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# African Immigrant Women Within the United States Educational System: A Sociocultural/ Experiential Analysis

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# **African Immigrant Women Within the United States Educational System: A Sociocultural/ Experiential Analysis**

University of Colorado Boulder  
Ethnic Studies and Leadership  
Honor's Thesis

By

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Experiential Analysis

**Abstract**

With debates on immigration occurring around the world, debates in the United States regarding race and racism surrounding police brutality, and discussions on the 2014 Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia, it has become even more pertinent to understand each others backgrounds, surroundings and identities. This paper uses the sociocultural identities of African immigrant women in the United States (US) to try to understand immigration, race, racism, gender, sexism, nationality, and ethnicity in relation to transnational leadership and feminism; all of which can be examined through the identities and experiences of African women in the US.

This experiential analysis uses theories on identity development among immigrant students, on transnational feminism, and servant leadership to understand a population that is under studied and a population whose identities, due to the racialized history of the United States, are broadly categorized as Black and/or African American. While race is an important social construct that shapes opportunity and life chances in the U.S, these categories tell us little about the varied ethnic identities within racial groups, which often go unrecognized and misrecognized in research surrounding the role of culture and identity in educational institutions. To critically examine these varied ethnic identities, seven African immigrant women, whom pseudonyms are used for, narrated their experiences in the US educational system.

With their intersectional self-defined identities, they described ambitions to work abroad with their immigrant group or countries of origin, and discussed struggles in terms of their nationality, race, ethnicity and gender within the US context. Based on common themes that emerged across their narrations, findings indicate that the narrators perceived their intersecting

identities and experiences as different from their African American peers in important ways.

These differences include having transnational perspectives and understandings of the systems of oppression that exist within and outside US society. Consequently, from their experiences of being outsiders within, African immigrant women are able to self-define, develop transnational perspectives, and have agency.

## Acknowledgments

This paper is dedicated to my family, the narrators involved in this research, my advisors, my superstar professors at the University of Colorado Boulder, and all of those committed to the educational access and success of every child in the world. Education is a human right! To my family, thank you for all of the support that you have given me and for always cheering me on. To my brother, you have been a role model in all aspects of my life. Know that you have taught me to believe in myself, to find confidence in myself, and to follow my dreams no matter who tells me that I can't. Mommy, you are my world! You too are my role model. The strength that you have as a woman, as a human being even with all of the struggles that you have endured and continue to endure keep me motivated. I hope to be as caring and loving as you are once in motherhood. To my younger siblings, keep working hard and making yourselves and your family proud, we believe in you!

To my narrators, Ama, Star, Angola, Mahra, Nikki, Hope, and Zebra, thank you for taking the time to tell your stories and allowing me to share them with others. I could tell that this process was a liberating one for you all. If you ever need to reflect on your life and the amazing women that you have become, I am here for you all. I wish you all the best in your aspirations, happiness, courage, and peace. You are the ones who can define your self worth. This is a lesson that I have had to learn and continue to learn. Thank you again for your courage and support.

Dr. White, Dr. Williams, and Dr. Aldama, you all have been very supportive through this process and have valued my experiences in and outside the classroom, this has been a liberating process. bell hooks (1994) in her passage, *Theory as Liberatory Practice* from *Teaching to Transgress*, states:

“I came to theory because I was hurting- the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend- to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing” (p. 59).

Your classes, your pedagogy of allowing students to use theory in practice, have been a healing journey for me. Being on a predominantly white campus makes me feel, in many cases, that I am an outsider whose identities and perspectives do not matter and that what I was feeling of an outsider within was me being delusional. Now, after conducting this research, learning from my narrators, and using theory to explain our experiences as African immigrant women and vice versa has helped me to survive on this campus. I appreciate you, your support, and the amazing work and research that you all do within your respective disciplines.

This same liberation and support has occurred within other classes because other professors have also followed the same pedagogical approaches that you have. Thank you to Debra Naranjo, Barclay Jones, Ann Scarritt, Levi Johnson, Cecilia Valenzuela, Awon Atuire, William Takamatsu Thompson, everyone from the Ethnic Studies Department and Ethnic Living and Learning Community, and to the student groups and call centers that serve the needs of underrepresented students on college campuses. We have been able to breathe on our respective campuses because of you all.

To educators, parents, students, and policy makers who may read this document one day, please understand that the stories that are told by the narrators in this paper should not be generalized. Instead, their stories should add on to the work that you are all doing and hopefully causing us to consider the experiences and identities of all students when educating them, making policies, and interacting with them in some capacity. As students, we can work with you in making this world one in which all children have access to education, and education that is of quality. Let us change this world for the better, together.

With much respect and appreciation, thank you for taking the time to read this paper and for participating in this dialogue.

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## **Background and Positionality of Researcher**

Before speaking to my mother about her parents' educational attainment and experiences, I thought my grandparents, my grandpa especially, had gone to college. Whenever I spoke to his kids or other people who knew him, they would always tell me what a respectable and educated person he was. He was a very political person; he was a community organizer and highly respected man and later an elder in his community. After speaking with my mother, I learned that my grandfather had not had any educational attainment and that the only education that he received was outside of the classroom. My grandfather only went to Quranic School. To support himself and his family, he went to a technical school to learn how to drive so that he could be a taxi man.

My mother told me that during the time that my grandfather and grandmother grew up, the schools were mostly owned by white colonists; Guinea gained its independence October 2, 1958. To go to school, families had to have the money and connections to those governing the country. Also, being a girl, even if my grandmother had the connections or financial resources to go to school, she was not allowed to; her duties were to cook, clean, and try to make ones self suitable for marriage. At a very young age, she was arranged to marry my grandfather. Therefore, not having had any schooling except for Quranic School for my grandfather, my grandparents emphasized the need to get an education to my aunts and uncles. My grandparents had nine kids. Out of their nine kids, six went to a private, technical, or public school. My grandfather used his earnings to send his eldest, his first born son and second born (my eldest aunt) to get an education.

After its independence in 1958, Guinea's first President, Ahmed Sekou Toure set into law that girls and women should also be allowed to go to school; 1958 was when the second oldest, my aunt, was born. Also, after decolonization, in primary school, students studied in the native

language of the group that was highly populated within that region; for example, in Pulaar, Susu, Maninka, etc. Then, in middle school, students would be taught in French. In primary school, students would learn about the history of their local community while studying in their native tongue, then in middle school they would learn about the history of the country and the history of the continent of Africa in French, and later world history in high school, also in French. The purpose was to retain ones own history, liberate ones mind from colonialism, and participate in the economic well being of the country through the aspiration of getting an education and a job, which translates to the ideologies of the first wave of African immigrants after independence (Nyang 2011).

Due to this educational background, both my mother and my grandparents have emphasized the importance of education to my siblings and I. Indeed, this was one of the reasons for my family's immigration to the United States in 2000. Though, once in the United States, the educational aspirations of my parents were reevaluated, as the fastest way to financially support their family was to obtain technical skills. Therefore, my mother and father decided to go to technical school to get a nurse aid certificate. My mother went back to school and received her LPN and then her RN in 2014. In doing so, she demonstrated to her children the importance of getting an education. One of my mother's primary beliefs was that getting an education would help us in assisting others and ourselves; we should become servant leaders. This wisdom and perseverance has inspired my siblings and I to strive to be as strong and hardworking as our mother. My brother is now in his second year of graduate school for a master's degree in Public Health, I am attending the University of Colorado Boulder and am in my last year of undergrad, and my little brother and sister are excelling in school. Both are getting good grades and are in higher-level classes.

In order to utilize these lessons and privileges of getting an education as an African immigrant woman and Guinean in the United States, coming from such an educational background, I find it necessary to examine my privileges, identities and experiences in the US educational system. I aspire to work abroad, specifically in Guinea with local organizations, communities, parents, students, and teachers in improving the educational system in Guinea, especially after the 2014 Ebola outbreak. This devastating and life consuming disease has caused confusion and fear among communities as many students have not returned to school, some schools have not opened yet, and some teachers have not returned due to either fear or having found other sources of income since they were not being paid during this outbreak.

In aspiring to work in Guinea and other countries in Africa, I have had to examine my identities of being an African immigrant woman, a recent US citizen, a Guinean, one who identifies as a heterosexual, and who speaks both my native language, Pulaar, and English. In doing this self reflection and self definition, I decided to conduct research, a senior thesis, about the experiences of other African immigrant women in the US who are in similar positions, in that they are about to graduate from college/ university or have recently, within the last year, graduated. This allows for an understanding of how they have defined themselves in relation to US society and to the global world, to examine the development of their social and cultural identities in the US educational system, and to examine how all of these aspects may or may not relate to their career goals and leadership in society.

Now, when I say “African”, this is not meant to disregard the cultures and identities of some of the narrators who assisted me with this paper nor the commonalities and differences among many countries on the continent of Africa. The words “African Immigrant” are used because within the academy and politically (i.e. US legislation, etc.) these are the words used to

describe people from the continent of Africa. Thus silencing their identities and experiences because it places meanings associated with the word “African,” such as being victims and needing saviors, as depicted by Western media, onto people with cultural, ethnic, geographic, political, and economic differences. In stating where the narrators are from, asking how they self-identify, and asking them about their experiences, this study departs from dominant norms of silencing and instead provides a platform in which they can be heard (Potter, 2014). This is very important to remember when reading this paper.

Ironically, I argue that there is not an emphasis on this community due to the racialized history of the United States, which leads immigrants from the continent of Africa to be broadly categorized as Black or African American. While racial categories are socially and politically viable in numerous ways, it can also influence researchers to disregard the multiplicity of ethnicity within racial groups, and even places stereotypes of Blackness developed and established within the United States onto immigrant women from various countries on the continent of Africa.

These stereotypes include those related to describing Black American women as jezebels, mammies, sapphires, and matriarchs. As these labels are unfairly placed upon all women racialized as Black or African American, African immigrant women face additional struggles of identity development related to their immigrant identity. This can include speaking a language other than English or stereotypes about the continent of Africa and African immigrants. Hence, African immigrant women struggle with both the misrecognition of being Black or African American in the US, and therefore inheriting the same stigmatizing and controlling images in addition to challenges related to their intersectional status as women from various countries on the continent of Africa (Harris-Perry, 2013). Some of the challenges or expectations that they

may face as transnational women are that of being seen as having fertility, womanhood, and being protectors and carriers of culture (Faith Ringgold, 2012). With all of these definitions of identity being placed on them, it becomes harder to self-define.

I argue that in trying to deal with different self-identified and non-self-identified identities, these students use strategies of cultural straddling, cultural conformity, or cultural resistance similar to African American students who negotiate cultural expectations in order to survive in the US educational system, but aimed more broadly to include cultural expectations related to national and transnational forces from both the US and abroad (Carter, 2005). These terms will be defined within the next few chapters. Findings indicate that African immigrant women use adaptive strategies to negotiate a range of different cultural and social contexts and expectations.

Due to their experiences in the US educational system, and their capacities to negotiate a range of cultural expectations, once African immigrant women enter college/ university, they start to examine their experiences, challenge the need to negotiate their identities and various expectations, and start to critically tailor these negotiations to fit more closely their individual identities, all of which leads to an understanding of systems of oppression that are related to their intersectional identities of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality and class. For many of the women, their transformation and analysis produced knowledge and skills to become servant leaders and transnational feminists, which allows for civic participation in the US and abroad.

## **Introduction**

### **African Immigrant Population in the US**

To understand the educational experiences of African immigrant women, this thesis paper explores the complex diversity of this population first. The population of the United States is growing and with it the immigrant population. Today, nine out of ten immigrants come from a non-European country (Rong and Preissle, 1998, p.6). Furthermore, the foreign-born immigrant population in the US is now at its highest, growing since 1910, at 22.4 million and the population of the native born children is also at its highest, also since 1910, at 25 million (Rong and Preissle, 1998, p. 6). With this increase in immigrants and corresponding increase in immigrant youth, there is an extreme urgency to understand these different populations; their educational experiences and identities can influence their success and civic and global participation.

