comments like "You're not one of them", "You are not like them, "Don't be like those African-American children. They don't have culture", and "You're not like those black kids". These statements largely appeared to be parents' attempts to dissuade their children from adopting the perceived and observed disrespectful behaviors, and lack of achievement among black youth, and instead, promote in their children a sense of difference.

The second narrative, which is intimately connected to cultural differences, reflects parents' understanding of racial barriers in the U.S. and how these barriers impact their Black children. Some participants shared that their parents would share

that as a black person, one has to work twice as hard to achieve. Ngozi reflected on how she was raised to view her blackness in relation to whites, saying, “We were raised to know that we’re black, and white people might think that you’re inferior, and you have to be the one to, you know, prove that to them.” As reflected by Ngozi’s statement, several parents appeared to understand and express to their children that, in the U.S., blacks are stereotyped as lazy and, thus, they instilled in their children the need to work harder than their Black and White peers.

Several participants also mentioned that their parents often warned them against behaving in particular ways and associating with black peers they considered undesirable. Ngozi put it this way, “not so much that they were gonna try to bring me down, but you’ll become lazy by association, was the idea. Not necessarily that they’re gonna want to pull you down, but if you choose to let that lifestyle or that cultural tie affect you, then it’ll happen.”

However, a common theme was participants’ perception that their parents were unable to teach them about how to simultaneously negotiate and reconcile their racial identity and ethnic identity. This was true even of participants whose parents did address issues of racial discrimination in the U.S. While the participants experienced identity issues related to race and ethnicity simultaneously, guidance from parents dealt with race and ethnicity as if they were mutually exclusive. For example, lamenting on her conflicting experiences, Emeka said,

One of the things that I think would have helped, maybe, growing up--I just never really remember having conversations with my parents about how to reconcile the two things. And now when I think about it, I’m just like, ‘My mom should have helped me out.’ I don’t know that I even approached my mom about something like that. Because when I was at home I was Nigerian. ... I guess my mom didn’t anticipate that I would be going through such a thing...

Instead of helping their children to understand what it means to be Black and African in the U.S, and how to navigate the disparate and conflicting understandings of blackness and Africanness that they would encounter in society, parents focused on individual development. Emphasis on personal success was evident in parents' comments like, "Be great", "People are only superior if you let them be superior to you", and "Don't mind them, you know who you are." Furthermore, many parents advocated education as a way of bypassing the discrimination that they anticipated their children would experience and emphasized hard work, individual success, and retention of and pride in Nigerian culture. They did not get the full understanding of the challenges and experiences they would encounter because of their Blackness and Africanness from their parents, but from elsewhere.

#### *Learning How to Fit into a Racial Category*

Abimbola said in an interview, "I didn't understand how I could not be black because I look black," reflecting the confusion that many of the participants experienced about their racial identity during their interactions with their Black American peers. For many participants, blackness was initially understood simply as a function of skin color. However, as Ngozi alludes to in the following quote, blackness is interpreted and understood in a variety of ways that extend far beyond skin color. As Ngozi pointed out, "I feel like the blackness that I have now has definitely been predominantly a social construct, something that I've had to learn. It's been a learned process for me..."

For the study participants, learning about blackness in the U.S context was at the center of learning how to be racial. Learning blackness included learning how to present oneself, how to walk, how to talk, how to engage or disengage in academic

work, and how to interact with others. To participants, this meant accepting a pre-engineered way of “being Black” that was created and perpetuated by, to various extents, Whites, mainstream media, and American Black peers and accepting the racialization of popular cultural signs and symbols (music, dress). One participant described blackness as “something that could have been bought from a store, a commodity to be consumed... it was from BET, it was from television...” Blackness was also a negotiated identity that was defined differently in different contexts and could be accepted or rejected by others. Learning to be black in the U.S. involved knowing and accepting Black experiences with slavery, Jim Crow laws, and the civil rights movement. It involved understanding certain cultural referents and experiences such as braiding, pressing, and relaxing hair, and eating southern soul food. Learning blackness involved having particular domestic and communal experiences such as coming from single-family homes, preferring sports over academics. According to many of the participants “Learning blackness” was a daily process that involved keen observation of others and acceptable imitation of behaviors observed.

#### *Peers Defining and Enforcing Blackness*

Race was an integral dimension in the construction and negotiations of identity among the participants in this study. It operated as an undercurrent that informed participants about how to define “Blackness” and how those who were racialized as Black were supposed to behave and relate to each other. Participants felt that Black American peers, in particular, often questioned the authenticity of their blackness by questioning their preferences, behaviors and interactions. When participants showed a lack of familiarity with cultural referents that characterized the dominant understanding of blackness in the U.S., they felt that their peers often made them feel

as though they did not belong to the racial group to which they felt they were supposed to belong. In different contexts and by different people, participants were told that they were not black enough. This was tied directly to their familiarity with meanings of race and blackness as reflected in the media and understood by family, peers and society as a whole. In general, participants found that dominant conceptions of race and blackness, privileged particular understandings which were limiting and exclusive.

Several scholars have discussed that newly arrived Black immigrant adults often do not have an invested interest in associating or identifying with the established black population in the U.S (Arthur 2000; Kasinitz 1992; Zéphir 2001), but for African immigrant youth who have spent the majority of their formative years in the U.S., there is a both a strong personal desire and an external pressure to “fit in,” which motivates many to learn blackness. The majority of the participants in this study sought acceptance from their Black American peers.

Participants explained that there was an established social definition of blackness among their peer groups. Because they were racialized as black, many of them were expected to comply with the expectations and behaviors dictated by their peer groups. Participants explained that their peers were central in creating, enforcing and policing the meaning of blackness in various social contexts. This included the expectation that they perform "acts of blackness" that were acceptable in the eyes of the peers. Some of the “acts” mentioned included but were not limited to being able to jump rope “Double Dutch” style, sitting at the designated “Black table”, dating black boyfriends and girlfriends, listening to “Black music”, not having an accent, wearing particular types of brand name clothing and shoes, coming from a single

parent home, knowing how to braid hair, joining the step team, eating particular types of food, doing poorly in school, and socializing strictly with Black peers. For instance, Kunle explained how doing well in school would cause him problems among his black peers. He said, “I grew up like in the south Bronx, so it wasn’t that cool to be smart. And, if you were smart, you were considered trying to be white.” Similarly, Emeka explained how her getting math tutoring assistance from a white classmate caused her problems within her black peer group. She said,

There was this girl – she happened to be this white girl – that was just very – she wanted to help me out...We would call on the phone and she would help me do my math homework and stuff like that. And I remember when they found out; they were just like, “What?” It was just – it’s math, it’s school – like, “Oh my gosh, leave me alone.” It’s just things like that that just caused me to just be an outsider, kind of.

Participants explained that failure to adhere to these expectations resulted in being accused of “acting white,” or “not black enough” which often led to criticism, ridicule, peer isolation and exclusion.

The Inherent “Force” of Blackness. During the focus group session, as participants talked about the pressures of "fitting in" with their Black American peer group, a discussion of a phenomenon they identified simply as "the force" took place. Emeka commented, “I mean, you were black, you looked black, so you should hang out with black people. Yes, it was like a force.” According to the participants, “the force” was a racialized obligation or responsibility to connect to, relate to and interact with their Black American peer group. The participants’ description of “the force” was complicated and multilayered and inherent in “the force” were the meanings and the expectations that their peers attached to blackness.

Research that focuses on relationships among adolescents of color argues that they socially create a list of racialized markers to control, exclude, and maintain racial

solidarity within their peer groups (Carter 2005; Nearl Barnett 2001; & Perry 2002). Participants highlighted several racialized expectations, but the most common was captured by Emeka when she stated, “It was like ... in order for you to prove your blackness, in order for you to stay in tune with the black community, you have to hang out with them [Black American peers].” In this quote, Emeka captures and addresses two major criteria that several participants also mentioned “the force” required in order to be accepted by Black American peers. The first criteria dealt with the impact that racialization has on those who are phenotypically Black. Because of their blackness, Emeka and other participants felt they were required to socialize with others who were Black. Emeka elaborated further on this point when she said, “if your skin color was a certain way, you had to hang out with a certain group of people.” Black people hung out with Black people; Latin people hung out with Latin people; White people hung out with White people.” Emeka’s statement is corroborated by research that acknowledges the self-segregating patterns of peer groups that middle school and high school students observe and often feel forced to accept (Tatum, 1997).

The second criteria that participants agreed upon and actively discussed pertained to the need to prove their blackness to their peers. Participants discussed the need to prove blackness as “having to do a dance”, or having to “behave a certain way because you’re black”. Several mentioned how they worked ardently to present themselves in ways that were aligned with the Black culture represented by their black peer groups. Here, Abimbola described the particular behaviors she adopted to fit in more with her Black American peers at school in the following way:

“...I would try to keep up with the music and things like that ... I would try to keep up with BET so that when they were singing songs at recess, I knew the songs also. I learned how to braid at that point so I would cornrow girls’ hair,

just try to do things. Joined the step team and tried to do things to make myself fit in more...”

While Abimbola adopted particular behaviors to prove her Blackness, Emeka did it by “hanging out” with her Black peers so that she would be exposed to the cultural referents and expectations they practiced and placed upon those racialized as Black.

In the same discussion about “the force,” Ngozi identified blackness and learning blackness as “a weird, contradictory, hypocritical imposition where you’re supposed to be proud, but then you start dicing...” The pride that she and several other participants mentioned during the focus group came from their understanding of the Black political movement in the 1960’s and 1970’s that raised a new racial consciousness among Blacks, emphasizing political and economic independence from Whites, educational equity, pride in natural black beauty among other issues. However the “dicing” Ngozi spoke about refers to the contradictions and tensions within the Black community, particularly as they related to skin color, behavioral expectations, academic performance, and African identification. For example, she explained, “...if you’re too black, you’re too physically black, it’s a problem. If you’re too light, it’s a different kind of problem.” Ngozi captures how tensions surrounding skin color and color preference persist in the black community despite the black cultural politics that champion African features. This is one example of the complex and contradictory expectations surrounding blackness that left many participants confused and constrained in their efforts to construct their racial identities.

While several participants focused on the social imposition by others to “fit in”, others discussed the more internal desire to belong and to be accepted by their peers. Many discussed longing for the shelter of a group that resembled them and shared cultural commonalities but often worried about being rejected by other Blacks

who had already branded them as an outsider and not black enough. Dayo, for instance, whose primary peer group was composed of Whites talked about possible rejection in the following interchange with the interviewer:

Dayo: ... I knew that I wasn't one of the Black Americans.... but then it was like I wasn't exactly happy with the [white] people I was around, because I didn't quite feel accepted, and I didn't quite feel accepted with the black Americans either. I just didn't feel like I belonged anywhere, so I saw the Black Americans and I just didn't quite feel like I belonged with them. That's it. I wanted to.

Interviewer: Why did you want to?

Dayo: ...I think there was something missing probably with being around the white kids all the time, and I just had a yearning just to be accepted with them. I wanted to be accepted with them.

Dayo experienced the same feelings of not belonging with both Whites and Blacks but mentioned that, despite his discomfort, he had a strong desire to be accepted, particularly by his Black peer group.

Though feelings of racial obligation existed for many of the participants, several expressed feeling “different” during interactions with their peers. The “difference” that participants discussed was not only seen by them, but was also acknowledged by others. Kunle explained, “...we're just different. I don't know how to explain it. People can tell in some cases, we just didn't fit in.” Moreover, their peers used this difference as evidence that they were not black enough. Kunle and other participants offered a variety of reasons as to why they felt different within their peer groups. However, consistent were themes related to their use of standard English, cultural differences, and social class.

Standard English Discourse. One of the major behaviors that academics cite as a characteristic of “acting white” is the use of Standard English (Carter, 1999; Fordham



Emeka: I just didn't – I just wanted – I didn't want them to be like, "Oh, she's a White girl.

Interviewer: Why would they say you were a White girl?

Emeka: Because I just – I – I didn't speak "slang" enough. I didn't speak – I just never had that tone or voice or that way of talking. I was always more proper. I didn't really say, "ain't," because that's not what I learned at home. I don't say, "ain't," I didn't say, "Got no," or double negatives. I didn't speak like that.

For Emeka, her sense of identity and sense of belonging was defined by her involvement with and acceptance by her Black American peer group and she learned that if she spoke, she would be seen as different and risked being excluded by the group. Thus, she felt that self-silencing was the only way to maintain her relationship with her peers.

Culture, Class, and Blackness. For many participants, part of feeling not black enough was due to the cultural differences between themselves and their peers. Emeka summed it up this way: "I just didn't fit in. Just because of my culture, I didn't fit in." The feelings of difference came from how they were raised, the cultural practices and foods in their homes, their parents' strictness and behaviors in public settings, and the academic and behavioral expectations that were imposed on them. Discussing difference, several participants talked about how the cultural behaviors that they observed within their peer groups in school ran counter to how they were taught to behave at home in terms of addressing adults, dress, speech, behavior, academic orientation among other things. Kunle explained:

The African kids get it the worst. Because, you gotta understand, the kids spend time at home. At home, their parents are telling them, "Oh, African kids are respectful to their parents and teachers. African kids eat jollof rice and can eat it at school, African kids wear wrappers and sandals to school. They can speak Gokana [a Nigerian language]. They're different, duh-duh-duh." So the

kid is gonna feel like he has to go to the school and put that out there, and he's only doing what his parents taught him to do, you know what I mean?

According to Kunle and several other participants, “putting it out there”, or displaying cultural behaviors, became a problem with their peers who were able to trace aspects of foreignness (accent, dress, names, clothes, mannerisms, taste, speech), which they often used to frame them as “not being black enough”.

Feelings of difference also occurred during interactions where shared cultural experiences and ways of being were highlighted in the peer group. Emeka, for instance, shared that she often felt like she could not identify with her peers' experiences, saying, “... like my group of friends that I hung out with, as African Americans they identify with each other. But when it came to me, I was fundamentally different...”. She went on to explain that she could not relate to her African American peers particularly when they behaved in ways she saw as being stereotypic, such as being loud and argumentative. She said, “it was like in the group, I mean, black girls were so black. You know, they were like really black....So, I was just like, I'm not. I can't compete”.

Likewise, Ngozi mentioned that her unfamiliarity with Black cultural references often made her feel like a cultural outsider during interactions with her peers. She said, “I've had moments where there have been very, very kind of highly black American contextual situations where when I was growing up, I didn't understand it. So, I would either pretend or I didn't say anything until I understand it.” The “black American contextual situations” that Ngozi referenced refers to the shared domestic and social experiences often discussed by her black American peers, which she often did not experience and did not understand. She went on to elaborate on her unfamiliarity with distinct cultural aspects among Blacks who have ties to the southern

part of the United States like, “ you know, I don’t know, things with grits, or collard greens, or hair in the kitchen.” Ngozi’s unfamiliarity with particular cultural aspects of her Black peers such as eating food traditionally eaten by Black Americans in the south or using hot pressing combs to straighten their hair, generally in the kitchen, often made her feel excluded from conversations and experiences that bonded her Black American peers together.

Although many participants described a cultural gulf that marked them as “different” and “not black enough” among their peers, class also impacted their racial identity and sense of belonging. For participants race and class were often conflated and issues that they perceived as class-based were also about blackness. These class dimensions came up for the participants around clothing, cars, homes, parental occupations. Remilekun explained, “I didn’t have – I didn’t wear the same things that other kids wore. ... I wasn’t in style, in fashion. I didn’t have the sneakers, I didn’t have the sweater tops that they had and things like that.” For many of the Nigerian respondents, their parents were unable to afford the brand name clothes or shoes that their peers wore. Over time, this causes participants to become very aware of class differences and to feel different from their American peers.

Participants responded to the visible class difference by regularly pleading with their parents for material goods. Although parents did sometimes succumb to their pleas and purchase popular clothes and shoes, participants explained that most of the time they were denied these items because of their parents’ limited income. Abimbola recounted her mother’s common response to her clothing requests, saying, “...every other time it was like, “You’re not serious. Money does not grow on trees.”

In addition to identifying income constraints, several participants discussed how their parents challenged their requests for popular clothing with a variety of responses, like emphasizing how they were different from American children, or comparing their own lives in Nigeria to their children's lives in the U.S. As Kunle recounted, "my Dad thinks if you're not walking on your feet [barefoot], you're fine because, "When I was young, I wore slippers." In the experience of Kunle's father and many other African parents discussed in the study, school children wore uniforms, which, to various degrees, masked economic differences between students. Therefore, they did not have a frame of reference for the social importance of clothing in peer groups in the United States; whereas, Black American parents, even those in poverty (perhaps those in poverty even more so) more likely understood the social significance of wearing the "right" clothing and were willing to purchase popular clothes for their children to avoid teasing by their peers.

According to all participants, a common response from parents when denying them clothing items was to emphasize that material gains come with academic success. This often left many of the participants frustrated because they felt they "worked hard" academically, as their parents requested, but saw no immediate material reward. On the contrary, they saw their peers, who they saw as not striving for academic success, in possession of these items that they longed for. For example, Adesina recalled:

...there are plenty of times in middle school and high school where I would get frustrated and mad because even though my parents were like, "Hard work, hard work," there would be plenty of times where I didn't have the nicest clothes – my hair wasn't done the way I wanted it. I didn't have the right shoes and I'm like, "You say work, work, work, but I'm working hard and you can't even get me some jeans that I want," and so I see other people looking the way I want to look and I'm like, "They're not doing what they're supposed

to do, but they're looking great. They're getting all of the attention. I want to be like that...

Likewise, Kunle recounted,

... I would go to school and I would see a kid that came fresh home, fresh back to school off of suspension and this kid would have the new sneakers, all the nice clothes, all the jewelry and everything like that. I was getting good grades, and I didn't understand why I was wearing my brother and sister's clothes. That pissed me off. Then my dad would tell me, "Do you want a gift? This is what you're supposed to do." But I'm like "Still, can I get some kudos?" That didn't help because that really made me mad. In my head, I would think, "You have money to send home, but you don't have money to buy me a new pair of sneakers when I need it because I had these sneakers for 2 years.

According to Adesina and Kunle, their parents' emphasis on hard work without providing them with the material goods they felt they deserved, frustrated them and contributed to their feeling different within their peer group. A point worth mentioning is that while many American parents may have understood the value placed on clothing among youth and, in response, purchased items for their children, the participants felt that their African parents did not. The most salient reasons mentioned were financial constraints, parents' lack of understanding about the social significance of clothing, and spending priorities, which often included sending money to Nigeria, as Kunle discussed. For many of the participants, their parents' reluctance to buy name-brand clothes not only distanced them from their peers, but it also served as yet another aspect that made them "not black enough" among their American peers and was a source of divisiveness and ridicule that made many participants feel inadequate and different.

Although several participants were unable to "learn and perform blackness" as dictated by their peers, some participants managed to do this and, as a result, they gained acceptance among their black peers during the middle and high school years.

Five of the eleven participants, Abimbola, Adesina, Femi, Ngozi, Uzoma, who were able to fit in, attributed their success to a variety of factors, including their ability to identify with the social and cultural experiences of their black peers (e.g. racial discrimination, music, food) and finding a “genuine” peer group that was understanding of and accepting of their cultural background and, when necessary, protected them. As Adesina explained,

So the, the children that I grew up or peers I grew up with started from elementary school. If there were other people that would tease me, they would protect me. And so I gained a sense of like security within my – that was my security blanket, basically. There were non-African kids that would protect the African kid. So that’s what I gained. I gained a sense of like loyalty with them.

Several participants also mentioned that their ability to “code switch” or imitate the language patterns and social behaviors of their peers in particular social contexts helped them to gain acceptance. For instance Ngozi said, when you’re in a certain environment, you speak a certain way.” ....I could manipulate – I didn’t go home and talk like that. But, I could roll my neck with the best of them and do that.” Ngozi’s comment is significant for two primary reasons. First, it highlights the fact that she had to learn to change her language and her communication styles in various contexts in order to fit in with her peer group. She learned to “roll her neck”, which is a common gestural movement generally used by Black girls to emphasize a point or demonstrate defiance. According to Ngozi, learning these “Black” speech patterns and behaviors helped her to be viewed as “authentically Black” by her Black American peers. Second, Ngozi realized that displaying these speech patterns and behaviors at home was not acceptable or desirable.

Likewise, in the following interview excerpt, Abimbola highlighted how adopting her peers’ language patterns helped her to adapt to her Black peer group.

Abimbola ...once I got to middle school I think I probably settled more into my blackness.  
Interviewer: What does that mean?  
Abimbola: Black as in African-Americaness. I don't think I sounded as white any longer. ...

For Abimbola, “settling more into [her] blackness” required learning how not to sound white, and instead learning the communication patterns of her peers in order to feel more accepted.

### Summary

It is important to note that for the majority of the participants, learning blackness was not a simple process, nor was it necessarily desired by all the participants. The process of learning blackness was different for each individual participant, depending on their personality, their situation, their way of wanting to deal with the pressure of the peer group, and the information that they receive from their parent.

Parents and peers had perspectives of what it meant to be black. African-born parents combined race, ethnicity and nationality into one concept, which was to be dealt with simultaneously. Nonetheless, over time some immigrant parents eventually came to understand these concepts as separate socially constructed entities. In contrast, Black American peers defined blackness based solely on skin-color. Membership is involuntary and cannot be negotiated. Hence communication patterns using standard English is considered a betrayal to the group racial identity. Nonetheless this perspective of involuntary group membership confounds issues of culture, class, and blackness.

## Chapter 6: Challenges in Constructing and Managing an “Authentic” Nigerian Identity

The previous chapter focused on the process by which participants learned and experienced their blackness. They negotiated from within dominant understandings of blackness as dictated primarily by their parents and Black American peer groups. While all of the participants shared their experiences and challenges with their racial identity and understandings of blackness, in particular, another common subject amongst them was the complexity of constructing and presenting an “authentic” Nigerian identity among non-Africans and Africans. In Chapter 5, I highlight the varying ways that the participants’ Nigerian identity was challenged, their reactions to such challenges, and the subsequent impact those challenges had on their personal self-identification in various social contexts. The chapter explores and identifies the factors that influenced how participants viewed their Nigerian identity in light of others’ perceptions, expectations, and assumptions of what it means “to be” and “look like” a Nigerian. Findings are organized around the major themes that emerged in respondents’ interviews about their Nigerian identity experiences during interactions with non-African and African communities.