For this thesis paper, the African immigrant population, at large, and African immigrant women, specifically, are the focus of this study. In 2007, there were 1,023,000 African born residents in the US, which is an 80 percent increase that has occurred since 2000, and is expected to continue to increase (Reed and Andrzejewski, 2013, p. 2). Many African immigrants reside in cities such as New York City, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and Dallas and come from mostly West African (37%), East African (28%), and North African countries (19%) (Reed and Andrzejewski, 2013, p. 4). Some of these West African countries, as shown by Table 4, consist of the following countries: Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. While many African immigrants from East Africa come from the following countries: Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Eritrea and Sudan (not defined as “North” or South Sudan in table 4). Other countries that African immigrants emigrate from are South Africa, Egypt, Morocco, and many other countries as the continent of Africa consists of 54 countries.

Also, the African Immigration Council (2012) reports that there were 396, 510 African born immigrant women and 484, 790 African born men in 2000 while there were 761,677 foreign born African born women and 845, 237 foreign born African men in the US in 2010. The discrepancy between the number of men and women is due to some cultural expectations in many African countries of men being the ones to bring prosperity to the family and the ones who are mostly encouraged to go to school on a regular basis, as most girls and women have to help the family with domestic duties placed on them and some also stay home due to menstruation cycles (Kraft, 2015).

With this diversity in African immigrant backgrounds, even more can be found within and outside of these 54 countries as there are between 1000 to 2000 different languages, 75 of which are spoken by more than a million people and the rest by a few hundred or several hundred people (Harvard African Language Program). Therefore, the study of this population is of significance for educational leaders and policy makers who, since the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, are “mandated to track educational attainment and outcomes of all subgroups” (US Department of Education, 2001). In exploring the demographics of the African immigrant population in the US, we also need to understand why they immigrated to the US and their educational attainment thus far.



**Table 4: From Which Countries Do the Majority of African Immigrants in New York Come?**

**Top 10 Sending Countries of Foreign Born Africans in New York City, by Time**

1980 Census				1990 Census			2000 Census			2007 ACS		
Rank	Country	N	%	Country	N	%	Country	N	%	Country	N	%
1	Egypt	4,180	29.3	Egypt	7,817	26.8	Nigeria	12,370	20.5	Ghana	16,500	18.3
2	Ghana	2,420	16.9	Ghana	4,665	16.0	Africa (ns)	11,925	19.7	Nigeria	14,522	16.1
3	Nigeria	2,120	14.8	Nigeria	4,418	15.1	Ghana	11,652	19.3	Egypt	13,034	14.5
4	Morocco	960	6.7	Africa (ns)	1,963	6.7	Egypt	10,988	18.2	Africa (ns)	11,998	13.3
5	Africa (ns)	860	6.0	Morocco	1,695	5.8	Liberia	3,803	6.3	W. Africa (ns)	10,342	11.5
6	Liberia	580	4.1	Liberia	1,511	5.2	Morocco	3,177	5.3	Morocco	6,167	6.8
7	South Africa	480	3.4	Ethiopia	1,033	3.5	Ethiopia	1,282	2.1	Senegal	3,921	4.3
8	Ethiopia	400	2.8	Sudan	790	2.7	Senegal	1,184	2.0	Guinea	2,896	3.2
9	Sierra Leone	360	2.5	Senegal	789	2.7	Sierra Leone	1,076	1.8	Liberia	2,463	2.7
10	Tunisia	240	1.7	South Africa	694	2.4	South Africa	1,055	1.7	Ethiopia	1,421	1.6
	All Other	1,680	11.8	All Other	3,825	13.1	All Other	1,901	3.1	All Other	6,915	7.7
<b>Total</b>		<b>14,280</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>29,200</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>60,413</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>90,179</b>	<b>100</b>

Data: IPUMS

2000 Census				
Rank	City	N	%	Top Countries Of Origin
1	New York, NY	60,413	10.6	Nigeria, Africa NS, Ghana, Egypt
2	Los Angeles, CA	13,312	2.3	Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria, S Africa
3	Minneapolis, MN	10,082	1.8	Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia
4	Chicago, IL	9,822	1.7	Nigeria, Ghana, Africa NS, Egypt
5	Philadelphia, PA	6,756	1.2	Africa NS, Liberia, Nigeria, Egypt
6	Washington, DC	6,591	1.2	Ethiopia, Nigeria, Africa NS, Sierra Leone
7	Jersey City, NJ	6,267	1.1	Egypt, Kenya, Africa NS, Ethiopia
8	Boston, MA	5,616	1.0	Nigeria, Somalia, Africa NS, Sierra Leone
9	Alexandria, VA	5,509	1.0	Ethiopia, Ghana, Sierra Leone
10	Seattle, WA	5,223	0.9	Ethiopia, Eritrea, Africa NS, Somalia
	All Other*	441,146	77.3	
		<b>570,737</b>	<b>100</b>	
2007 ACS				
Rank	City	N	%	
1	New York, NY	90,179	8.8	Country of origin NA for 2007
2	Chicago, IL	16,748	1.6	
3	Minneapolis, MN	15,783	1.5	
4	Los Angeles, CA	14,068	1.4	
5	Philadelphia, PA	11,858	1.2	
6	Alexandria, VA	11,031	1.1	
7	Seattle, WA	10,079	1.0	
8	Boston, MA	7,913	0.8	
9	Newark, NJ	7,428	0.7	
10	Washington, DC	7,177	0.7	
	All Other*	831,099	81.2	
		<b>1,023,363</b>	<b>100</b>	

Data: IPUMS

\* Includes all other cities, as well as not in identifiable cities.

(Reed and Andrzejewski, 2013, p. 4)

## **Educational Attainment of African Immigrants**

When asked why they chose to immigrate their family to the United States, my parents said they wanted their children to receive a good education. This to my parents was the American Dream, one of educational attainment and success as well as prosperity. For many African immigrants who bring their children to the US it is due to this dream as well. Other immigrant families or person(s) have other reasons for immigrating to the US. One of my narrators, Nikki, explains, “my dad moved because of a job after getting a promotion from being a regional director of a company in an African country” and moved the rest of the family after he settled in the US. While Zebra described:

“The plan was to go to school in the US and go back to Eritrea. My dad wanted to train in the US to be whatever the country needed like studying agriculture or to be a pilot but he finally settled with what he want to do, business. Unfortunately, in the 80’s there was a famine and war, which led him to stay here in the US.”

The example shared by Nikki shows a widely untold story of African immigrants moving to the US for reasons related to leadership roles that they already hold in their respective countries and positions in the US that work to continue their roles in the development of the African continent. Zebra describes a similar commitment to development from her father. In this case, her father did not have a leadership position within an African country in terms of government or non-governmental agencies. Instead, her father was trying to become educated in the US so that he could go back to Eritrea to assist in its development but the occurrence of war and famine led to him and his family being in the US since 1974. The engagement in international affairs has followed the daughters of these two men. Zebra graduated with a BA in International Affairs and Economics because she wanted to

“Study something that taught me more about the world and how different systems are connected and how my identity as an African connected to my identity as an American. Also, to learn about issues related to the “Global North and Global South” and [teasing

out] what development means. Economics was something that tied into the development literature that I read.”

While Nikki says that,

“I am majoring in Sociology and minoring in Political Science. My dad chose my major. I wanted to be a history major because I wanted to go straight into law school but my dad thought Sociology would be a better route. Also, I saw that people who went into social justice type law like immigration, international or human rights law had Sociology degrees. I like it now. Political Science allows you to understand a system and then politically analyze those systems; it is one thing to critique a system and another to understand why I am critiquing it.”

Zebra, a college graduate within the past year and someone who was born in the US and went back to Eritrea to visit while a freshman in College (2<sup>nd</sup> generation African immigrant), and Nikki who was born in Sierra Leone and spent some time in another African country and then grew up in the US (1.5 generation African immigrant), share a similar passion of understanding systems of oppression in relation to their identities and to their education in the US and that of their parents educational backgrounds.

However, literature on the educational experiences of immigrants indicates that it is hard for them to achieve due to tensions between socio-cultural identities as immigrants in the US and the ethnocentric nature of cultural norms and expectations in American schools (Lee, 2005). Also, many distinguish between first and second-generation students, calling first generation immigrants more successful than second-generation immigrants (Lee, 2005). Contrary to these literatures, African immigrants do better academically than other foreign populations and African-Americans. As it stands, according to, the 2000 census, “Africans composed the most highly educated group in the country, surpassing White Americans, Asians, and Latinos” (Halter and Johnson, 2014, p. 213). Though, the comparison in achievement outcomes between African immigrants and African Americans are sometimes problematic, as they are not always grounded in critical understandings about the distinct challenges facing the two groups.

Research investigating the over policing of Black girls, which was conducted by Kimberle Crenshaw, who coined the term intersectionality, Priscilla Ocen, and Jyoti Nanda reveal that Black girls are ten to twelve times more likely in Boston and New York respectively to be suspended than white girls and five to 7.4 times more likely to be suspended than black boys (2015). Unfortunately, the study does not define its Black girls population, whether it consists of Black immigrants or not. Although, the study shows that with more enforcement and zero-tolerance policies placed on Black girls, there is a “school to prison pipeline.” Girls in the study explain being blamed for being harassed or bullied by boys but when they tell their teachers or other educators within the school about their dilemmas, they are accused of being the cause of the harassment and bullying. They are accused of being hypersexual because of the way that they dress or due to them being pregnant, if that is the case.

What is not understood though by those doing the policing is that black girls and women have controlling images of a sapphires, jezebels, matriarchs, and welfare queens that are institutionally placed on them. Sapphires are emasculating, sassy neck twisting black girls and women while jezebels are seen as hypersexual (Williams, 2015). Matriarchs are working class single mothers who yell at their “baby daddies,” and welfare queens are single mothers with a lot of kids and they abuse social programs from the government (Williams, 2015). All of these controlling images are ones that can be seen on television or movies, which in turn places these definitions onto black girls and women.

Black girls and women are too often objectified and put on exhibit for the pleasure of others therefore making it important for them to analyze their own identities and self-define. In addition, black girls and women are over policed and at risk of the “school to prison pipeline” because of expectations they face at home to perform domestic duties: to clean, to take care of

their siblings, and etc. which can make them late to school or miss certain days. This may not be just because of family expectations but also institutional problems related to income, job loss, lack of adequate health care for parents to take care of their kids so the daughter is expected to perform the duties of the mother. These pressures can be heightened if the girls or women are the oldest and they have a single parent, and even more heightened for African immigrants.

African immigrant women face cultural expectations to perform these duties, along with controlling images in US society, the pressures to achieve in school and prove that as a woman they can accomplish the wishes and dreams of their parents in the US and families in their respective countries. Ama, Angola, and Hope are the oldest in their families so they face the pressures from their parents and abroad even more, they have to be an example for their siblings. Butcher 1994, Farley and Walter (1989, 1991) state “although some anticipated they would be less successful in the US schools because they faced the double barriers of xenophobia and racism, others have regarded them as a “black success story” in a racially segregated society.” What this paper tries to add to this is that for African immigrant girls and women, they face sexism as well.