### (Re)constructing a Nigerian Identity: The College Context

Many participants shared that over time they wanted stronger connections to their Nigerian heritage. This is not surprising considering that adolescence is a time of identity exploration and development. Several participants lamented that as they grew older, they had fewer interactions with Nigerians outside of their family unit. They

attributed this to a variety of reasons including their parents' busy work schedules, which often limited access to transportation, their own academic schedules, and the lack of a strong Nigerian presence in their neighborhoods. The majority of the participants grew up in neighborhoods and attended schools with few or no Nigerians. Resultantly, participants were not able to form their own Nigerian peer groups or have access to other Nigerians outside of their families.

For many participants, their processes of identity adaptation and formation changed based on their social contexts. For example, once they moved beyond high school into college, they were faced with new options, peer groups, awarenesses, interests, and interactions and they began to explore and (re)construct their ethnic identities.

Ama, for instance, who in her early schooling years had faced colorism and xenophobia towards her as African, experienced her college life as an opportunity to embrace her culture and come to terms with her identity. She said, "...I think college is where I really grew up, to love myself. Other people didn't treat me differently because who I was, who I am, and ...I've learned to embrace my culture in college. She went on to explain that, in the college environment, she found other students with similar experiences, particularly in organizations that provided opportunities and spaces for students to affirm their identities. She explained it as follows:

... there was clubs, specifically for African students.... in these clubs they had students like me. They were born here, but their parents were African, so I found more students like that when I went to college.

Finding other African immigrant students with similar experiences and backgrounds was particularly significant for Ama as through this experience she shared that she stopped bleaching her skin:

I actually stopped the bleaching when I got to undergrad. I just stopped...I think I just needed to see other people like me. And also we can talk about our experiences because they have experiences, too. The same people that were in the same boat that I was in.

Likewise, Uzoma and Bunmi expressed their excitement in attending college specifically because it afforded them the opportunity to interact with Africans—an opportunity that they rarely had previously in their neighborhoods and schools. During her interview Uzoma explained:

Uzoma: I was kinda excited because I came from an all Black high school ... I was really interested in coming and seeing how African students here were because I thought I had the opportunity to interact with African students because, believe it or not, there were not that many African students at my school.

Likewise, Bunmi expressed her anticipation in being around more Nigerians:

Bunmi: ...the context in which I was coming from there was maybe like five Nigerian families. Coming here, coming to a place again where I knew that there was a lot of Africans and finally I'd be able to engage in a larger population of Nigerians.

Corroborating existing research, nine out of the eleven participants viewed their college life as an opportunity to interact with fellow co-ethnics and embrace their ethnic heritage (Sidel, 1994), which they had hidden, negated, ignored, or denied for so long. Many participants discussed that their interest in making connections with co-ethnics and reinforcing their ethnic identity as Nigerians led them to join organizations like the African Student Association on their campus. Joining any organization can initially be difficult due to unfamiliarity with other members and challenges in penetrating established networks and many of the participants discussed an extra layer of complexity in their interactions with other African students.

For many participants, the excitement to experience a deeper exploration of their Nigerian culture was diminished by the lack of acceptance that they encountered from many of their African peers. In the college setting, participants found that there was a new mix of Nigerian students. Some, like the research participants, had spent the majority of their developmental years in the U.S. and others had grown up in strong Nigerian communities in the U.S. or were international students with very recent ties to Nigeria. The latter two groups demonstrated and emphasized strong, traditional Nigerian identity and behaviors, such as possessing an accent, displaying particular mannerisms, fluency in their native language among other identifiers. Several participants discussed that during interactions with these particular groups the authenticity of their Africanness and Nigerianness was questioned.

Therefore unsurprisingly, respondents repeatedly described Nigerian identity as problematic to manage. One participant said it this way, “I never was enough of anything.” Most often, these situations involved a perception that they did not fit the stereotypical depiction of Africans in the U.S.; they seen as not fitting the general criteria of what an African looks like and/or as attempting to present themselves with an identity that was not Nigerian. In such social situations participants felt judged around their ethnic and cultural identities as it related to their Africanness and they found the authenticity of their Nigerianess questioned by non-Africans and Africans alike.

#### “You don’t look African”: The Significance of Appearance

A dominant theme within the majority of the interviews was the role that the participants’ physical appearance played in how they were identified by others. Participants noted that they were often told by Africans and non-Africans alike that

they “did not look African” and discussed that when people found out they were African, they were often not believed. For instance, Ama and Kunle shared a reaction they often received from her peers once they learned of their African background:

Ama: I’ve noticed that in high school, like “No way! You’re not African, “ or if I didn’t say anything, my best friend at that time, who was Caribbean, she’ll tell people, “She’s African,” and they’ll approach me like, “You’re African, for real?”

Kunle: Sometimes my own friends would say stuff like that to me. Like, “Yo, you cannot really be African.... Like even now, people tell me, “Oh, you don’t look African.” Like, I didn’t know Africans were supposed to look a certain way...

Participants gave a variety of reasons why they believed others did not view them as African including, lack of accent, styles of dress, attractiveness, light skin and eye color, and mannerisms. However, the consensus among research participants was that they believed that their peers and others did not view them as fitting the stereotypical views of Africans projected in the media and held by those who had had limited interactions with Africans. Remilekun explained it best when she said:

I think it's because their stereotypes are, you know, kind of thrown to the way-side of what a typical African is like. Like, okay, I don't have a strong accent. Okay, maybe some Africans had a smell to them, but I don't particularly have a smell to me, you know....So, there's just so many people that are shocked when they find out. You know, or may be because, you know, I don't dress African. Or, I'm not loud, or, you know, I don't speak Broken English, or it just – I basically think it's because it goes against all your stereotype.

Though participants often heard that they were not viewed as African by non-Africans, they also discussed hearing the same from Africans. Bunmi and Ngozi offered explanation for why they and other participants are often not viewed as African by other Africans. Ngozi said, “..it’s been my hair, it’s been the way that I dress...” Likewise, Bunmi explained others’ reactions to her appearance, saying

“...when I go out, I hear, ‘You don’t look Nigerian.’ So, it’s always like this battle, you know, ‘You look Afro-centric.’ This is what I get a lot that I look Afrocentric.”

Afrocentric look that Bunmi identified includes wearing natural hairstyles and large accessories (e.g. earrings and bracelets). She and other participants, namely Ngozi and Ama who also dressed similarly, were also told that they did not look Nigerian by other Africans. Bunmi, Ama, and Ngozi had physical appearances that may be perceived as conflicting with traditional Nigerian typification, particularly as it relates to the combination of hairstyles and dress. In regard to hairstyles, all three women wore natural hairstyles. Bunmi wore her hair in a medium cut afro that is generally worn by school aged Nigerian girls and not by young marriage-aged women. Ngozi and Ama, on the other hand, wore their hair in dreadlocks. Dreadlocks in Nigerian culture, generally signify rascality and is often associated with disrespect, apathy, drug use, unintelligence, a lack of femininity, and poverty. As such, it is uncommon to see Nigerians with dreadlocks. Although the associations attached to short afros and dreadlocks are evolving and becoming more acceptable with the younger generation, older Nigerians generally remain judgmental towards and disapprove of both hairstyles.

Just as hairstyle has specific importance to one’s ethnic authenticity, dress styles are also significant. Nigerians, in general, are status conscious and clothing, as a sign of status in the Nigerian dress culture, functions as not only a mark of identity, but also provides indication to a person’s age, gender, marital status, place of origin, and class status. As such, many Nigerians are very particular in their dress habits and physical appearance and place a high value on their clothing. For Ngozi and Bunmi, their dress styles were very casual and informal, and they generally wore jeans,

oversized shirts and large earrings. Similarly, Kunle whose dress style often represented a young urban style explained that he was often questioned on his Nigerianness based on his dress style. He said,

Matter of fact, one asked me, “If you’re Nigerian, why do you wear earrings?” I said, “The same reason your son wears it, but takes it off when he comes home.” You know, and that was the end of that, you know, because again, what I’m wearing or how I look like doesn’t depict who I am, you know what I mean? Again, just because I don’t wear a wrapper everywhere, doesn’t mean I’m not Nigerian.

In this quote, Kunle’s talks about his clothing as being inconsistent with what others perceived to be authentic Nigerian presentation and dress, which forced him to defend his claim of being Nigerian. Kunle also captures the complexity of identity and recognizes the limitations of using clothing or outer appearances to locate a person’s background and experiences. According to him, his Nigerian identity is not strictly tied to how he looks or what he wears. Kunle’s and other participants’ dress styles may have been comfortable and acceptable for them in their predominant social settings and during interactions with American peers. However, many participants found that it was not always accepted in predominately Nigerian settings and in fact, was often used against them to question their claims to Nigerianness. As such, those participants who were perceived to have a more Afrocentric appearance or dressed in a more relaxed, casual way (jeans, oversized shirts) were more likely to be associated with traits stereotypic of Black Americans and told that they did not “look Nigerian”.

#### Where Are You From?

As societies continue to globalize, individuals from all corners of the world are finding a common home in the United States. A common experience of immigrants, regardless of their location of origin, is contending with the question, ‘Where are you

from?’ This simple question is becoming more fraught and difficult to answer, particularly with the children of immigrants, with the continuous increase of immigrants of color to the United States. This question, while it may seem to be an innocuous inquiry into one’s background, is, for many, loaded with ambiguity and presupposition on the part of the questioner and the respondent.

For first generation immigrants the question may be easier to answer as they come with physical, linguistic, religious and cultural characteristics and experiences from their native home. In addition, first generation immigrants are more likely to interpret and respond to the question in a more straightforward answer. However, having spent more time in their host country, it may become a cumbersome question, as it is a reminder that you are not a “true” member of your host society. For the children of immigrant families who spend a significant amount of their developmental years in the United States, answering the question, ‘Where are you from’ can also be challenging.

For the participants in this study, responding to this question often proved to be a thorny and complex process that contextually-determined and highly dependent on who was asking the question. As Bunmi explained, “You know, usually I try to figure out why somebody's asking me where I'm from.” Adesina echoed this when she said, “It depends on the intention. You can tell someone’s intention, if they’re trying to berate you or if they just are curious.” As discussed previously, participants had multiple experiences where their identities were challenged by others. As such the process of answering questions about their background could be trying. Abimbola demonstrated the complexity in answering such questions in this exchange:

Interviewer:                   How do you answer the question, “Where are you from?”

Abimbola: That's a pretty difficult question for me to answer most of the time because it depends on what the person means or who the person is, where they're asking me the question. Because, you know, it could mean, like, "Where are you from in America?" or like, "Where are you really (stressed) from?" I actually had someone on the Metro last week ask me where I was ... and then she was like, "Oh, where are you from because you look like you're a Caribbean." And then I was, like, "Bowie." And then she was, like, "No, where -?" And I was, like, "Oh, oh, Nigeria." And she's, like, "Okay, I didn't think you were fully American.