Even with these multiple identities and challenges, Halter and Johnson (2014) explain that African immigrants high academic performance is a result of the belief that “work is the medicine for poverty.” Many students want to achieve because of a belief that academic success translates into financial prosperity for themselves and their family, ultimately leading to a better life. This goes back to the idea of the American Dream. The chart below (Figure 6) gives a visual understanding of the educational attainment of African immigrants. Egyptians’ educational attainment is 4.9 percent less than a high school education, 31.2 percent of Egyptians are high school graduates or have received some college education, and 63.9 percent receive bachelor’s

degrees or higher. For Somalians, 39.5 percent of them have received education that is less than high school level, 48.0 percent of them have graduated from high school or have received some college education and 12.5 percent of them have received a bachelor's degree or higher.

Compared to other foreign born populations, 11.9 percent of African born students have less than a high school education compared to 31.5 percent of all foreign born students, 46.6 percent have graduated from high school or have some college compared to 40.9 percent of all foreign born students, and 41.5 percent receive a bachelors degree or higher compared to 27.6 percent of all foreign born immigrant students. These figures are from Figure 6 and were taken between 2008-2012. The educational attainment of African born immigrant students is dependent on their country of origin, the economic and political well being of the country as shown by Figure 6. The political and economic well being of Somalia illustrates why the number of people who immigrant to the US with less than a high school education are higher than other countries. Therefore, in having to deal with the background of their country of origin, their family and their own educational background, racism, controlling images, sexism, family expectations, and xenophobia, students still find a way to overcome these obstacles.

However, the celebrated performance of first generation African immigrants, as stated by Halter and Johnson (2014) and Lee (2005) does not always translate into the same success for second-generation African immigrants. Halter and Johnson (2014) believe that there is a "stratified second generation decline, whereby the children of recent immigrants who are largely racialized as nonwhite often face downward mobility and limited opportunities for advancement" (p. 215). Lee (2005) has similar findings although concluding that academic achievement among immigrant students is dependent on the student's socio-cultural experience at home and within his or her school setting. This is also dependent on what route of acculturation or enculturation

the student takes and what they choose to negotiate. “Acculturation” is defined by Webster dictionary as the process of someone from one cultural group adapting to or borrowing the beliefs or traits of another cultural group. “Enculturation” is defined by the same dictionary as a person who learns the “traditional content of a culture and assimilates its practices and values.”

Halter, Johnson and Lee view first generation immigrant students as those who participate in the enculturation process since they find that they tend to speak the native language and are more willing to follow cultural values and expectations. Second generation immigrant students are expected to follow the process of acculturation since they may try to assimilate more and may choose not to listen to cultural expectations of their parents and may be monolingual (Lee 2005). The second-generation immigrant students’ willingness to assimilate is associated by his or her parents as being negative and associated with that of being an African American.

The competing classifications of self-identifying as African but African American by US society, images of Blackness on TV, and the racialized history of the US causes many African parents to associate bad traits with African Americans. This is also related to their exclusion within history education in schools and on TV therefore separating themselves to receive recognition as being African. Ama, a first generation/ 1.5-generation Ghanaian student, when asked if she ever felt embarrassed about her identity and that of her parents, and if she had ever been told that she was acting white, she replied by firmly stating

“Never. I tell people that they are acting white like my African friends because they do stuff here that they wouldn’t do in Africa. They try to deny some parts of their culture like their language by not speaking it in public, they respond back to me in English.”

Thus second-generation and third-generation students, especially, are pressured by their parents to maintain cultural ties to combat definitions of Blackness by US society. First generation students tend to pressure themselves to maintain cultural ties and in many cases pressure their

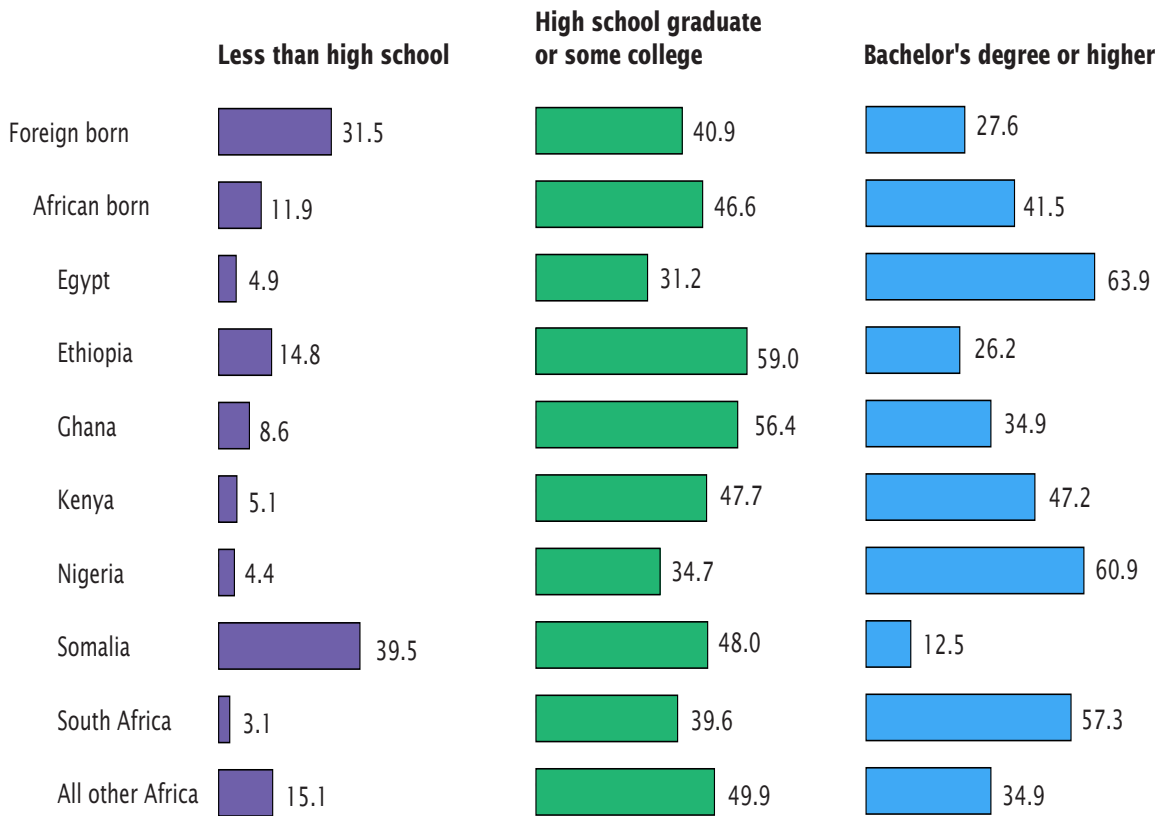
peers to abide by the same expectations. This pressure is not only about combating definitions of Blackness in the US but also stereotypes about being “American or Americanized,” which comes from their respective communities.



Figure 6.

**Educational Attainment of the Foreign-Born Population From Africa by Selected Country of Birth: 2008–2012**

(Percentage distribution of the population 25 and older. Percents may not add to 100 due to rounding. Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/acs/www](http://www.census.gov/acs/www))



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008–2012 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates.

## **The Misrecognition of African Immigrants**

In 2008, the United States of America elected President Barack Obama, a president who is half white and half black/ African descent (Kenyan). Then in 2014, President Obama established the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI). This initiative works to invest in the leadership potential of young Africans in Africa as “nearly 1 in 3 Africans are between the ages of 10 and 24, and approximately 60 percent of Africa’s total population is below the age of 35” (YALI). The program also has a fellowship component, the Mandela Washington Fellowship, which brings 500 25-35 year old leaders from different African countries to receive leadership training at different universities and colleges in the areas of business, entrepreneurship, civic engagement and public administration (YALI). Participants and advocates of the program have described it as an amazing opportunity for many Africans on the continent.

While the program is a success for these participants, what many fail to realize, including President Obama, is that there are African immigrants in the United States who are first and/or second-generation students who would also like to participate in the development of the respective countries that they come from. Mahra aspires to use her schooling and experiences in the US to build a school in Ghana. She says that she pursued her major, accounting, and certificate, entrepreneurship, in order to have “more knowledge and insight into my dream of building a school in Ghana and using my experiences in the US and that of my culture to share with students in Ghana...I just want a degree so that I can go back honestly.” By not including Mahra and those like her in the development of the continent of Africa, we exclude their experiences and identities as many identify as African or in Mahra’s case Ghanaian.

This exclusion of African immigrants is based on assumptions that their educational goals and future leadership roles are limited to national issues within the US rather than transnational, extending across the Atlantic to the continent of Africa. Some of the reasons for this are

inadequate research in the African immigrant youth population in the United States, and their unrecognized and misrecognized identities. Their educational success and privileges in the US could contribute to the development of the continent of Africa. In order to understand or know what this potential could be, this paper tries to understand the identity development and career goals of college-going and recent college graduate first and second-generation African immigrant women in the United States.

This is extremely important because these students have cross-cultural experiences and perspectives that make them unique in a global economy. Furthermore, living in a racialized society, once migrating to the US, African immigrants become Blacks in America. The definitions of Blackness in the US are then placed on them. Therefore, Africans not only face these new definitions but they also face controlling images that many African American girls and women face. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explains this transformation in one's identity in her excerpt *To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America, You are Black, Baby* from her book *Americanah*:

“Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I’m Jamaican or I’m Ghanaian. America doesn’t care. So what if you weren’t “black” in your country? You’re in America now. We all have our moments of initiation into the Society of Former Negroes. Mine was in a class in undergrad when I was asked to give the black perspective, only I had no idea what that was. So I just made something up. And admit it- you say “I’m not black” only because you know that black is at the bottom of America’s race ladder. And you want none of that...So you are black, baby. You must show that you are offended when such words such as “watermelon” or “tar baby” are used in jokes, even if you don’t know what the hell is being talked about- and since you are non-American Black, the chances are that you won’t know...In describing black women you admire, always use the word STRONG because that is what black women are supposed to be in America. If you are a woman, please do not speak your mind as you are used to doing in your country. Because in America, strong-minded black women are SCARY” (2014, p. 222, 223).

In having to deal with their new identities as immigrants, foreigners in another country, African immigrant women have to deal with a new identity, being a black woman in America,

and have to face the implications of having that classification placed on them. This forced classification is present as stated by many of my narrators, in census forms that ask them what ethnicity or race they identify with. For a non-American Black, the choices are Black/African American, non-Hispanic, or other. When asked if she had ever been classified as an African American, Ama, a student from Ghana explains, “Yes, especially when you are filling forms out. I just want to be called African and not African American because it makes me feel more proud of my continent. I have been classified as Black American and African American.” By being called African American, Ama feels as though her identity is being taken from her, which takes away any power of self- definition.

Obama’s initiative, YALI, and its misrecognition of Africans in the United States does the same thing as it disregards their self identification of being African. Census forms, and the lack of distinction of the historical and social difference between African Americans and Black immigrants from other countries silences them and their experiences. Not surprising, though, since US history has depended on this white and black American dichotomy in defining superiority and inferiority, good and bad, etc. Exemplified in the history classes taught in schools, images of African Americans on TV, and so forth shows this institutionalized definition of who is Black. Unfortunately, for many Black immigrants, African immigrants who come to the US, their stories of voluntary migration, linguistic difference, and history counter the institutionalized stories of Blackness in America.

These definitions of Blackness challenge the identities of African immigrant women further as their definitions of blackness and girlhood or womanhood is also being challenged. They are challenged by expectations of women of color, specifically Black women in the US, as well as by their own cultural backgrounds to not conform to the expectations or stereotypes of

Black women. To show his disappointment of me in not doing the expected duties of a woman in my Guinean culture of cooking and cleaning, or my lack of respect for him when I talked back to him, my father would tell me that my attitude is that of an African American and that if I did not stop to listen to him, I would end up being a hoe out in the streets. He equated my actions of not doing chores and not listening to him as something that African American children would do, which to him would result in a downhill spiral causing me to become a jezebel or any other bad thing that he had heard about African American women. As an African immigrant woman, Guinean in the US, I, along with many other women who identify as African and a woman, have to negotiate our identities while in different spaces. We are challenging existing patriarchal hegemonies operating both in the United States and within African countries while facing institutional systems of racial oppression in the US, which reflects how we shape and are shaped by migration (Abiodun, 2012).