Several participants also mentioned that they feel like they will be judged based on their answer to questions about where they are from. As such, they find themselves gauging the person's intent before answering. Bunmi offered her experiences:

I try to gauge why they're asking me. So, does it seem like they're asking me because of my accent? Does it seem like they're asking me cause of my name? Does it seem like they're asking me just generally to have a stronger understanding of my background? So, if it's like the former, my accent, then I'll say, "Oh, I grew up in Massachusetts." If it's my name, then I definitely say, "I'm Nigerian." But, I kind of qualify that by saying that I was raised here. And, of course, it depends also on who's asking me, and kind of what are the implications of my response, too. So, how are they gonna form a view of me depending on how I respond to them. I may try to gauge that. That's a lot of gauging. And, then, you know, lastly if it seems like they just wanna get to know my cultural background a little bit more, then I'll say, you know, "I'm Nigerian, but I was raised here.

So, I try to stick with, "I'm Nigerian," but then if it's a Nigerian who's asking me, then, of course, it's a whole nother set of gauges that I have to figure. Again, like, are they kind of testing me to see how Nigerian I feel? Are they trying to figure out, you know, if I'm going to claim my heritage, or are they trying to convince me that I'm not Nigerian, in fact? I mean, I try to gauge all of that depending on how they ask me the question.

Participants learned that answering questions relating to their background was complicated due to the assumptions people make about them because of their physical and behavioral characteristics. For instance, participants explained that when they claimed Nigeria as their native land, they found that there were often challenged for two major reasons. The first pertained to their American accent. The presence of

accent or a particular sounding accent is often used to locate an individual's background. The participants' lack of an African accent often required more clarification or brought about more questions from the questioner. Ama described a experience mentioned by all of the participants when they were asked about their backgrounds and responded with Nigeria, "They say, 'You don't look like you're from here. Where you from?' or 'What's your background?' I'll say, 'I'm Nigerian.'" They'll say, 'Oh, you don't have an accent.' "Because I wasn't born in Nigeria, I was born here."

Second, in claiming a Nigerian identity, several participants experienced people accusing them of being divisive and separating themselves from Americans and Black Americans, in particular. The issue of first generation black immigrants making ethnic distinctions from the native Black population has been raised by other researchers who argue that they do so in order to protect themselves from the negative perceptions and treatment of Black Americans (Vickerman, 1999; Waters, 1999). Several participants admitted to highlighting their Nigerian roots at times to distance themselves from the negative associations with Black Americans. However, the majority of the time, it originated from pride in their homeland, pride in having a place to call home, and their Nigerian cultural orientation. In addition, several participants mentioned that they claimed a Nigeria background because they often felt like they were not accepted by U.S. society. Bunmi captured this experience when she said, "I feel like I don't identify as an American because I'm not accepted as an American, that's my reason..." Kunle further elaborated on Bunmi's lack of acceptance when he said:

Like, African-Americans, everybody has shown me, like, this is not my home, you know what I mean? No matter how much I do try to assimilate, they show

me like, this is, I'm not welcomed here. So, I mean, you know, it's not my home, it's not my place.

As demonstrated in these quotes, Kunle and Bunmi felt that their attempts to claim a Black American identity had been challenged, like their legitimacy as Black. As such, Nigerian was the identity, with which they most identified and, therefore, claimed. Ngozi described it this way:

...it means being oriented towards a certain culture, understanding it from to, some degree, an insider's point of view...My orientation is not one that is American, and leaving the home and having that idea that, "No. I'm not an American," reinforced by the fact that, like I said, there are a lot of things that I didn't grow up with that are Black American cultural traditions. So, then, it's like, "Yes. Okay. This is where I'm from, and this is where you're from. Your heritage is that of an American who is Black, and mine is that of an African in this country, so now—who's living in this country....I'm not saying that to separate myself, but it is a way that people will know that I have a different kind of history.

As seen in this quote, Ngozi explained that highlighting her Nigerian background was an attempt to acknowledge her family's history and immigrant background and her individual cultural orientation and simply to emphasize that being Nigerian was an authentic part of her identity that she wanted acknowledged.

### *Testing of Identity*

During the individual interviews and focus group session, nine of the eleven participants discussed that they were directly told by other co-ethnics that they "were not Nigerian", "not really African" or "not Nigerian enough". This accusation often occurred during initial interactions where participants were introduced to another Nigerian. Participants highlighted a list of characteristics that others used to denounce their Nigerian identity included having friendships with Black Americans, not wearing traditional African attire, and having Afrocentric characteristics and an American accent.

Participants further discussed that during interactions with Nigerians they often encountered “a test” that was imposed on them to prove their Nigerian identity. Pyke and Dang (2003) explain that *intraethnic othering* occurs within co-ethnic groups, when individuals who are unable to successfully perform their ethnic identities are subjected to ridicule and isolation. For the participants in this study, their ability to “pass or fail” the test determined whether the authenticity of their Nigerianness was accepted or denied by their Nigerian counterparts. Adesina explained, “It’s like they have these qualifications set for you and it’s like if you don’t meet these qualifications, they look down on you”. Abimbola agreed, saying, “You know, like they’ll just say something to make me basically in some way prove that I really am from Nigeria.”

Bunmi shared an example of how she was tested by a Nigerian peer:

...when I started meeting people, they were constantly questioning whether I was Nigerian and almost testing me... It was the craziest experience. I just remember this one girl and she just – she kept – she could not understand that I was Nigerian, and I was telling her my name. She was like, ‘Well, where’s your family from?’ And, I was like, “The East.” And, then she asked me what state and then she asked me what town, and then she asked me village. And, when I was able to name all of those things, she kind of relented, but she never apologized nor did she explain to me why it was so difficult to believe that I was Nigerian.

This test, as Bunmi illustrated, can include a detailed list of questions that others use to determine what they see ones “authentic” Africanness. In addition to details about family residence in Nigeria, participants spoke about other questions pertaining to the number of times they had visited Nigeria, their familiarity with Nigerian culture, traditions and experiences (e.g. boarding schools) and their place of birth and ethnic language ability.

For many participants, the questioning and “testing” of the authenticity of their Nigerianness resulted in an internalized sense of not being authentically Nigerian.

Many questioned their Nigerian identity particularly as it related to the expectations placed on them by fellow Nigerians.

Bunmi: I mean, again it just - it's kind of hurtful, cause it's kind of two-fold. So, one hand it's, "Why don't they believe me?" And, on the other hand it's kind of like, "Well, maybe I'm wrong." And, so maybe I'm not Nigerian, maybe I'm not who I think I am. So, it made me question a lot....

Uzoma: So when you have other African students saying, "Well, you're not really Nigerian," it's like, "Okay, I'm not really Nigerian then. I guess I'll just go over and be a Black student." It was kind of like the one final straw that made me disassociate myself completely with all things Nigerian. But whereas the Black Student Union was more open ... didn't care if you were Black, Caribbean, Nigerian or whatever. You were Black...

Fear of being questioned about or denied their Nigerian identity led a number of participants to intentionally avoid Africans in their school. As Bunmi articulated, "it just made me kind of weary of it, and also weary of the Africans on campus" and as Uzoma demonstrated above, other participants decided to join organizations that they found to be more inclusive and non-judgmental.

For all of the participants, not being considered African enough was more prevalent in their adult years, particularly in their college years and during their interactions with other Africans. While they often heard and, to some degree, understood identity questioning from non-Africans, they found it particularly painful coming from their African counterparts. They experienced a variety of emotions when their Nigerian identity was contested including frustration, hurt, anger, loneliness, annoyance, shame, rejection, and guilt. Adesina said, "It's ... hurtful because it's like they're trying to take away something that you believe is yours."

Many of the participants had come to love their identity as Nigerian, which they were often forced to explain or defend in social and academic contexts. One

participant stated, “I suffered because I was African and now you’re telling me that I’m not?” All of the participants had been, to various degrees, physically attacked, verbally harassed, mischaracterized, or marginalized as a result of their African heritage. As such, criticism and rejection from the African people with whom they culturally identified and had regularly defended caused significant pain.

For some, college presented an opportunity to finally come to terms with and explore their Nigerian identity. To be denied the opportunity to do so was emotionally damaging. As Dayo explained, “It definitely did hurt, because I’m here, you know, I want to be Nigerian. I want to be accepted. And you keep on drawing this distinction between us.” Estrangement and rejection from Nigerian and African peers caused several participants to experience a sense of alienation that led them to question their place in the world. It was one thing to be denied by people with whom you have different historical and cultural experiences, but it was another to be denied membership among those with whom you identify. As such, for another African to indirectly question the authenticity of their Nigerianness or blatantly deny them of their African identity was very painful to participants.

#### Identifying the Contextually Based Identity Constructions of Nigerian Youth

Although all of the participants discussed at length the challenges they had in managing their Nigerian identities, the interviews revealed that for ten of the eleven participants, their self-identification as Nigerian was not entirely tied to the requirements and expectations of others. But rather, their claim to Nigerian identity was based on their Nigerian parentage, their domestic training as Nigerians, their transnational relationships with family members in Nigeria, the maintenance of

Nigerian cultural traditions in their adult life (e.g. the types of food they ate), and their ability to speak or understand their native language among others things.

In response to a question like “How do you identify yourself?” participants said there were a number of variables that determined how they identified themselves including the social context and who was asking the question and why (curiosity or to berate). This finding parallels Laguerre’s (1998) research on Haitian immigrant youth which argues, “instead of seeing the youngsters as having one identity, it is more accurate to see them as performing the identity that is most suitable to the situation they happen to be in” (p. 195). As such, the majority of the participants did not offer a clear, concise identity label, but rather identified identities that were contextual and highly fluid as Ama described:

I would say I’m Nigerian, but I’ve also noticed that depending who I’m talking to – let’s say if I’m among a lot of Nigerians, I think sometimes I get a little bit intimidated, if I’m among a lot of Nigerians, I’ll say my parents are Nigerian, but I won’t say that I’m Nigerian. But if I’m around people that I know that – if it’s just a little bit of Nigerians around, and more people that are not Nigerian, I will say I’m Nigerian. Just fully, I’m Nigerian. But if it’s a whole bunch – because I’m just afraid of the reaction that I’m going to get.

In this quote, Ama acknowledges a degree of Nigerianness that she cannot claim because her life experiences have been primarily in the United States. This is particularly relevant in the presence of other Nigerians who may question or criticize her claim as Nigerian. As such, she is cautious in talking about her background and in some cases, gives responses designed to avoid further questioning of her identity, specifically as it relates to her claim as being Nigerian. However, in more diverse settings where only a few Nigerians are present, she feels more confident in fully claiming Nigerian identity because she feels that others who have limited or no

experiences with Nigerian culture are less likely to challenge her claim of being Nigerian.

In describing herself, Ngozi offered a list of labels that she believed suited her in various social contexts. She explained:

Honestly, I've never been particular – Black, African American, Nigerian American, African – I've felt that all of them describe me accurately in some capacity, and I use them interchangeably. Sometimes I use them at the same time, so it really depends on the context, I think. If I'm around African Americans and I'm speaking specifically about African issues, I will make the distinction. If I'm around White people and I'm talkin' about issues that I think pertain to all Black people or what Blackness is, I will talk about myself as a Black person. So, the way identity works, I guess, some matter more depending on the context.