Accordingly, this paper tries to understand how African immigrant women in higher education have adapted to living in the United States and how their educational experiences shape what type of person and leader that they have become or want to become. Education is referred to as schooling and education received in other spaces such as their own communities and homes. This paper uses in depth interviews with seven African immigrant women who are or have recently attended a large, predominantly White, public university in the Mid-west. The paper uses acculturation theories on identity development of first and second-generation immigrants in relation to their educational experiences in the United States. This thesis paper also uses critical theories related to race and gender to understand the intersectional identities of African immigrant women and their negotiations with structural forces of racism and gender oppression, as well as the socio-cultural dimensions of identity development, family expectations,

and educational opportunity. These theories and frameworks are used because they allow me to examine immigration, nationality, race, and gender from perspectives that are not merely written by white men and/or white women authors. This allows for more transparency as the stories of people of color have been mostly told from a white lens. In addition, these different frameworks are more inclusive of the different identities that African immigrant women hold.

Research Question (s):

1. What cultural expectations do African immigrant women face at home with their families in the US and what expectations do they face within other educational spaces? How have they dealt with these expectations?
  - a. Do African immigrant women demonstrate ‘cultural straddling’ as an adaptive strategy for negotiating different social and cultural contexts and expectations?
  - b. Likewise, have African immigrant women demonstrated ‘cultural conformity’ or ‘cultural resistance’ in various domains and aspects of their lives? How do they make these decisions?
  
2. Do their experiences in different educational spaces enable them to become servant and/or transnational leaders?
  - a. While and after college, how do the cultural and social identities of African immigrant women make them more or less competent for cross-cultural, servant, and transnational leadership roles?

This thesis paper and its findings will contribute to theories on identity development, immigration and leadership, providing educators and policy makers with a better understanding of African immigrant student populations, specifically African immigrant women, which are disregarded for the most part. Issues of self-definition are sometimes tough when the people around you don’t understand it (Williams, 2015).

## **Methodology**

To understand what some of these issues related to identity development and leadership among African immigrant women may be, I conducted seven in depth qualitative interviews and participant observations within two months after receiving approval from an Institutional Review Board (IRB). All participants identified as African immigrant women in order to participate in

the study and were attending college or had graduated from college within the past year. For the purposes of this research, the interviewees or participants are described as narrators so that their stories and experiences are given more validity (Potter, 2014). The narrators who participated in this research of African immigrant women and their socio-cultural identities in the US educational system were selected through the recruitment of students at large, predominantly white, public university in the Mid-West that had African student involvement as well as chosen for convenience and from a snowball sample. A copy of the email sent in the recruitment process is attached on page 92.

Before interviewing the interested narrators, I had them sign a consent form, which is attached on page 93, and let them know that I would be using two to three recorders to interview them. This was explained to them as being a tool that would allow me to listen closely to what they had to say as well as take notes, and have something to use to transcribe their responses. I also advised the narrators that the recordings would not be listened to by anyone other than my thesis advisor and myself. To keep their identities hidden further, I have used pseudonyms in this thesis paper and when discussing my narrators with my thesis advisor or anyone else. Interviews were done in person at locations convenient to the narrators as well as on Skype because of time constraints and conflicts of availability.

These questions related to their socio-cultural identities, acculturation/ enculturation, and potential leadership on their respective campuses. I would ask the narrators a question on the questionnaire and they would answer them making sure to speak loud enough for the recorder. In addition, all interviews were one on one besides two, Angola and Mahra. I wanted to do an interview with all seven women together but there were schedule conflicts. Besides one narrator, Star, all participants attended the same university. After completing the interviews, I re-listened

to the interviews on my recorders and transcribed them. After transcribing them, I coded my transcriptions into colors that showed commonalities and differences between the narrators.

Then I interpreted the coded commonalities and differences fully in order to inform my writing phase and to answer my research questions. Some of the limitations associated with this study were time/ schedule conflicts related to class and work schedules, and US holiday breaks in which many students left their campus to go home for break. Another limitation in relation to time was that depending on the narrator, some took longer to answer questions therefore leading me to eliminate some questions and focus on those that would be important within an hour or hour and a half time limit.

The next time that I conduct research, I will keep these things in mind as well as remember that for some of my participants, language barriers and the wording of some of my questions required me to explain the meaning of some of the questions on my questionnaire. Not being able to interview more African immigrant women and those from multiple campuses created some issues because I believe that being on a predominantly white campus with a lower number of African students allowed for many similarities when coding. This makes me wonder what results I would have gotten on a campus where there was more African students or at a university in the northeast, like New York, where there is a bigger African population.



The following is a profile of the women who narrated their lived experiences about race, racism, gender, sexism, ethnicity, intersectionality, nationality and acculturation/ enculturation within the US educational system:

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Ama</b>	<b>Angola</b>	<b>Mahra</b>	<b>Hope</b>	<b>Zebra</b>	<b>Star</b>	<b>Nikki</b>
<b>Educational Level:</b>	College Sophomore	College Junior	College Senior, Fifth Year	College Graduate	College Graduate	College Freshman	College Senior, Graduating within 3 years
<b>Gender:</b>	Woman Identified	Woman Identified	Woman Identified	Woman Identified	Woman Identified	Woman Identified	Woman Identified
<b>Age/ Sibling Order</b>	19 years of age, Oldest out of siblings	20 years of age, Oldest out of siblings	22 years of age, Second oldest out of siblings	22 years of age, Oldest out of siblings	22 years of age, Second Oldest out of Siblings	19 years of age, Youngest out of siblings	21 years of age, Youngest out of siblings
<b>Immigrant Background:</b>	Ghanaian	Nigerian	Ghanaian	Ghanaian	Eritrean	Ethiopian	Sierra Leonean
<b>Immigrant Status</b>	1.5 Generation	1.5 Generation	1.5 Generation	1.5 Generation	2 <sup>nd</sup> Generation, Born in the US	1.5 Generation	1.5 Generation

## Findings

### Lessons in Education, Immigration, and Intersectionality

*“Race is not the problem, we give value to different types of races” –Bianca Williams*

*“Social responses to new immigrant groups are a major determinant of the future of race relations” –Rong and Preissle (1998, p. 8)*

Their lived experiences teach us about race and immigration in the United States. Immigrant students have a racialized experience in schools and in society in general in the United States. Stacey J. Lee’s Up Against Whiteness: Race, School, and Immigrant Youth thoroughly explains this. She examines first and second generation Hmong American high school students who experience racialization once coming to the United States. This can be applied to African immigrant youth as well. Lee finds that immigrant youth have to negotiate their identities in schools. The US schooling system “has strongly rejected conserving and maintaining the native language and cultural values of immigrant children” (Rong and Preissle, 1998, p. 12). There is an attempt to assimilate immigrant students once they enroll in US schools. Zebra describes having to take ESL classes, which has caused her to no longer have her ethnic accent, which relates to her ethnic identity.

In addition, schools are where students receive “lessons about race- what is said as well as what is not said- stature school policies, curricula, and interactions with peers and teachers” (Lee, 2005, p. 2). Initially unaware, fully, of the racial tensions and the history that exists in society between the black and white dichotomies, immigrant youth have to negotiate their identities while at school. When asked if she has ever been classified as African American, Angola, a 1.5 generation immigrant student from Nigeria, explains,

“Yes. That is what people see and assume until they take the time to know me because once they do they will hear me talking about my ethnic or immigrant background. I think

that sheets that make us check a box... that shouldn't even happen. We should have one box and a line next to it so that it is more inclusive especially to those who are multiracial. It is not fair to make them choose which **one** identity that they identify with more."

Angola's statement shows that there are different values placed on races, which allows for census data to only have certain ethnic groups specifically recognized while others are clumped into one classification. Within this exists a racial hierarchy in which whites are at the top and blacks at the bottom.

There is a problem with the black and white dichotomy when defining whiteness or blackness. Blackness is associated with anything bad and poor while whiteness is associated with anything good and wealthy. This can be illustrated through the representation of Black people in the US through Blackface in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the negative depictions of Blacks on TV, playing roles of thugs, maids, or helpless only to have a white person save them. Foreigners may not fit in either category and may choose to embrace whiteness since it is seen as being better but that does not mean that they are seen by society as having whiteness. If they are considered to have some traits or positive stereotypes related to whiteness, African immigrants have to drop any negative stereotypes related to blackness and vice versa. For instance, Angola, says that in

"Elementary, middle, and high school [with her Black American friends] I felt like I had to drop my identity and pick up a new one. This is the same thing that I had felt when I was with my white friends. I couldn't be authentically me because I wasn't welcomed. I had to put on my Blackness- put on black stereotypes [with my black friends]. I still have to do that sometimes in college though not as much."

Sometimes she would be told that she was "acting white" when with her black friends and seen as showing traits of whiteness, good stereotypes which to her black friends had been institutionally taught as being traits foreign to them:

"People would say that you don't act black like...you know. For example, after one of my white friends in high school said that they didn't like black people I said what? They replied by saying that I wasn't black, I didn't act black I acted white. I felt uncomfortable but didn't know what to say back."

The identities of African immigrant students are sometimes negotiated for them dependent on the racial constructs in society.

Stacey Lee (2005) explains that immigration is socially and racially constructed, and has been redefined over and over again in the United States to oppress white and non-white communities. Educational philosopher Ellwood Cubberley (1909) believed that “Americanization required breaking up immigrant groups or settlements, assimilating and amalgating these peoples as part of an American “race,” and implanting their children in the Anglo-Saxon conceptions of righteousness, law and order, public decency, and popular government” (Rong and Preissle, p. 12). This was done with forced migration and enslavement of Africans as there was a new race creating within America, African American or the “Black” race, which caused many enslaved Africans to lose their culture and history, which has caused separation between African Americans and Africans. With this separation, racial and social construction working against Black immigrants, particularly African immigrants, and their educational attainment are not highly looked upon.

Although many first and second generation Africans are achieving at higher rates than their other foreign counterparts, they are not considered a “model minority,” which brings back in the racialization of blacks (Rong and Preissle, 1998, p. 132). Their association with Blackness makes them unworthy of praise, which is different from Asian immigrant students who receive this stereotype. “Hmong American students are identified as culturally different and therefore not American (i.e., foreign) or seen as Americanizing in bad and dangerous ways (i.e., blackened)” (Lee, 2005, p. 7). Africans are not fully seen by whites as culturally different, but are rather immediately blackened nonetheless because of definitions of Blackness, while simultaneously seen as foreign by other blacks (e.g. African-Americans), therefore not fully American. As

explained above, Angola has to “act black” and disregard her ethnic identity in order to fit in with Black Americans and vice versa in order to interact to White Americans. These contradictions represent distinct processes of racialization and assimilation to which African immigrants respond in different, yet not fully examined ways.

### **Critical Theories on Identity Development**

Some of the assimilation theories associated with the identity development of immigrant students are the following (Lee, 2005, p. 8,9,10):

1. A linear path from foreign/ immigrant to mainstream American - the rejection of native cultures for the “American culture” (white, middle class culture)
2. Cultural assimilation- understood to be a prerequisite for socioeconomic assimilation, social mobility, and the successful achievement of the American Dream.
3. Segmented Assimilation- attributed to those who practice selective acculturation.

These theories of assimilation by Lee are similar with that of Prudence L. Carter’s theories on how Black students respond to (their blackness/ racialization) in school. In her book, *Keepin’ It Real: School Success Beyond Black and White*, Carter tries to understand the educational gap between white students and ethnic minority students, by examining how “students handle everything from the institutional, the cultural, and the personal when it comes to school attachment” (Carter, 2005, p. 6). These students are Black and Latino (both consisting of different ethnicities/ cultural backgrounds). Carter found that there are three types of students when it comes to how students handle their different cultural identities in relation to their schooling environment. These are cultural mainstreamers, noncompliant believers, and cultural straddlers.

Cultural mainstreamers are those who “reject their co-ethnic peers cultural codes about how to dress and speak, about musical tastes, about racial composition of friendship networks and they rarely [speak] about the political and social experiences of being Black or Latino” (Carter, 2005, p. 32). This aligns with Lee’s definition of a linear path to assimilation. In contrast,

noncompliant believers “struggle with school policies and various social and cultural codes...they create and embrace behaviors that signify their collective racial, ethnic, and gender identities” (Carter, 2005, p. 36). These students want to learn more about their cultural backgrounds, want critical curricula related to their identities and experience in the US, and ultimately yearn to learn about and question any systems that they believe relate to their ethnic experiences in American society:

Question: Did you learn about African History anytime during your education in the US?

“I took an anthropology class that discussed the continent of Africa. There are not a lot of classes because it puts the west in a bad light and a lot of our history has been destroyed, especially during colonization. It was a strategy to wipe out our societies and histories. I want to learn more about the continent and my identity and people.” (Nikki).

“If it was, it was about colonization or anything depressing. I learned more about the history of the state I was in and about European history. When I tried to write about Eritrean history in one of these history classes, I was told that it was a wash I wasn’t going to get anything out of studying that history. That it is pointless. I felt as though my history was pointless. So I took the time to talk to my family, friends, and other resources to learn for myself since I thought it was important.” (Zebra).

Cultural straddlers, though, “negotiate both the social and academic demands of school, balancing the expectations of teachers, parents and peers...they tend to be bicultural and bilingual, if not multiskilled in these areas” (Carter, 2005, p.38). These students are able to play a balancing act as well as code switch, dependent on the context (friends ethnic backgrounds, school, teachers, parents, etc.) they can change their language and behavior to fit their environment. Carter also says “many accommodating believers [cultural straddlers] are college-bound and headed toward the middle class” (Carter, 2005, p. 39). Lee’s definition of selective acculturation/ segmented assimilation aligns with that of Carter’s definition of cultural straddlers. Selective acculturation (Lee, 2005) is when a student learns and accepts their culture while learning the culture of America. These students are described as being more successful than students who choose other routes of assimilation or identity development:

“Children who learn the language and culture of their new country without losing those of the old have a much better understanding of their place in the world. They need not clash with their parents as often or feel embarrassed by them because they are able to bridge the gap across generations and value their elders’ traditions and goals. Selective acculturation forges an intergenerational alliance for successful adaptation that is absent among youths who have severed bonds with their past in the pursuit of acceptance by their native peers” (2005, p. 274).

This process of acculturation or identity development leads to a good (traditional) or bad (Americanized) dichotomy within the communities of immigrant youth. Immigrant youth who are first generation/ 1.5-generation immigrant students are expected to be the bridge for their parents, and second-generation siblings. For instance, when describing to my younger siblings why they are in trouble with my parents for something that is fine with their American friends parent’s I have to also speak with my mother to explain the generational and cultural disconnect.

Nikki states that when facing micro-aggression related to being an African woman in school:

“My parents did not understand. They told me to brush it off and that I would face bigger challenges. There was kind of a generational disconnect. The micro-aggressions were directed towards my heritage and disrespect towards the continent of Africa. I got called an African booty scratcher, a term I still don’t understand. Asked if everyone in Africa has AIDS, do I know anyone who has an AIDS baby, I was marginalized a lot, even my accent was made fun of. As well as further actions that made me the other. The exotic African girl who was not quite black enough but was definitely not white, and was just her own tribal like monkey girl, my older sister had to speak to my parents about my frustrations with these challenges at school.”

In my own experience, explanations had to be given to me by my brother because even though I understood the cultural and gender rules associated with staying home to take care of my younger siblings while he was outside playing with his friends; I attempted to resist my parents by not doing chores or cooking. These expectations of performing domestic duties while also performing well at school were highly enforced. When not followed, I was considered an Americanized kid by my parents.

### **Categories of Traditional and Americanized Students**

Traditional youth are the ones who have preserved their culture and considered by most of their community members as the “good” kids. They are considered part of the 1.5 generation. This is the generation that “could be found sitting with other foreign born” students who they know from other ESL classes or other classes that they have together. They have a dual frame of reference due to their attachment to their culture and experiences in their native country and assert that there are more educational opportunities in the US. They speak formal English and can be heard switching back and forth from English to their native language(s). For these students, having signs like English only or being put down for speaking their language is very upsetting since they want to be able to utilize all of their identities. They also link social mobility to education by aspiring to attend higher education after high school, as they believe that attaining an American education will lead to ascending the socioeconomic ladder of the American society (Lee, 2005, p. 60).

Their aspirations also come from them feeling obligated to repay their parents for the sacrifices that they have made for them by being in the United States. This sacrifice and dedication to the education of their children is very important as they are, in some cases, the first generation to attend college. For example, my own mother and father, although having better occupations and pay than most of their peers decided to leave the land that they knew, the family that they could count on in order for my siblings and I to gain an education that would assist us in surpassing their accomplishments in Guinea. Although I keep these sacrifices in mind and work to make myself, my parents, my family, and country of origin proud, it is important to note that like many other immigrant children, I understood that racialized tensions as well as cultural differences that exist in the United States make it hard to meet these expectations.



Students and their parents adjust to living in a new culture by adhering to some cultural adjustments- the education of girls and women- though they have to continue to be the carriers and protectors of their cultures. Cultural difference though are sometimes due to cultural expectations of some girls and women in many developing countries to cook and clean as well as the lack of financial resources to send both boys and girls to school. Boys are more respected, culturally, in many countries, therefore more likely to attend school than girls. Ama, one of my narrators states:

“Back home (Ghana) you [girls and women] have to work harder and have more expectations and discipline. Before going to school you have to make sure that you wake up early, clean the house before school and cook after you come back. They are the backbone; there would be more peace if African women ruled.”

While in the US, legislation like No Child Left Behind requires all children, boys/ men or girls/ women, to be in school. Public schools, and not having to pay for them is also a factor. Therefore this new privilege that girls and women have in terms of being educated is something that many immigrant parents accept but some still require their daughters to adhere to the cultural norms of cooking, cleaning, and so forth. This can also contribute to the “school to prison pipeline” for black girls as these expectations may conflict with their schooling. We won’t know the impacts that this has on African immigrant women specifically unless investigated, there needs to be research on this. Traditional students are said to adhere to cultural norms but also at times question it as well (Lee, 2005). Students who are traditional, are hybrids of the two cultures, while at times resisting the thoughts of both cultures ideologies about marriage, child bearing, gender roles, etc. (Lee 2005). For example, Zebra explains,

“As a [woman] in the US you are expected to be equal to men even though in a paradoxical way they are earning more than the [woman] but [women] have an opportunity to apply to different jobs. But then you may have to juggle motherhood and a job; so a lot of pros and cons. Back home (Eritrea), household rules are very gendered and occupations are very gender specific. Rape, Abuse, and violence are normalized. A [woman] having less education than the men is normalized. Although women have been

an important part of history because when Eritrea was fighting for its independence, women were also at the front lines. A lot of kids were born in the trenches and were named freedom because of that. Everyone was recruited to bear the price of freedom.”

With this understanding of cultural expectations related to gender roles in the US and back in Eritrea, Zebra has constructed her own roles and expectations. She graduated from her respective college within the past year, is completing an internship with a multinational organization, and is focusing on her aspirations in relation to Eritrean challenges or forms of oppression in the US and abroad before embarking on the path of marriage and motherhood. Zebra is a second generation Eritrean but does not display the stereotypes of second-generation immigrant students.

Americanized/ second generation youth are the ones who have “lost their culture” and turned into “bad” kids. (Lee, 2005, p. 50). Students are trying to distance themselves from their culture so that they can assimilate into American society. They are more comfortable speaking English than their native language, listen to “American” music: Hip Hop, and etc. while disregarding their own cultural aspects. Still, they face judgment, racialization, and prejudice from both non-white and white peers, as disregarding one identity does not mean fitting into the other. This can lead to internalized oppression or racism as the students do not like who they are culturally and do their best to change any identifiers that might associate them with a ‘foreign’ culture. For instance, straightening one's hair so that it is not associated with being African or African American so that it is acceptable to one's white peers. Another example would be talking negatively about those in your cultural group to non-African or foreign peers in order to disassociate from them.

Americanized students may express high expectations about their own education but the need to assimilate into society may counter this expression because they spend more time trying

to fit in (change of clothing, extracurricular activities, and so on). Significantly, “second generation youth appear to have more difficulty acquiring academic English than their 1.5 peers. while traditional students can rely on their native-language skills to learn English, most Americanized students possess relatively weak native language skills” (Lee, 2005, p. 76). Speaking a different language and using that to assist one in learning English can be helpful but for many Americanized students, they try to hide the fact that they may know another language. To assist these Americanized second generation students in achieving in schools Lee states that this calls for culturally relevant pedagogy and “teachers who care”. Americanized youth cannot relate to the curriculum that is being taught to them by teachers. They are unaware of their own cultures and history, forcing them to Americanize or assimilate into the group(s) that they learn about in school. “Many Americanized students fail to see how academic subjects will help them get work” (Lee, 2005, p. 81). The motivation to achieve in school is not the same for traditional and Americanized students, which impacts their academic achievements.

These students experience intergenerational conflicts at home as their parents may only speak the native language while the students are more fluent in English. “Americanized youths understandings of what it mean to be [an immigrant] in the United States are informed by their relationships with their parents, and their marginalized positions in school and the larger society” (p. 84). There is segregation/ division between the two groups because traditional youth who preserve their culture are seen negatively by their Americanized peers and vice versa. An example of this would be students who are taking ESL classes and are seen as the other by their American peers and “Americanized” peers. Both groups are negotiating some parts of their identity in response to their experiences at home, school, and larger society. Each group defines what it means to be American in the United States as an immigrant student or student with

immigrant parents. Immigrant parents want their students to achieve in school while also preserving their culture this is one of the foundations of the divide between traditional and Americanized students. Due to this, immigrant students construct identities against each other.

### **Messages About Gender and Gendered Bias**

There are dominant definitions of masculinity and femininity in the American culture and that of the students' cultures. In the United States, there are intersectionalities of gender, class, nationality, and race. Correspondingly, "the very definition of a woman has been tied to whiteness" (Espiritu, 2000). While White middle-class women were seen as being pure, women of color were characterized as immoral (Espiritu, 2000). Thus, the identity of White middle-class women was constructed in opposition to the identities of women of color as "the ideal [woman] is White, middle-class, able bodied, Christian, and heterosexual" in US society (Espiritu, 2000, p. 89). To continue, controlling images of Black women being mammies, matriarchs, welfare queen, and jezebel are also associated with Black African immigrants.

Therefore, portrayed as fat asexual domestic workers, a woman who challenges patriarchal power and is not submissive, and a woman who is dependent on the government for support for her kids, and/ or a sexual or exotic being (Collins, 2008). These controlling images of African American women due to the racialized history of the US are also associated with African women, which lead to intersectional oppressions of gender by US society and their own cultures. In turn causing them to shift by negotiating certain identities within different contexts. Shifting is defined by Charisse Jones and Dr. Kumea Shorter- Gooden as the "pressure for Black women to compromise their true selves as they navigate America's racial and gender bigotry...they modify their speech...or they alter their outer appearance" (2004). Black women have a double consciousness of who they should be as they shift from one setting to another (Du Bois 1994). African immigrant women, especially those who are first/ 1.5 generation who are cultural

straddlers continuously face this double consciousness. This starts as soon as immigrant students move to the US and learn about its racialized history and meanings of Blackness placed on the.