In this quote, Ngozi explained that, for her, choosing a particular label and enacting a particular identity is dependent on who the individual with whom she is conversing is and the nature of the discussion. She initially explained that she identified with multiple labels which she considered part of her identity in various ways. However, she found that she asserts a particular identity when the context of the conversation requires it. For instance, Ngozi explained that she enacts a more African identity when she is in a predominately Black American context, discussing African topics. In these situations, her experiences of and about Africans come into play and she asserts her identity as an African to reinforce the fact that she, as a person of recent African descent, can speak on the topic that may not be possible by those without the recent history or experiences.

Furthermore, at times she found it necessary to highlight the differences between Africans and Black Americans in terms of traditions, cultural values and experiences in the U.S., particularly when there is an assumption that the two groups' experiences in the U.S. are similar. However, when she is around Whites, her

discussion may be more focused on her experiences as a Black person in the United States, which may allow her to share her experiences concerning race relations and racial discrimination.

Dayo had a similar perspective illustrated as he talked about his personal identification in this way:

That's a hard question...I would say that I'm a mixture of different things. I would probably say I'm a Nigerian American. I think both of those words. I'm American. I can't run from that fact. I'm an American, but I'm also – I don't want to – I want to keep the Nigerian side of me, too. I've been influenced by African-American culture in this country. I've been influenced by white culture in this country, been influenced by Nigerian culture.

Dayo's response parallels other participants in the study who acknowledged that their experiences in the U.S. have had a significant impact on how they see themselves. He specifically identified three particular groups that have influenced how he sees and identifies himself, African American, White and Nigerian. Likewise, Bunmi labels herself as a "hybrid" due to the various influences that have impacted her identity:

I am a hybrid of sorts. And, I don't know why it's so difficult. Even now, it's kind of difficult to consider myself a hybrid. Maybe because there's no clear term for me, or it's such a fluid kind of identity, but, you know, I have to embrace it and accept it.

While Bunmi acknowledged she had been influenced by different cultures, she was bothered by the unstableness of her identity. As a child, her parents raised her as a Nigerian child and her Nigerian identity was reinforced by others who knew her family. However, as an adult she came to realize that she is also American, as she was primarily raised in the U.S. Oftentimes, that reality has been impressed upon her by Nigerians who contest her background and Americans who do not view her as a typical Nigerian.

Some participants identified themselves by redefining traditional terms. For instance, when asked how he identifies himself, Femi responded by saying:

My parents were born in Nigeria and they had me here. So I'd say I'm an authentic African-American whereas other African Americans, their ancestors were born in Africa and then slavery and they end up being born.

By identifying as an “authentic African-American,” Femi draws attention to current debates about who can claim particular identity labels. The debate on the umbrella term ‘African American’ is important as it disrupts the monolithic portrayals of the experiences of Black peoples in the U.S. The term African American is generally understood as a term to describe Americans who are direct descendants of African slaves. However, the term and its meaning has been challenged by Black Americans, African immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for a significant number of years, as well as the children of African immigrants who are raised in the U.S. (Swarns, 2004).

Taking a slightly different stance on his identity, Kunle responded to the question this way, “I identify myself as an African who can do African-American things.” In this response, Kunle alludes to his ability to “fit in” with African Americans. Culturally, Kunle saw himself as African, but he was able to present himself in a ways that allowed him to be accepted or “pass” as African American because of his socialization by African Americans.

### Summary

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate how participants constructed a sense of ethnic identity within the limiting constructs of stereotypes and expectations held by mainstream society and co-ethnic members. In response, participants demonstrated that their identities were based on many conflicting forces that required

them to be aware of their surroundings and able to modify their identities. As a result, they demonstrated a multilayered consciousness of their identity and of the different contexts in which they existed.

## Chapter 7: Conclusions & Recommendations

This research used qualitative methodology to explore some of the factors that impacted the racial and ethnic identity constructions and negotiations of 11 one-point-five and second generation Nigerian immigrants. The results from this data are based on questionnaires, semi-structured individual interviews and a focus group interview. The four major questions guiding the research are: 1) How do one-point-five and second generation Nigerian college students describe and experience their interactions with Africans and non-Africans (peers, family, and school personnel)? 2) How do they describe and experience their processes of racial and ethnic identity development? 3) How do their interactions with Africans and non-Africans shape their racial and ethnic identity development? 4) How do they negotiate their racial and ethnic identities among Africans and non-Africans? This chapter is organized around these research questions after which I address the significance of the study findings and their implications for future immigration research, parenting, and school policies.

### **How do one-point-five and second generation Nigerian college students describe and experience their interactions with Africans and non-Africans (peers, family, and school personnel)?**

In sum, this question pertains to the interactions that the study participants had with Africans and non-Africans and addressed the nature of the relationships they had with parents, peers, and school personnel. This study found that the participants' interactions and relationships varied among and across these three groups. Participants described their interactions and relationships with their parents as markedly different from their American peers' relationship with their parents. Moreover, they described their interactions with "outsiders", such as peers and

teachers, as also challenging. Conflicting expectations from parents and outsiders often created a sense of uncertainty on the part of the participants and many participants discussed feeling unable to simultaneously meet the expectations of their African parents and their non-African counterparts.

Many participants' interactions with their parents revolved around their parents' desire to maintain and reinforce traditional Nigerian culture cultural norms. Students came to understand traditional Nigerian culture as respecting adults, close parental monitoring of their peer interactions, and constantly reminding them that they were not American. Consequently, their interactions in the home were markedly different from their interactions with others outside of the home context.

Although the participants' considered the interactions with their parents difficult to balance, they described their interactions with their peers and school personnel as more contentious. These interactions with non-Africans appeared to be highly influenced by the media's disparaging portrayals of Africa and Africans. A common theme discussed by all of the participants was the ways in which the western media's pattern of depicting Africa as an untamed jungle and Africans as savages, influenced the way others related and interacted with them. Participants felt that many non-African adults and youth internalized and drew upon the pervasive, negative stereotypes and images to characterize and relate to them, which often led many to feel ashamed of their African heritage.

Participants specifically highlighted their interactions with their Black American peers as the most challenging in that although they often sought relationships with this group, their Africanness often served as a point of contention. Participants, who in the eyes of their peers, displayed stereotypical Africanized

behaviors or possessed Africanized features, were subjected to teasing and stereotypes that reflected on the negative images projected by the media. According to participants, their Africanness often reinforced the negative images that their peers held of Africans, which in turn resulted in tensions between the groups.

Similarly, the participants described their interactions with their White teachers as shaped by their teachers' misconceptions about Africa and Africans. Most described feeling a sense of otherness during these interactions. This otherness was marked by a direct or indirect recognition of the participant's cultural difference, which they often felt was undervalued or considered inferior by their White teachers. Furthermore, when the topic of Africa came up, whether in class or during one-on-one discussions, participants felt that their African heritage was exoticized, and that there was no true affirmation, acknowledgement, or understanding of the richness and diversity of African life, traditions, customs, and foods.

**How do they describe and experience their processes of racial and ethnic identity development? How do their interactions with Africans and non-Africans shape their racial and ethnic identity development?**

The discussion for these two questions will be combined because of the causal relationship between the two concepts. Whereas, the second research question focuses on how the participants navigate their social interactions, the third research question explores how those interactions impacted their racial and ethnic identities.

A general consensus among participants was that their parents did not teach them how to deal with the stigmas, expectations, associations and stereotypes attached to being both Black and African in the United States. Participants felt like their parents did not inform them that they would have issues with both identities, nor did they teach them how to negotiate the racism, xenophobia, and teasing that often

accompanied being both Black and African. The overall results of this study showed that parents varied in the ability to teach their children about race and racism. Many participants agreed that because of their parents' African based upbringing, they lacked the personal experience to teach them about what it means to be Black in the United States. In other words, students felt ill-prepared to cope with what it means to be black in America.

While their Black American peers were able to take certain experiences for granted, participants had to adjust and learn the same things in a short time and by trial and error. The longer the parent had been in the U.S., the more experiential knowledge they could transfer to their children about race relations in the U.S. As a result, participants varied in their understanding about blackness in that some participants saw their skin color as inconsequential and were taught to take pride in their cultural heritage and individual development, while others were taught to believe that their skin color could potentially limit their progress.

For the participants, the process of becoming black in a racialized society was largely determined by their peer networks. Although, Black Americans easily identified the participants as Black, based on phenotypic characteristics, the question of ethnicity still lingered. Participants explained that their Black American peers tried to figure out the similarities in terms of experiences and ideologies. Due to the socialized beliefs about race in the U.S., there was an underlying assumption that because this person is black, they must and should have something in common. Among their Black American peers, the concept of a shared common race was commonly understood, however, the concept of ethnicity was not. In particular, African identity (e.g. Africanized behaviors), departed from their Black American

peer's understandings of the way Africans have been socialized to understand blackness. As such, participants experienced social distance from their peers who were unable to reconcile or fit their "Africanness" into their construction of blackness. Yet, participants' Africanness was inconsequential to many Black Americans as long as Africans identified as Black and were able to reject or, in many cases, hide their African identity.

White teachers and peers also contributed to participants' racial and ethnic identity development. Based on their phenotypic characteristics, participants were racialized as Black; however, upon interacting and learning of their African backgrounds, many were treated differently by their white teachers and peers. Participants discussed this treatment in terms of being exoticized, being viewed as the token black, and/or serving as the African ambassador in the classroom. In each of these situations, participants felt like their identities were being showcased and that they were responsible for projecting a positive image of each identity. While participants varied in their reactions to the myriad responses of their white peers and teachers concerning their Black and African identities, they expressed that their reactions depended on the individual, their understanding of intent of the individual in the interactions, the audience witnessing the interactions, among other factors.

With respect to their interactions with their peers and teachers, participants felt ethnically conspicuous, and became hyper aware of their African identity. For some participants, the focus on their ethnic identity was positive, particularly when the situation allowed for more positive perspectives on Africans and African life to come to the forefront of conversations. For others, however, the focus on their

African identity was perceived as negative particularly when it was used in a divisive way, particularly in relation with their Black American peers.

In addition to Whites acknowledging and reacting to the participants' African differences, there was a need of "trying to figure out the type of other you are." In many cases, the "other" referred to discerning what type of "black" the participants embodied. To many White teachers, blackness meant defiance in the classroom, academic failure, and athleticism. However, because of many participants' placement in advanced courses, academic performance and good behavior, many were viewed as the "exceptional, special, and different black student," particularly when compared to their Black American counterparts. Identifying the participants as "successful" and "well-behaved" often resulted in the participants being treated as the token Blacks.

Treating African students as the token Black helps White Americans feel as if race is no longer an issue. Instead of acknowledging and attempting to rectify the continued racial separation in the United States, Whites point to their African students and feel that their racial quota for black support and relationships have been met. While scholars have acknowledged White Americans' practice of displaying favoritism and preference towards Black immigrants (Vickerman, 2001; Waters, 1999), one of the findings in this research was that for many of the children of African immigrants, the preferential treatment that they received from their White teachers and peers, particularly when compared to their Black American peers, was problematic because of the expectations placed on them to positively enact both an African and a Black identity.