Zebra describes,

“I thought I was white washed because people would tell me that I wasn’t white that I talked white, had straight hair, I straightened my hair, and wanted to change my middle name to something that was American like Tina. I wanted to hide as much of my identity as I could so that I could assimilate better. I didn’t speak my language in public or want my family to pick me up from school because then everyone would know my real identity.”

This is something that Zebra did until high school, though she embraced her Eritrean identity and cultural expectations when with her family.

Traditional women are more accepting of their parents’ cultural expectations of doing chores and their parents wishes of getting married. Also, traditional women resist cultural messages or expectations from their parents/ community less than Americanized students.

Though, these ideologies about change or resistance can occur dependent on which cultural expectations they confront. In addition, Lee (2005) concludes that Americanized and Traditional students conform more to school rules than Americanized and traditional men students. Nikki points out that there are other instances/settings of difference and tension between men and women:

Question: Is your experience as a woman different from that of African immigrant men? Why?

“Yes. In the US, how we encounter the world is very different. We are black under the law as I said before so black men and are perceived differently. For instance, in terms of police brutality, black men, even though black women experience it too, are over represented in prison and there are expectations of black masculinity placed on them such as providing for their families. Therefore, when we talk about blocked opportunities for black men or African men, we talk about tensions between the relationships of African immigrant men and women because if the African woman is able to work, in many cases over worked, and the African man feels threatened and may become aggressive.”

This tension that occurs between African men and women are pointed out by some of the other narrators, which can be associated with gender expectations in some of the cultures from the respective countries that the narrators are from and the controlling images of Black women in the US. For example, the Sapphire, a controlling image, describes Black women as emasculating women.

Another critical theory about messages on gender when discussing African immigrant women is Black Feminism. Before concluding my research, I did not have a lot of background on Black Feminism but then after taking a class on it and transcribing my in depth interviews, I realized that it was important when discussing these African 's responses to their intersectional identities of identifying as women, African, identifying with their country of origin, being classified as Black in the US, and their class. After ending my research I found that the resistance, self identification, and survival that occurs among African immigrant women who have all of these different intersectionalities is important when considering them as culturally competent leaders- feminist.

Traditional and Americanized women students construct their own definition of who they are or identify as dependent on which acculturation or identity development route they decide to take. As you will notice in my findings section, some of these African immigrant women “generate a dual consciousness...by...[becoming] familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection” (Collins, 2008, 107). In order to follow the acculturation route of a 1.5 generation immigrant student, some of the African immigrant students who I interviewed chose majors that tried to understand systemic systems in the United States, many related to race and ethnicity, while others looked at systemic oppressions globally. This allows them to understand the world that they live in and to have the

power of self-definition. The importance of self-definition that grabs the attention of many African immigrant women can be exemplified by the following quote from Patricia Hill Collins (2008) book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*: “Daughters of Africa... Awake! Arise! No longer sleep nor slumber, but distinguish yourselves. Show forth to the world that ye are endowed with noble and exalted faculties” (Richardson, 1987, p. 30).

Part of the importance of their self-definition comes from the need to empower themselves because as a 1.5 generation/ traditional student or second generation/ Americanized student, they are unable to do so. By self identifying, they are in a sense surviving their experiences in the US and resisting anything that may oppress one of their intersecting identities whether that is their nationality, race, ethnicity or self identified gender. In order to do this though, as will be shown by the transcripts below and findings section, they need these spaces in the American educational society to define themselves, this could be in their school, at home or society in general. In college, Nikki explains,

“People might know I am different because I now classify myself as an African woman but the term African is strange for me as well. This is because it is also assuming that all Africans are the same so I take it a step further and highlight the fact that I am a Sierra Leonean woman and that Africa is made up of many countries. I explain this to people because now I have the vocabulary and facets to do so.”

Angola also explains that before going to college and learning what her blackness really meant, she did not feel comfortable on campus. She notes “[when you find] a community around you even other communities of color who felt some of the things that you were/ are going through...you are finally able to develop some confidence and resilience. I have to take ownership of my own education even if someone does not think I belong on that campus.” All of my other narrators follow in this route of examination and self-definition. They identify with

their country of origin and gender while some go further and identify with their sexual orientation and ethnicity.

Once in college, as stated by Nikki, they get the vocabulary to empower themselves by having the words needed to self identify and the community to also do so. This can lead to their empowerment as young African immigrant women. As Danait Aregay explains:

“For me the process of identity [development] and the process of self discovery has led to the decolonization of my mind. The relevance of critically examining and unveiling my racial and cultural history in an aim to understand the social context of the current position of my people was a crucial step in figuring out who I am as an individual. As a person with black skin living in a white space, I am realizing the imperativeness of being consciously aware of the messages I receive about myself and how I process that message/ knowledge” (personal communication, 2015).

The lessons that they learn through their experiences of identity development in the US educational system, once in college, leads to an examination of their identities and to examine oppressive systems in the US and abroad, which contributes to them having a transnational view.

### **Critical Theories in Leadership**

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected and more and more political relationships form, there will be, and this is already occurring, a need for culturally competent leaders. Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber in their research paper, *Leadership: Current Theories, Research, and Future Directions*, explain that leadership is evolving due to this interconnectedness. Leadership has moved from just being about white elite men who work in the private sector in the US to leaders from all settings/ contexts, to leaders and followers from different cultures, and those from different countries.

In their paper, Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber argue that leadership has evolved into a relational practice. For many African immigrant women who have learned some of the systems and culture of the US and that of their own, they are at an advantage because they are able to form relationships with those in the US as well as those within their country of origin with less



tension. These 1.5-generation immigrant students speak of using the experiences, relationships formed in the US, experiences abroad, and leadership examples abroad to shape their definition of leadership. Many of them spoke about servant leadership. Servant leadership defined by Carter G. Woodson (1933) in Duncan Okoth-Okombo's book *Challenging the Rulers* (2011) as:

“Unlike the [mis-] leader is not on a high horse elevated above the people and trying to carry them to some designated point to which he [or she] would like to go for his own advantage. The servant [leader] of the people is down among them, living where they live, doing what they do, and enjoying what they enjoy. He [or she] may be a little better informed than some other members of the group; it may be that he [or she] has had some experience that they have not had but in spite of this advantage he [or she] should have more humility than those whom he [or she] serves for we are told that ‘whoever is greatest among you, let him [or her] be your servant’ (39).

This is a term that many of the narrators used when describing what type of leader they are or aspire to become, which were related to their goals of working abroad, particularly on the continent of Africa. As Nikki describes, “a leader is someone who takes the role of being a servant in a community. Leaders are not those who just propel or define a vision for a community or organization, they are the one's who work alongside people to accomplish an equally distributed task.” She also states that it is “a person who is willing to work for others has respect, humility, and values honesty.” All of which are definitions that are extracted from examinations of leadership styles in the US and abroad, in ones respective country. Similarly, Angola explains that, “there are different types of leaders: charismatic, encouragers, servant leaders, and so on. I consider myself a servant leader because I want it to be a communal process.”

By having these definitions, these African immigrant women are transnational in thinking. They are part of the new African diaspora. Sulayman S. Nyang (2011), a professor in the department of Africana Studies at Howard University, argues that the first Africans to voluntarily migrate to the US a hundred years after the civil war were “subjects of ethnic nationalities,

kingdoms, and empires, of the pre-colonial era, their brethren who came here during the last one hundred years arrived as citizens of nations that did not exist in 1619 or 1865” (conclusion).

Now, those who are part of the new African diaspora are transnational, have multiple identities and develop relationships with people of various ethnic backgrounds, even those on the continent of Africa (Nyang, 2011, conclusion). Nyang (2011) believes that if African immigrants are able to play a balancing act with all of the identities that they have, they can “operate meaningfully and effectively anywhere in the global environment” (conclusion).

As first/ 1.5 and second-generation African immigrant women, it is important to be able to shift from one setting to another. This past summer, although difficult at first, I had to shift from being an African immigrant woman in the US to being a woman in Guinea. I integrated myself into the community making sure not to elevate myself in any way, instead learning from the communities and family members that I met about expected roles of women and of Americans. Due to now having a Guinean accent, although being able to speak my ethnic language, I was called an American. It was interesting because they tested me continuously to see if I would make myself look better than me by asking me to dress in my American clothes, but I understood that I was being tested. Like my narrators, I am looked at in the US all the time and have my self-identity tested all the time when having to shift. I chose to dress in the traditional clothes, I cooked and cleaned as was expected of women but also resisted this expectation by having discussions with my family and their friends about obligations of girls and women.

I would discuss with the guys, especially, during the times that they met to gather around and talk about politics, school, or other aspects of life. Asking them about their opinions on Guinean girls within the country and abroad. Sometimes, I made sure to come when girls and were supposed to be cooking so that I could see how they would respond. Some asked why I was

not cooking and other guys would respond and say that it was the American way, were lazy in the US. I proceeded to ask why they were so lazy while in Guinea, and had the women do the cooking, laundry and other chores for them.

While some of the guys disagreed with me others continued to engage in the conversation with me saying that they could cook and do what the girls and were doing but it was a cultural thing. I continued by saying that I understood but that they should also see how tired their mom or aunt was. Surprisingly, many of them took what I said into account. I was afraid I was crossing some line since I had not been in Guinea for fifteen years now. Within a couple of weeks, some of the guys asked me and other girls to come and have tea with them during their social gathering of talking about life, invited us to play football (soccer) with them, and one of them even helped me with my laundry (washing while I rinse). His mother came out of the house to laugh and ask what was going on. I made a joke and said that it was just the process of partnership of 50/50. Since, she jokingly says 50/50 to him, having him complete some of the things that she has to do.

He now washes his own laundry and makes his own food, sometimes. With their identity development encompassing issues related to gender, race, ethnicity, and nationalism African immigrant girls and are able to challenge inequities in all of these aspects. They then become transnational feminists; girls and women who tackle the “social, political, and economic equality of across national boundaries” and form alliances with men and others globally (Moghadam, 2005). This can translate to second-generation girls and women immigrant students too.

Second generation immigrant students may face more tensions because they may have forgotten their native language and assimilated into US society to the point that there is little to no connection between them and their country of origin. Although, some of my participants/

narrators revealed other findings that showed that their experiences in college, and spaces or lack of spaces are important to the resistance of assimilation. Farrell (1980) explains that “although extreme assimilation preaches a rejection of one’s roots and a disdain for whatever immigrants cannot change or disguise, ethnic affiliation often persists among the second and third generations of Americans, long after the language and knowledge of the ‘old country’ have been lost” (p.12). This example is evident in Zebra, a second generation student, who conducted research related to the economic well being of Eritrea, studied abroad on a Caribbean island in order to understand some of the political, social and economic challenges that Afro-Caribbean’s face. All of which was done before graduating from college.

She used her identity development and ideologies on servant leadership to form transnational networks that work towards social justice. All in all, with the world becoming more interconnected, having African immigrant women students who are able to bridge transnational gaps is pertinent to US-Africa relations as well as other relationships abroad. African immigrant women provide global and interdisciplinary perspectives to social, political, and economic issues of gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, and so on. This is even more cause to examine their identities in relation to transnationalism.