## **How do they negotiate their racial and ethnic identities among Africans and non-Africans?**

This final research question differs from the others as it examines the behaviors that participants enacted to negotiate the various expectations, and assumptions that others had about their ethnic and racial identities. In the context of the study, participants' negotiation of their identities was contextually determined and dependent on their desire to be accepted by others. The participants adopted different ways of negotiating their identities according to whether they were with fellow Africans or non-Africans.

During interactions with Africans, the participants often felt that they had to authenticate their Africanness. Authenticating their Africanness involved proving that they were in fact Nigerian by being able to successfully answer questions about Nigeria, or giving detailed information about their Nigerian backgrounds. Similar to other immigrant groups, one-point-five and second generation Nigerians are expected to identify with their co-ethnics. This finding has been confirmed by previous research on intra-ethnic relations (Kim, 2005, Pyke & Dang, 2003). When participants felt like they were being tested and they had to demonstrate that they really were authentic Africans, they often felt denigrated by the people they expected to accept and protect them.

Despite the lack of affirmation from their co-ethnic group, the negotiation with non-Africans was even more complex. These negotiations required hiding or minimizing their Africanness and maximizing their blackness. They achieved this process of acculturation, by adopting their peers' speech patterns, style of dress, hairstyles, etc. particularly during their adolescent years.

As the participants became adults, the negotiations of their identities changed. For some, their identities became less about hiding their Africanness and more about distinguishing their ethnicity within the larger racial group. Whereas, previous researchers have argued that first generation black immigrants distance themselves from Black Americans because of negative stereotypes, this study acknowledges this finding, but also asserts that participants' unique Nigerian upbringing significantly influenced their periodic desire to distinguish themselves from Black Americans.

Lastly, the one-point-five and second generation participants in this study spent the majority of their developmental years in the United States. Unlike their first generation parents who were born and raised in their country of origin, these participants were highly influenced by others of varying racial and cultural backgrounds. The construction of their racial and ethnic identities was, according to participants, highly influenced by their parents, the media, their peer networks, and teachers. However, as adults, they were not solely defined by these outward experiences, but rather, became active in their negotiation of their racial and ethnic identities. For many participants, negotiation involved learning to evaluate social contexts, before enacting particular identities. Their past experiences and the reactions they have encountered with Africans and non-Africans alike about their racial and ethnic identities have resulted in their practicing agency in presenting various identities that is highly dependent on the context and the individual with whom they are interacting.

#### Contributions to Our Knowledge Base

This study on one-point-five and second-generation Nigerian immigrants is significant and timely in a number of respects. First, it complements the presently

limited scholarship available on Africans residing in the United States, which focuses mainly on the experiences of first generation immigrants. A small, but growing number of scholars examine reasons for migration (Djamba, 1999; Gordon, 1998), the economic trajectory of the African population (Doodoo, 1997), social networks and integration (Adeshina, 1995; Arthur, 2000) and African immigrants' experiences with race and racism (Matabane, 1998; Uchem, 2001). While this literature provides substantial insight into African immigrant experiences as a whole, it seldom includes the experiences of the children of these immigrants in the United States. Though many scholars have begun to explore the educational and social challenges of these children (Harushimana, 2007; Traore, 2006), there is a paucity of research that examines the identity experiences of one-point-five and second generation African immigrants, including Nigerians who make up one of the largest African populations in the United States.

Second, this research adds a new dimension to existing studies that explore how black immigrants adjust to U.S. racial constructions and assignments (Bailey, 1999; Vickerman, 1999), specifically focusing on learning blackness as a racial and social process. Immigrant scholars have acknowledged the fact that black immigrants' racial majority status in their native countries limits their understandings and experiences with race and racism as found in the United States (Bashi & McDaniel, 1997; Bryce-Laporte, 1972). This study complicates this literature by examining the ways in which African-born parents conflate and construct race and ethnicity and how this can impact their children's conceptions and negotiations of their Black racial identity. In addition to examining parents' impact on their children's racial identity, this study supports and extends current research that

highlights the significance of peer networks (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Waters, 2001) in the construction and policing of the meaning of blackness (Carter, 2005).

While supporting the growing scholarship that examines the contextually-based identities of immigrant youth (Waters, 1999; Yon, 2000), this research found more nuanced explanations for how and why Nigerian youth enact various identities by highlighting the significance of the social context and the intent of the individual who is asking the question.

Third, this study can foster a deeper understanding of intra-ethnic relationships within immigrant populations. Immigrant scholars often assume co-ethnic community solidarity, overlooking the tensions that exist within ethnic and national groups. In conversations about belonging, ethnic identity constructions and negotiations, participants in this study collectively identified intraethnic “othering” (Pyke & Dang, 2003), a less researched phenomenon that occurs within ethnic groups. For many participants, being told by co-ethnics or other Africans that they were not “African enough” or being questioned about the authenticity of their Africanness significantly impacted the way they saw themselves and interacted with the African population.

Fifth, a major challenge in the study of immigrant populations is that existing literature is located in different academic fields (sociology, anthropology, psychology, education). This study reverses this trend by drawing from these various disciplines to examine the racial and ethnic identity experiences of a particular population, one-point-five and second generation Nigerian immigrants with a particular focus on how their ethnic and racial identities are impacted by the social interactions they have within the schooling context.

Finally, this study has given the participants an opportunity to speak for themselves, thus countering the stereotypical images perpetuated by the western media about Africa and her people. These kinds of testimonies are necessary to inform and persuade non-Africans to critically question the information they hear about Africa and Africans in the media.

### Recommendations

As the number of Nigerian immigrants continues to rise in the United States, it is important to recognize the impact of their presence in schools and communities and the unique needs and experiences of students who come from these populations. My study suggests the following implications for future research, parental guidance and school policies.

#### *Recommendations for Parents & Schooling*

The findings of this study have some implications for parents and parenting. First, many African parents understand school as a cultural-neutral place that focuses primarily on academics. However, as this study and countless other studies show, the schooling context is highly social. African parents must take an active role in their children's academic and social experiences through school visits, parent-teacher conferences, dialogue with their children about their schooling experiences, and becoming active on the school board. Parents' active participation in the schooling of their children is important because of the need for representation. If students see others like themselves present and active in schools, that presence creates a validation of identity and a sense of belonging, two factors necessary in positive self-development.

Secondly, according to previous discussions, participants' ethnic and racial identities were significantly impacted by the interactions with and treatment by their non-African counterparts. Many of the participants discussed feelings of difference and expressed concerns about being stereotyped based on the prevalent media images of Africans in the Western media. Parents interested in instilling pride through an African identity might engage their children in a conversation about their life experiences in Nigeria, teach their children their language and about their particular Nigerian customs and traditions, and emphasize the beauty, diversity, and richness in African cultures and languages. Beginning this education at an early age may buffer and counter the impact of ethnic teasing, negative images, and stereotyping that children may experience outside their families and ethnic communities.

It is also recommended that Nigerian parents who want to maintain and strengthen their children's ethnic identities enroll their children in extra-curricular activities such as weekend schools, institutions, associations, and other Nigerian-centered entities that can support the identity processes, by encouraging them to practice their native language and to interact with Nigerian peers and adults.

Parents interested in developing and promoting a positive sense of their children's Black racial identity are encouraged to educate themselves and their children about the historical and contemporary experiences of Black Americans and other People of Color in the United States. Parents should also be aware and cautious of the behaviors and attitudes that they model to their children about Blacks in the United States as research shows that many Black immigrant students have an affinity to and a strong identification with the Black American culture and identity (Kalmijn, 1996; Rong & Brown, 2002; Waters, 1994; Zephir, 2001).

### *Recommendations for School Policies and Practices*

The responses of teachers and school administrators who witness ethnic and racial teasing in the schools must be addressed. This study found that oftentimes, teachers do not respond as they see the behavior as students simply teasing and “playing”. Professional development is necessary for teachers and administrators to raise sensitivity about the dangers of ethnic and racial teasing and stereotyping. Training is also needed to help teachers prevent teasing from occurring and to understand how to appropriately intervene when it occurs.

Teachers and, subsequently, their students need to embrace learning about the range of different cultures that exist in their academic communities. While interested teachers may learn some of this on their own, teacher preparation programs and in-service professional development offerings must also take part in this process. These programs should ensure that teachers do not reify or newly acquire and then transmit cultural stereotypes, which can lead to (further) marginalization and disempowerment of students who do not culturally identify with the so-called cultural “norms” being taught about them and/or “culturally relevant” (Gay, 1994; Irvine, 2003) practices being employed to teach them.

Schools should also diversify portrayals of Africa and Africans in the curriculum. Participants in the study clearly emphasized media-generated stereotypes as integral to their perceptions of themselves as African, indicating that media images have implications for people whose lives and cultures are supposedly unfolding in front of the lens. One way to provide a more multi-dimensional portrayal of Africa and African people is by replacing Hollywood movies on Africa with diasporic films, documentaries, and self-authored works in the humanities and social sciences.

curricula. Eurocentric textbooks and travel writings have been denounced for conveying biased and, at times, racist content against ethnic minorities (Parsons, 1982; Wainaina, 2005). Similarly, Hollywood has been accused of misrepresenting Africa (Polakow-Suransky, 2008). Intellectual honesty should require that authentic texts and films produced by cultural insiders replace the versions produced by cultural outsiders, whose credibility and intention may be questionable.

Lastly, educators should find connections and foster relationships between Blacks worldwide by committing to gradually replacing cultural days with total integration of Black Histories in the social studies and humanities curricula to ensure that Black experiences worldwide are acknowledged and given the respect they are due.

#### *Recommendations for Future Immigration Research*

Future research should account for internal group diversity among those considered “Black” and their varied experiences with discrimination. The assumption is that because African immigrants, by virtue of their skin color are black, they will be subjected to racial discrimination in the same ways as Black Americans and other racialized groups in the United States. While research bears this out to some extent, further research is still needed to explore other forms of potential discrimination and social challenges that may be unique to African immigrants (e.g. related to language, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, or culturally based behaviors).

Future empirical studies of African immigrant youth should pay attention to the intricacies of their ethnic and racial identification. They should also explore the strengths and limitations inherent in African immigrants’ strategies for adapting to

life in the United States, as such exploration can positively inform the patterns of adaptation that other African immigrants may experience in the United States.

Further research should consider the social and economic positions of Nigerian immigrants in their native countries, focusing on differences that emerge on the bases of national origin, as well as national origin vis-à-vis ethnic identity and then link this to research seeking to understand Nigerian immigrants' experiences within the United States. This can lead to more nuanced, more thorough, and ultimately more accurate understandings of Nigerian immigrants and their children's social and educational needs, both pre and post immigration.

Intra-racial relations between native Blacks and immigrant black groups is also an area that requires much more research. Many social scientists, particularly academics have been reluctant to acknowledge or address the xenophobic and intra-racial tensions that exist within the black populations. While several immigrant scholars have begun to address these issues (Traore, 2006; Turner & Cochran, 2003), there appears to be a reluctance to deeply examine these relationships and, more importantly, to develop practical strategies for building pan-Black community in rigorous research communities.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Study participants are needed for a dissertation project seeking to gain an in-depth understanding of the racial and ethnic identity experiences of 1.5 (arrived in the U.S. under the age of 12) and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation (born and raised in the U.S.) Nigerian students at the University of Maryland College Park.