### **From Theory to Practice: Interviews with African Immigrant Women**

I found commonalities in the areas of the pressure to achieve, pressure to maintain cultural norms, identity expression/ formation/ classification and its relationship to transnational feminism or leadership. These commonalities were consistent with the theories on assimilation and identity development as outlined in the first part of this paper while other commonalities such as identity expression added on the theories of Lee and Carter. Lee in *Up Against Whiteness* compares traditional or first generation immigrants with second generation or Americanized

immigrant youth. 1.5 generation. Traditional immigrant students are cultural straddlers, they are the ones that hold on to their culture while at the same time adapting to the culture of the American society. These are high achievers who listen to their parents and work hard in school as they understand the sacrifices that their parents made for them to receive an education in the US. Zebra discusses these expectations and sacrifices:

“They expect me to go as far as I can with my education. That’s why they have made the sacrifices of being in another country, being discriminated against, made fun of because of their accents, and having to work ten times as harder as everyone around them. I know I have to do the same.”

Surprisingly, although many of the narrators spoke about pressures to achieve, the pressures to achieve were slightly different for each participant because many of them put more pressure on themselves than their parents but in different ways. For instance, Angola, a 20-year-old 1.5-generation college junior narrator from Nigeria explained that her parents “expected the most for my education. They expected me to have good grades and even bought me math books and other types of books for the summer and I was expected to know that subject by the end of the summer. She continues on and explains, “there were no excuses to achieve because of the privileges I had of not going through some of the hardships that they (her parents) faced in Nigeria while trying to get their education.” Angola then explains that because of these expectations, she too was hard on herself, describing herself as being a “perfectionist.”

Like Angola, Ama, Mahra, Star and Zebra had these pressures to excel and associated this with the sacrifices that their parent(s) made. This aligns with Lee’s explanation of 1.5 generation understanding the sacrifices that their parent(s) made and how they use that to motivate themselves or excel when it came to their academics. Although, Zebra, by Lee’s definition, is a second-generation student exhibits the same pressures from her parents about sacrifice and about putting pressure on herself.

Her motivation to achieve as an Americanized student, comes from her struggle and resistance to self identify and to know her immigrant background and history. Zebra explains that before “I wanted to hide as much of my identity as I could so that I could assimilate better. I didn’t speak my language in public or want my family to pick her up from school because then everyone would know my identity.” She self identified as a Black or African American student, many times not even having to say what her self identification, as a child, was because of her skin color. But in high school, she has the opportunity in her history class to write a research paper. Zebra asked her teacher if she could write about Eritrea as she was starting to embrace her cultural background. His reply was that “it was a wash, I wasn’t going to get anything out of studying **that** history. That my history [was] pointless.”

In resistance to this accusation and her teachers dehumanizing response, Zebra decided to do her own research even if it was not going to be turned in to her teacher. She asked family members, friends, and used online research to find about her Eritrean history. This narrative inquiry continued to college when she decided to major double major in International Affairs and Economics because she believed that the two would allow her to learn about the world, systems within our society, and “how my identity as an African connected to my identity as an American.” Then, after going to Eritrea for the first time in 2010, she decided to relate her academics, even more to her identity and experience in Eritrea. This is exactly what motivated her and led her to conduct research in 2012 in Eritrea.

Hope and Nikki had different stories. Hope says, “there was never any pressure to do what my parents wanted me to do, like saying ‘you will not disgrace me’.” Out of all of [her] cousins, [she is] the only one to have gone to college and has always liked school. Maybe it was an unspoken rule not to do something that would ‘disgrace’ them. Every African parent wants

their child to major in something that brings prestige and honor to their family.” For Hope there was no pressure to achieve from her parents because she already had high expectations of herself.

Nikki on the other hand describes there not being a lot of pressure on her to achieve because of her parents class. There was not a lot of pressure to achieve because there was no financial burden or dreams of prosperity, this was something that her parents already had. She describes the as being very supportive of anything that she part her mind to. This, class, was an aspect that neither I nor Lee or Carter had considered when discussing acculturation. In contrast, immigrant women such as Ama, Angola, and Mahra describe putting less pressure on themselves in college to get the best grades. Mahra, for example says that “because of my parents expectations, I always wanted to be a perfectionist and get all A’s. However, now that she is a college student, Mahra adds, “those expectations of being a perfectionist have diminished a little. I have understood that as long as I work my hardest and persevere, I can achieve my goals of building a school in Ghana.”

This is echoed throughout my interviews. Once in college, these African immigrant women redefine what success means to them. The pressure to achieve from their parents and themselves, once in college, changes because they begin to understand that excelling does not always mean getting good grades. Ama defines excelling in college as the process of “not [focusing] on the grades, [but] on the material because you have to understand what the teacher is saying than focus totally on the grade.” She redefines it in a way that says that the numbers are not what count but what she learns from the material. This redefinition is something that is argued within US schooling systems as standardized test scores are being used to measure the comprehension of students, their success and that of the school.

These African women believe that the knowledge that they gain from their classes are more important than the grade but this does not mean that they are not getting good grades as comprehension of the material, in most cases, reflect the grade that a student receives. For Star, though, applying less pressure on herself does not mean that her parents will do the same. Star is from Ethiopia and is a 1.5-generation student. When she talks about her parents, she means her mother, sister and brother in law. Star is the youngest woman of four and the only one that is not married does not have kids, and the only one that has attended college; there is a lot of pressure fore her to achieve.

Her parents expect her to go into a field that will bring prestige, honor, and money to the family. She is expected to major in something related to the medical field but says that she wants to do something else that involves helping others even if it does not mean getting a lot of money, social work. This did and does not go well with her parent's vision of what their 1.5-generation student should be doing to honor the family for the sacrifices that they have made to bring her to the US. She explains, "they don't like me wanting to major in social work because they want me to get a job in the medical field but I don't want to do that. So I am going to do what makes me happy." In this sense, this 1.5 generation African women immigrant is being non-compliant and acting like an Americanized person, as described by Lee and Carter, they not listen to the cultural expectations of their parents.

Although trying to work hard in order to accomplish their aspirations and to thank their parents for the sacrifices that they have made in also being discriminated against and made fun of due to their nationality, all of the narrators classified themselves as African or classified themselves in relation to their county of origin. They are negotiating and shifting their identities to meet expectations that they have for themselves and from their parents while also having a



consciousness that relates to their country of origin. After going through all of these experiences, self-definitions, and intersectional challenges of race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, immigration, etc. and when given the space to examine them, mostly in college, these African immigrant women become cross-culturally competent and transnational in thought. They also empower themselves through this examination of their experiences and identities in the US educational system by trying to fight against systems of oppression (racism, sexism, xenophobia, etc.) that try to silence them.

## Conclusion and Implications

*“We realize the importance of our voice when we are silenced”- Malala Yousafazi*

*“Black women have agency (self definition and resilience) but the burden does not rely just on you” –Collins (2008)*

*“Knowledge can help to transform the world”- Herbert Marcuse*

African immigrant women have agency, they are able to self define. I am able to come to this conclusion using narratives from immigrant women of different cultural backgrounds from the continent of Africa, ranging from those who are from Ghana, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. I only wish that I were able to interview more women from other countries and those around the US. There needs to be more research on this population. The changing demographics of the US and the world, the challenges that arise from this shift, and systems of social, political, and economic oppressions are cause for more research on immigrant groups, such as African immigrant women. Respect for our differences and understandings of those differences can create change. Our experiences and ethnic background are important; these experiences are complex, are related to our identity formation and transformations while in the US educational system:

Using lived experiences and epistemologies, African immigrant women can contribute to Obama’s initiative, YALI. This initiative tries to train individuals from different African countries in the areas of business and entrepreneurship, civic engagement and public administration. President Obama should use the talents of Africans in the US and those on the continent to work together in the development of the continent because the above areas are not the only ones that African immigrants on the continent and in the diaspora can excel in. African immigrant women bring a transnational perspective that allows for this critique. In addition, this opportunity could be a great leadership challenge for both groups to work together despite any

tensions that there may be in terms of possibly having different ideologies related to gender, ethnicity, or nationality due to different lived experiences.

To continue, more research needs to be done on the relationships between Black immigrant groups and African Americans as there needs to be more solidarity and understanding within these groups as well. This is one of the ways to understand race relations among blacks in the US. The racialized history of the US has contributed to the lack of solidarity among people of African descent. Furthermore, schools and educators need to be more conscious of their relationships with immigrant students as their interactions with them and degrees of assimilation tactics may impact the success of African immigrants. They need to be especially mindful of cultural expectations, related to gender, that might impact the schooling of immigrant women. Also, African immigrant parents have to be aware of and understand the intersectionalities that African immigrant women face as it can help in communicating and assisting them in their endeavors. Lastly, the acceptance of all of these factors and examination of the intersectional identities of African immigrant women contributes to them becoming transnational leaders and feminists.

All in all, this thesis paper has attempted to discuss the misrecognition of African immigrant women, their sociocultural identities within the US educational system and its relationship to transnational feminism. This sociocultural/ experiential analysis adds on to all of the theories discussed above, especially Feminism as it gives a transnational outsider within perspective and explains why terms and self-definition matters to women of color, specifically African immigrant women.

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## Case Study: Interview Questions

### Introduction:

*Thank you for participating in this study. I will begin by introducing myself and explaining the reasons for choosing to conduct this research. If you have any questions or concerns please let me know. My name is Bintou Diallo and I am working towards a baccalaureate in Ethnic Studies and a minor in Leadership. I decided in focus on African women when deciding on a thesis topic because in doing readings, I found that there was not enough information on the African immigrant population in the United States or African immigrant girls. Due to these findings and the amazing leadership skills that I have seen on this campus, I want to examine how your cultural or social experience within the United States educational system has informed your identity today and the leader that you have become. Now when I say education that does not mean just schooling but also what you have learned outside of your schooling from the communities that you have lived in, social media, and other forms of educational outlets. I will use a tape recorder during the course of this interview so that your thoughts can be fully heard and so that I can pay more attention to what you have to say; in some cases, you may see me dot down a couple of notes.*

*During the interview, if for any reason, you feel uncomfortable answering any of my questions or do not feel comfortable in the space you are in, please stop me so that I can move on to a different question. Your participation in this study will be kept confidential and your identity will not be revealed to anyone.*

### Interview Questions

1. What is your name?
2. What is your country of origin
3. What year of schooling are you in?
4. How long has your family lived in the United States?
5. For elementary, middle, and high school what type of school did you go to? (Public, Charter, Private, etc.)
6. What was the race/ ethnicity of the students who attended your school?
7. What are you majoring in? Why?
8. What are your goals after graduation?
9. What student groups are you involved in? Why?
10. What expectations do your parents have about your education?
11. What expectations do you have about yourself and your education?
12. Do you feel welcome on your campus? Why or why not?
13. Do you work on campus?
14. What does your work entail?
15. What were/ are your parent's thoughts on the US Schooling system?
16. Why did your parents say that they immigrated to the United States?
17. Where you bullied in school or outside of school due to your ethnicity?
18. Were you ever classified as African American? If so, Why?
19. What identity of classification do you give yourself (African, African American, etc.)? Have you, or others in your schooling, defined or made distinctions between the two? If so, how do you feel about those distinctions?