### CRITERIA FOR PARTICIPANTS:

1. Currently a student at the University of Maryland
2. Between the ages of 18-32
3. Born in Nigeria and came to the U.S. under the age of 12 (1.5 generation) or born and raised in the United States (2<sup>nd</sup> generation)
4. A daughter/son of Nigerian parents who have been residing in the U.S. for a minimum of 15 years

### DETAILS OF PARTICIPATION:

1. Complete a brief questionnaire (15-20 minutes)
2. Participate in 2 separate interview sessions each about ninety minutes in length that will take place at a date/time and location of the participant's choice
3. Participate in 1 1/2 to 2 hour focus group to further explore personal racial and ethnic identity constructions and negotiations

\*Confidentiality will be maintained by assigning pseudonyms for participant names and institution. Please contact Janet Awokoya at [jawokoya@umd.edu](mailto:jawokoya@umd.edu) for further details.

## **Appendix B: Informed Consent Form for Participants**

Date

Dear Participant,

This is a research project conducted by Dr. Donna Wiseman and Janet Awokoya at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you have self-identified or have been identified as a one-point-five or second generation Nigerian college student. The purpose of this research project is to understand how your interactions with your African counterparts and other groups inform your racial and ethnic identities.

### **Procedures**

As part of this project, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire, and participate in two separate interviews, and one focus group where you will answer several questions about your experiences with your racial and ethnic identities. The questionnaire will take about fifteen minutes to complete, and the interviews will last approximately ninety minutes, but may last longer if you agree. The focus group will last between 1 1/2 to 2 hours. The interviews will be tape recorded and later transcribed, and the focus groups will be videotaped. Copies of interviews, transcriptions, and findings will be available to you upon request.

### **Confidentiality**

We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential to help protect your confidentiality. All information gathered from this study will be kept in locked files in my home office. My research advisor, Donna Wiseman and I will be the only people with access to this consent form. We will shred and/or destroy these items five years after completing the dissertation. Your name will not be listed on any of the questionnaires, interviews or focus groups. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to so by law.

### **Risks**

There may be some risks from participating in this research study. You may feel uncomfortable while answering certain questions and you may be tired during the interviewing sessions and focus group meeting. However, the questions asked of you are similar to those of other studies on immigrant adults and youth and have been found to be relatively safe.

### **Benefits**

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about one-point-five and second-generation Nigerian college students construct and negotiate their racial and ethnic identities. We hope that the results of this study will educate immigrant parents, policy makers, and faculty at

institutes of higher education of the factors that contribute to the successes and challenges of one-point-five and second generation Nigerian students.

**Withdrawal from the study**

Though your participation is greatly appreciated, it is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study and you can stop your participation at any time. Your decision whether to participate will have no effect on any courses or organizations that you are a part of at the University of Maryland.

**Questions or Concerns**

Please feel free to ask any questions about this dissertation research. You may call me directly at xxx-xxx-xxxx or email at [jawokoya@umd.edu](mailto:jawokoya@umd.edu). You may also contact the principal investigator, Donna Wiseman, at [dlwise@umd.edu](mailto:dlwise@umd.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as an informant in this research study, please contact: Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; email [irb@deans.umd.edu](mailto:irb@deans.umd.edu); telephone 301-405-0678. This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

**Statement of Age of Subject and Consent**

Your signature indicates that: you are at least 18 years of age; the research has been explained to you; your questions have been fully answered; and you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.

---

PARTICIPANT'S NAME

---

PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE

---

DATE

## Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire

**For each question, please check the correct answer or write neatly in the space provided.**

1. Gender: Male \_\_\_\_\_Female \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your date of birth? \_\_\_\_\_(example: May 11, 1979)
3. What city and state were you born in? \_\_\_\_\_
4. List the cities and states that you have lived in:

### City & State Length of Time

5. Where do you live during the academic year?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_With parents
- b. \_\_\_\_\_Dorm/ Apt. on campus
- c. \_\_\_\_\_House/ Apt. off campus
- d. Other:\_\_\_\_\_

6. What is your marital status?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_Single, never been married
- b. \_\_\_\_\_Married
- c. \_\_\_\_\_Separated
- d. \_\_\_\_\_Divorced
- e. \_\_\_\_\_Widowed
- f. \_\_\_\_\_Domestic partnership

**I would like to learn a little about your family. Here are a few questions about them.**

7. Are your biological parents currently married to each other?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_Yes
- b. \_\_\_\_\_No
- i. If no, for how many years have they been apart? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Please provide the zipcode of where your family currently lives. \_\_\_\_\_

9. Which of the following people, *in addition to your parents or guardians*, live in the house where your family resides. (Check all that apply)

- a. Brothers or step-brothers \_\_\_\_\_ How many? \_\_\_\_\_
  - i. Ages & Gender \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Sisters or step-sisters \_\_\_\_\_ How many? \_\_\_\_\_
  - i. Ages & Gender \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Grandfather or grandmother \_\_\_\_\_ How many? \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Uncles or aunts \_\_\_\_\_ How many? \_\_\_\_\_
- e. Other relatives \_\_\_\_\_ How many? \_\_\_\_\_
- f. Non-relatives \_\_\_\_\_ How many? \_\_\_\_\_

**I would like to know about your parents' experiences in Nigeria prior to immigrating to the United States.**

**Father**

10. What city/region did your father come from in Nigeria? \_\_\_\_\_

11. What kinds of work *did your father* normally do? That is, what was his job called?

Name of Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

12. What did he actually do in that job? What were some of his main duties?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

13. Describe the place where he worked; What did the company make or do?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

14. In your view, what do you think that your father's class status was in Nigeria?

- a. \_\_\_ Lower class
- b. \_\_\_ Middle class
- c. \_\_\_ Upper class
- d. \_\_\_ I don't know

15. What was the highest level of education your father received **prior to coming to the U.S.?**

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Middle school graduate or less
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Some high school
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ High school graduate
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Some college or university
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ College graduate or more
- f. \_\_\_\_\_ I don't know
- g. \_\_\_\_\_ Other: Explain \_\_\_\_\_

16. Approximately what year did your father leave Nigeria? \_\_\_\_\_

a. For what reason? \_\_\_\_\_

**Mother**

17. What city/region did your mother come from in Nigeria? \_\_\_\_\_

18. What kinds of work *did your mother* normally do? That is, what was her job called?

Name of Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

19. What did she actually do in that job? What were some of her main duties?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

20. Describe the place where she worked; What did the company make or do?

\_\_\_\_\_

- 
21. In your view, what do you think that your mother's class status was in Nigeria?
- a. \_\_\_ Lower class
  - b. \_\_\_ Middle class
  - c. \_\_\_ Upper class
  - d. \_\_\_ I don't know

22. What was the highest level of education your mother received **prior to coming to the U.S.?**

- a. \_\_\_ Middle school graduate or less
- b. \_\_\_ Some high school
- c. \_\_\_ High school graduate
- d. \_\_\_ Some college or university
- e. \_\_\_ College graduate or more
- f. \_\_\_ I don't know
- g. Other \_\_\_\_\_ Explain \_\_\_\_\_

23. Approximately what year did your mother leave Nigeria? \_\_\_\_\_  
a. For what reason? \_\_\_\_\_

**Please describe the present or most recent job of your father, stepfather, or male guardian.**

24. Is he currently working, unemployed, retired, or disabled?
- a. \_\_\_ Currently working
  - b. \_\_\_ Unemployed
  - c. \_\_\_ Retired
  - d. \_\_\_ Disabled

\*If your father is unemployed, retired, **or** disabled, answer the following questions for his **most recent job**. Also, if your father works more than one job, please answer for the job you consider to be his major activity.

25. What kinds of work does he normally do? That is, what is his job called?  
Name of Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

26. What does he actually do in that job? What are some of his main duties?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

27. Describe the place where he works; What does the company make or do?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

28. What is your father's highest level of education in the U.S.?
- a. \_\_\_ Middle school graduate or less
  - b. \_\_\_ Some high school
  - c. \_\_\_ High school graduate
  - d. \_\_\_ Some college or university

- e. \_\_\_\_\_ College graduate or more
- f. \_\_\_\_\_ I don't know
- g. \_\_\_\_\_ Other: Explain \_\_\_\_\_

**Please describe the present or most recent job of your mother, stepmother, or female guardian.**

29. Is she currently working, unemployed, retired, or disabled?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Currently working
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Unemployed
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Retired
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Disabled

\*If your mother is unemployed, retired, **or** disabled, answer the following questions for her **most recent job**. Also, if your mother works more than one job, please answer for the job you consider to be her major activity.

30. What kinds of work does she normally do? That is, what is her job called?

Name of Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

31. What does she actually do in that job? What are some of her main duties?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

32. Describe the place where she works; What does the company make or do?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

33. What is your mother's highest level of education in the U.S?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Middle school graduate or less
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Some high school
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ High school graduate
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Some college or university
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ College graduate or more
- f. \_\_\_\_\_ I don't know
- g. \_\_\_\_\_ Other: Explain \_\_\_\_\_

34. What is your family's total income before taxes? Numbers are in U.S. currency.

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Under \$19,000
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Between \$20,000 and \$39,000
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Between \$40,000 and 59,000
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Between \$60,000 and 79,000
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Over \$80,000

**I would like to ask about your religion.**

35. What is your CURRENT religion? \_\_\_\_\_

a. Specific denomination: \_\_\_\_\_

36. Do you CURRENTLY belong to a place of worship, i.e. church, synagogue, mosque, or temple?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Yes

b.  No

37. About how often do you attend religious service?

- a.  Never
- b.  About once or twice a year
- c.  Several times a year
- d.  About once a month
- e.  2-3 times a month
- f.  Nearly every week
- g.  Every week (once a week)
- h.  Several times a week

38. Were you raised in the same religion?

- a.  Yes
- b.  No

39. In what religion were you raised? \_\_\_\_\_

a. Specific denomination: \_\_\_\_\_

**I would like to know about your political participation.**

40. Including any current membership, were you a member of any African organization/ association or club within the past year?

- a.  Yes
- i. What are they? \_\_\_\_\_
- b.  No

41. Including any current membership, were you a member of any NON-African organization/association or club within the past year?

- a.  Yes
- i. What are they? \_\_\_\_\_
- b.  No

**I would like to know about your cultural background.**

42. How many times have you ever been back to visit Nigeria? \_\_\_\_\_

43. Have you lived there for longer than 6 months?

- a.  Yes
- b.  No

44. Do you ever send money to anyone in Nigeria?

- a.  Yes
- b.  No

45. How often do your parents send money to anyone there?

- a.  Never
- b.  About once or twice a year
- c.  Several times a year

- d.  About once a month
- e.  2-3 times a month
- f.  Nearly every week
- g.  Every week (once a week)
- h.  Several times a week
- i. DK/ Not sure: \_\_\_\_\_

46. How often do you watch Nigerian TV (including videos or movies) or listen to Nigerian radio or Nigerian music?

- a.  Never
- b.  About once or twice a year
- c.  Several times a year
- d.  About once a month
- e.  2-3 times a month
- f.  Nearly every week
- g.  Every week (once a week)
- h.  Several times a week
- i.  Every day

47. Which language(s) were you *spoken to* at home when you were growing up in the (U.S.)?

- a.  Primarily English
- b.  Primarily Yoruba
- c.  Primarily Igbo
- d.  A combination of English and Yoruba
- e.  A combination of English and Igbo
- f.  A combination of English, Yoruba, and Igbo
- g.  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

48. Which language(s) did you speak most at home when you were growing up (in the US)?

- a.  Primarily English
- b.  Primarily Yoruba
- c.  Primarily Igbo
- d.  A combination of English and Yoruba
- e.  A combination of English and Igbo
- f.  A combination of English, Yoruba, and Igbo
- g.  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

49. Which language(s) do you prefer to speak in your home most of the time now?

- a.  Primarily English
- b.  Primarily Yoruba
- c.  Primarily Igbo
- d.  A combination of English and Yoruba
- e.  A combination of English and Igbo
- f.  A combination of English, Yoruba, and Igbo
- g.  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

50. I understand:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ English only
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ English and Yoruba
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ English and Igbo
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ English, Yoruba, and Igbo
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

51. I consider myself:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Fluent in English only
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ Fluent in both English and Yoruba
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Fluent in both English and Igbo
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Fluent in English, Yoruba, and Igbo
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

52. What language(s) do you speak in college and/ or at work?

\_\_\_\_\_

53. What language(s) do you use with your peers?

\_\_\_\_\_

**I would like to know about the community that you grew up in.**

54. The community that I grew up in had:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ No Nigerians
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ A few Nigerians (Less than 10%)
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ Many Nigerians (More than 10%)
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Many other African groups, please list which groups

\_\_\_\_\_

55. I spent most of my childhood in:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ A predominately White environment
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ An ethnically and racially diverse environment
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ A predominately African environment
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

56. I spent most of my teenage years in:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ A predominately White environment
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ An ethnically and racially diverse environment
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ A predominately African environment
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

57. I am spending most of my young adult years in:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ A predominately White environment
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ An ethnically and racially diverse environment
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ A predominately African environment
- d. Other \_\_\_\_\_

## Thank you for completing the questionnaire!

### Appendix D: Interview Protocol

#### Background

- Tell me about yourself
- (If 1.5er) How old were you when you came to the United States? Tell me about your immigration here. What was the transition like? (Probe: What were the hardest things that you had to adjust to when you came here?)
- (If 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation) Tell me about your experiences at home.

#### Family/ Home Life

- Tell me about your family and your growing up.
- In what way were you raised? (Probe: What kinds of traditions, customs, practices did your family observe in your home?)
- How involved were your parents in your upbringing? (Probe: Did you see them a lot? Did you do activities with them, did they participate in school functions?
  - If not, where were they?
- Who took care of you when your parents were away from home?
- Do you think that African families in the U.S. have a different way of raising children than other Americans do? (Probe: What are the differences?)
  - Which way do you think is better? Why?
- When you were growing up, did you ever disagree with your parents about the way they raised you? What about? (Probe: Were they too strict? About what: Friends, curfew, dating?)
- When you were growing up, did your parents apply the same rules for boys and for girls, or did boys and girls have different rules?
- \*Who do you feel closest to in your family? Why?
- You stated that \_\_\_\_ (see questionnaire) lived with your immediate family. What was that like?
- What types of guests came to visit your family in your home? Who would you all visit regularly?
- How often did you see them? (Probe: What sorts of occasions brought you together? What were those occasions like)?
- \*Who in your family influences you the most? In what ways? Why does (family member) influence you the most?

#### Additional Questions about Parents

- Did your mother or father give you advice about other racial or ethnic groups? What types of things would they say? Where do you believe they got these notions?
- Did they ever say that people might try to limit how far you can go because you are African? (Probe: What did they say?) Do you agree with them or not?
- Is there anything else about your home life that you would like for me to know?

### Childhood Neighborhood

- You lived in \_\_\_ neighborhood for the longest time. Is that your current neighborhood?
- What was it like to grow up in that neighborhood? (Probe: What were the best things about it? What were the worst things about it?)
- Can you tell me who lived in that neighborhood? What groups of people lived there?
- How did the kids get along with each other? What would they do? (Probe: If several different groups: How did the kids from different backgrounds get along with each other?)
- Are you still living at home? (If still at home): What is the main reason you are living with your family right now? (If not still at home): what were the main reasons you moved away from your parent's / family home?
- Is there anything else about your neighborhood life that you would like for me to know?

### Early Schooling Experiences

- Describe some key experiences with peers in elementary school, high school, and college? How has it impacted the way you see yourself or the way you think about yourself? (Probe: Any interactions that caused you to feel different from others?)
- To which racial and ethnic group did most of the students belong (the school you've talked about the most)? How did the different groups get along?
- Did you ever feel treated differently from other students at the school? (Probe: because of race, ethnic group, gender, by teachers or fellow students?)
- What kinds of grades did you get in elementary school, middle or high school? What do you think are the major reasons that you got the grades you did?
- Do you remember being placed/tracked into "smart classes, remedial or special education at your school? (Probe: How did you feel about that?)
- How were you treated with your teachers/ guidance counselors? Did you ever feel that you were treated differently because of race or ethnicity? Did you participate in any school activities, such as sports, clubs, school politics or other groups? (If yes, what did you do? How did you feel about those activities?) (If no, was there any particular reason why you did not participate in any organized activities outside of classes?)
- Did any person or group cause you difficulties (Who was this? How did they cause problems? What did you do?)

### College Experiences

- Tell me about the transition from high school to college? (Probe: What was the biggest thing that you had to adjust to?)
- Your major is \_\_\_ (Probe? How did you decide on that?)
- Tell me about your experiences with professors and students. Do you ever feel treated differently from other students at school? (Probe: because of race, ethnic group, gender, teachers or fellow students?)
- What kinds of activities do you participate in outside of your classes? (student groups, political organizations, work, etc.) (Probe: Which ones? Why did you join them?) Why did you leave?

- How has your college life differed from middle school and high school experiences?
- Is there anything else about your school life that you would like for me to know?

### Identity

- How do you answer the question, “Where are you from?”
- How do you describe (identify) yourself? (Probe: In class when they do introductions, how do you introduce yourself? In groups how are you introduced?)
- \*What are some of the things that you believe make you \_\_\_\_\_? If any, what are some of the things that you believe make you American?
- Tell me what it means for you to be \_\_\_\_\_. What/ who has influenced you to think this way about being \_\_\_\_\_
- \*Do you ever identify as African-American? Black? What is more common for you to say? Why?
- \*Can you tell me when you feel more one than the other?
- Did you identify the same way when you were growing up?
- What did that mean to you when you were growing up?
- What about now, does it still mean the same thing? Do you ever change the way you identify?
- Is the way you describe (identify) yourself different with different people?
- Are there people that make it difficult to answer?
- Do you ever change how you present/ identify yourself? What situations change how you present yourself?
- Have you ever had to explain who you are?
- What kinds of experiences have you had explaining who you are? When does this happen? How do others respond?
- Where have you run into challenges with your identity?
- What would you like to say to people who don't get it?
- How do your siblings identify themselves? How does it differ from the way you identify yourself, if it does? How has it impacted the way you identify yourself today? How do your siblings' values differ from yours if they do?
- \*Have there been any specific times you feel you have benefited from being African? Can you give me an example?
- Have you ever experienced any problems or difficulties from being African/ Nigerian/ Black? Can you tell me about that?
- Has there ever been a time when you hid your ethnicity/ race? Why?

### Religion

- What is your religious affiliation? Are you active in your religion? Do your religious activities transmit ethnic culture to you in any way? How so?

### Group Perceptions

- What are the perceptions African immigrants have of Black Americans?
- What are the perceptions Black Americans have of African immigrants?

- How do parents, relatives, community inform you about being Black American? Is there an effort to distance from Black Americans? What does that entail?
- When you hear the word African what comes to mind?
- When you hear the word Nigerian what comes to mind?
- When you hear the words African-American what comes to mind?
- Do you feel that you have a strong social attachment with Nigerians?
- What types of attitudes do you have about your ethnic group—and your racial group?
- What characteristics of Africans/ Nigerians do you like the most? (Probe: ideas, values, behaviors) What characteristics do you like the least?
- Can you tell me a story or describe your relationship and experiences with Nigerians, Black Americans, or other immigrant groups? How has it impacted the way you see yourself or the way you think about yourself?
- How do you think that the fact that you were born in \_\_\_\_\_ and that your parents were born in Nigeria have influenced you? What are some of the issues? How do you think your values are different than your parents', if they are?
- How do you feel people who are African perceive you? Why (example/personal story)?
- How do you feel people who are not African perceive you? Why (example/ personal story)?
- If their assumptions are wrong, do you correct them (example/ personal story)?
- Do you have any connections to Nigeria (visits, media, calling home, etc.)?
- Have you ever gone back to your parents' home country? How often have you been there? Can you tell me about what your visit(s) were like? (Probe: How long did you stay? Why did you go there? (If has not been there: Why have you never been back to visit your parents' country? Would you like to go? Why?
- Do your parents send money back to the home country? Why and to whom? Do you send any money to the home country? (Probe: why and to whom?)
- Do your parents own any land back in the home country? Tell me about that. Do you parents have any other investments back in the home country?
- Would you ever consider living there? Why or why not?
- (If R is a citizen): You said that you are a citizen. Can you tell me when and why you decided to naturalize?
- (If R is not a citizen) You said that you are not a citizen. Can you tell me what your current immigration status is? Have you considered naturalizing? (Probe: why have you not done that?)

#### Language/ Accent

- When do you speak English? When do you speak Yoruba/ Igbo?
- If you are not very familiar with your language of origin, how is this taken by your own group? By other groups?
- What kind of experiences do you have when speaking English/Yoruba/Igbo with your African counterparts?
- Has anyone ever questioned you about your accent/ or lack of accent? Tell me about that.

#### Peers

- How do you choose your friends?

- With which specific cultural or racial groups do you generally choose to befriend/ or interact with the most? And why?
- What kinds of things do you and your friends talk about?
- Who among your friends influence you the most? In what ways?
- Are you romantically involved with anyone? Tell me about your relationship.
- Have you ever experienced ethnic prejudice? If so, can you share that experience and how it felt to you?
- How has it impacted the way you see yourself? How did it influence the way you think about yourself?
- Are there any other issues you would like to talk about or any other questions you think that I should have asked?
- Do you have any questions for me?

## **Appendix E: Focus Group/ Critical Incident Scenarios**

### **Incident 1**

When I was younger, I didn't mind sharing my African background in school. I actually looked forward to my parents coming to school to talk about Nigeria. When I got older, I didn't share my background with others; some of my closest friends don't even know I'm Nigerian.

### **Incident 2**

Amaka says that she often felt different from her Black American peers at school. She was often told that 'She wasn't black enough or that she acted white'. She explains, "I didn't understand how I could not be black because my skin color is black. I often felt like I would have to try to change who I am in order to fit in."

### **Incident 3**

When someone says, "I don't believe that you're Nigerian." It hurts me. I'm not going to deny that I have American influences but they want me to act Nigerian, and I don't understand what they want me to do to show I'm Nigerian.

### **Incident 4**

Jide explains that he identifies as Black, African American, Nigerian, African, Nigerian American and other. He says that all of these labels have described him in different situations or has been used by others to describe him.

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