20. What classification did you give yourself when you were younger?
21. What is your relationship like with African Americans?
22. What have your experiences been like with White students, or with other students who are not of African descent?
23. Did you have any expectations that were different from that of your siblings from your parents?
24. Did you have any expectations that were different from that of your classmates?
25. What is culturally different from being a women in US society and when you are home with your family?
26. Do you speak a different language from English?
27. Did you have to learn English when you first can to the US
28. Have you gone back to your country of origin?
29. Have you ever felt embarrassed for being an African immigrant or if you don't identity as African, been embarrassed of your parents' identity?
  - a. Have you ever been told that you are acting white? If so, by who?
  - b. What does acting white mean to you?
30. Did your teachers make you feel welcome in school?
31. Did your classmates make you feel welcome in school?
32. Have you learned about history related to the African continent in school?
33. What history classes have you had through your US schooling?
34. Have you taken any classes related to the African continent in college? Why? Why not?
35. Do you consider yourself a leader?
36. What does leadership mean to you?
37. What events on the African continent have impacted your experiences in the United States?
38. How have these events shaped your identity?
39. How have these experiences impacted your experience?
40. How have you dealt with the impacts that these events have had on your identity?
41. What do you think your peers, who are not African immigrants, know about the country that you immigrated from?
42. Why do they know this information?
43. What is different from the person you were when you were younger and now in college?
44. Do you feel closer to your culture now or when you were younger? Do you feel comfortable using language or participating in other cultural practices related to your ethnic heritage?
45. Have you had to deal with racial or cultural issues since coming to the US? Why?
46. Have you had to deal with these racial issues as an African or African American?
47. As an African and girl, what micro-aggressions have you faced? (Definition will be defined)
48. Is your experience as a woman different from that of African immigrant men? Why?
49. Do you plan to work in an African country?
50. Do you plan to work with African communities in the US? In what way?



Case Study: Interview Results (1 out of 7)

Narrator: Ama

Educational Level: College Sophomore

Gender: Women

Age/ sibling order: 19 years of age, Oldest out of siblings

Immigrant Background: Ghanaian

Immigrant Status: 1.5 generation

Interview Questions

1. What is your name?  
-Ama
2. What is your country of origin?  
-Ghana
3. What year of schooling are you in?  
-Sophomore
4. How long has your family lived in the United States?  
-November 2012 is when I came to the US
5. So your family has been here since then?  
-No, my mom has been here for 13 years. So this is my first time staying with her.
6. For elementary, middle, and high school what type of school did you go to? (Public, Charter, Private, etc.)  
-A public school. Wait so you mean in the US?  
Interviewer response: In the US but if you want to talk about Ghana that is fine  
-I came here during the last semester of junior year (high school). Private school back in Ghana for primary school, middle school, and part of high. I shouldn't be in college right now.
7. What identity of classification do you give yourself (African, African American, etc.)? Have you, or others in your schooling, defined or made distinctions between the two? If so, how do you feel about those distinctions?  
-Um, I consider myself as an African, especially Ghanaian because of how my culture has influenced and shaped me and my language and my beliefs.
8. Do you speak a different language from English? / What languages do you speak?  
-Akan
9. What are you majoring in? Why?  
-Neuroscience because I always wanted to study the brain and go into more depth and know what is going on. At first when I was coming I was a biochemistry major but I didn't really have passion for it so I switched it.
10. What student groups are you involved in? Why?  
-ASA (African Students Association), BSA (Black Student Alliance), and part of the health board on my campus. I think that is it for now.  
Interviewer: Why did you get involved in all these different groups?  
-For ASA, I wanted to get closer to my African friends. For BSA, I felt like it was where we meet new people, although it is not just Black students but you can meet new people from different countries like the Philippines. For the health board, I am always into health stuff so I wanted to get to know more about health issues and the campus health.

11. What are your goals after graduation?  
-I am so determined to get into a medical school after college.  
Interviewer: For neuroscience?  
-Yea
12. What expectations do your parents have about your education?  
-They expect me to excel in everything and they expect me to follow my dreams, and not listen to what people say. Also, they expect me to care for people.
13. What expectations do you have about yourself and your education?  
-My expectations in life are to become the person I want to be and go to medical school, of course, to get good grades. Right now I am not focused on the grades, I am focused on the material because you have to understand what the teacher is saying than focus totally on the grade.
14. Do you feel welcome on your campus? Why or why not?  
-Yea, I do. I didn't expect it because at first when I was coming her, the school was not my first choice but my mom forced me to come here, so I came. So when I was coming here I heard this school was a white school but it doesn't seem like it because there are a lot of Africans that I have seen on campus. I feel welcomed and most people are very nice to me.
15. Did your student groups make you feel welcome on campus?  
- Yea, especially my RAP (Residential Academic Program- leadership program) because we have events to attend so with the events we get to connect and to know each other. I am in a Trio program and we have events too.
16. Do you work on campus?  
-No.
17. What does your work entail?  
-N/A
18. What were/ are your parent's thoughts on the US Schooling system?  
-At first they thought that it was... well I am not sure what they thought before coming to the US. After, my mom knows that compared to like Universities in Ghana, the Universities here have more opportunities and they have a lot of programs to offer students.  
Interviewer: Was there a neuroscience program back home?  
-No.
19. Why did your parents say that they immigrated to the United States?  
-My mom came to the US through my grandmother because she has been here for 20 something years. I don't know about my dad but she (my mother) came here just to... she went to school in a community college when she came and got her nursing degree and is an RN now.
20. What was your first school of choice?  
-Yale.
21. Where you bullied in school or outside of school due to your ethnicity?  
-No, I have never been bullied.  
Researcher: What about outside of school?  
-Does racism count?  
Researcher Response: Yes.

-When I was in the speech and debate team and we were doing a tournament and there was this judge who decided to give my opening defend a bad score because he said that he didn't hear through my accent although I had a strong defend with sources and everything. But in all four rounds I won three.

22. What have your experiences been like with White students, or with other students who are not of African descent?

-I have never encountered someone bullying me or saying racist stuff even though... maybe they said it behind my back but I never heard any of them say something. I find them really friendly. My roommate who is white is really friendly and funny; she makes me feel welcome. I really connect with Asians students we become friends right away.

23. Did your teachers make you feel welcome in school?

-Very, very helpful. I had three best teachers in high school, which I still stay in contact with them; they really helped me. Especially my English teacher, she helped me with my college applications and my ACT because it was three months until the ACT and I didn't know anything, so she really helped me. Which I appreciate.

Researcher: How did you do on the ACT?

-I did three times and SAT two times. For the first one I got a 19, for the second one I got a 22, and for the third one I had a 25. For the SAT, for the first one, I had a 1600 and for the second one I had a 1400, so I should have stopped at the first one.

24. Did you have to learn English when you first came to the US?

-Yes. People were like wait, how many years have you been in the US. I'm like two years. They say wow. They think in African countries students don't know how to speak English.

25. Were you ever classified as African American? If so, Why?

-Yea, especially when you are filling forms. I just want to be called African and not African American because it makes me feel more proud of my continent. I have been classified as Black American, African American.

26. What classification did you give yourself when you were younger?

-Ghanaian

27. What is your relationship like with African Americans?

-I have a really good relationship with them. I find African Americans... No... Black Americans to be friendly and helpful despite their harsh tones. When you get to know them and their stories.

28. Did you have any expectations that were different from that of your siblings from your parents?

-I am the oldest. I have two younger brothers. The oldest one is very smart and has a really good GPA. He wants to go to MIT for mechanical or computer engineering, and they wrote him a letter. Like me, he is an extreme introvert but the youngest one is an extreme introvert. My mom always told me to follow my dreams but there are some things that you cannot tell an African parent like I will be a dance major.

29. What is culturally different from being a woman in US society and when you are home with your family/ or back home?

-Back home you have to work harder and have more expectations and discipline. Before going to school you have to make sure that you wake up early, clean the house before school and cook after you come back. They are the backbone; there would be more peace if African women ruled.

30. Have you gone back to your country of origin?  
No, I plan to in 2016.
31. Have you ever felt embarrassed for being an African immigrant or if you don't identify as African, been embarrassed of your parents' identity?  
-No, I try to embrace my culture and country.
- Have you ever been told that you are acting white? If so, by who?  
-Never. I tell people that they are acting white like my African friends because they do stuff here that they wouldn't do in Africa. They try to deny some parts of their culture like their language by not wanting to speak it in public, they respond back to me in English.
  - What does acting white mean to you?  
-How you dress, speak (ignore their language), and their education. Some white people don't care about their education and some African students act like that sometimes.
32. Did your classmates make you feel welcome in school?  
-Yes.
33. Have you learned about history related to the African continent in school?  
-Yes, in my history class in high school. I learned about slavery and got very angry at the N word because to me there is no difference between a white person and a black person. Our skin color is what makes us different. I also took a Black Studies class where my teacher talked about Kwame Nkrumah, Bob Marley, and others. He was white but had an Afro.
34. Have you taken any classes related to the African continent in college? Why? Why not?  
-No.
35. Do you consider yourself a leader?  
-Yes.
36. What does leadership mean to you?  
- Based on the leadership types I have learned in some of my classes I believe I fall under servant leadership. They serve everyone and try not to be the boss and put people down, we are in a web of inclusion. A leader is authentic and is not a manager. A leader tries to find new ways to fix problems. The leaders in my home country care about themselves.
37. What events on the African continent have impacted your experiences in the United States?  
-Traditional festivals back home, make me miss not being there. The relationship between China and my country because the president has traded a lot our resources like gold for loans and from an African newspaper, I learned that a villager in Ghana got shot by a Chinese person. You can't buy anything original anymore because it is Chinese made.
38. How have these experiences impacted your experience?  
-They make me mad.
39. How have you dealt with the impacts that these events have had on your identity?  
-It makes me have to explain stuff about Africa to others. It also makes me embrace my identity and culture; my culture shapes my identity.
40. What do you think your peers, who are not African immigrants, know about the country that you immigrated from?

-They think Africa is one big country and that if something bad is happening it is everywhere on the continent. They think that everyone speaks French and that Africa is full of trees and jungles, a poor country to them but continent to me, and that if they go there they will die.

41. Why do they know this information?

-Some people are just racist. There was a school that tried to suspend all of their African students. They have less knowledge about Africa because of not having taken classes about African history and leaders, and the media has a part in it. I blame the media and past generations for not informing people about it.

42. Is your experience as a woman different from that of African immigrant boys? Why?

-Yes because I am experiencing different challenges in college than they are. But I don't see the difference because they are expected to do chores here too but in Africa that would be different.

43. Do you plan to work in an African country?

-I plan to go to medical school, get my degree and go back to my country and build a hospital to help people and the different communities there.

#### Case Study: Interview Results (2 out of 7)

Narrator: Angola

Educational Level: College Junior

Gender: Women

Age/ sibling order: 20 years of age, Oldest out of siblings

Immigrant Background: Nigerian

Immigrant Status: 1.5 generation, born in the US

#### Interview Questions

1. What is your name?

-Angola

2. What is your country of origin

-Nigeria

3. What year of schooling are you in?

-This is my third year.

4. How long has your family lived in the United States?

-For about 18 years.

5. For elementary, middle, and high school what type of school did you go to? (Public, Charter, Private, etc.)?

-Private school from kindergarten to first grade but public school starting second grade.

6. What was the race/ ethnicity of the students who attended your school?

-In my private school it was pretty diverse because of the state that we lived in but for public, once we moved, it was mostly white students.

7. What are you majoring in? Why?

-Sociology and Ethnic Studies. They give me a better understanding of public health since my school doesn't offer that, which gives me the history and sociological identity of the communities of color that I want to work with particular with girls and women and children. I understand why people are disadvantaged and why certain disparities exist.

8. What are your goals after graduation?  
-I would either like to apply for an internship or go to graduate school for public health.
9. What student groups are you involved in? Why?  
-African Students Association because when I first came to campus I felt lost and out of place and swallowed by the whiteness of my campus and was suffocating so I decided to find an African community where I could feel welcomed and understood.
10. What expectations do your parents have about your education?  
-They expected the most for my education. They expected me to have good grades and even bought me math books and other types of books for the summer and I was expected to know that subject by the end of the summer. There were no excuses to achieve because of the privileges I had of not going through some of the hardships that they faced in Nigeria while trying to get their education.
11. What expectations do you have about yourself and your education?  
-Before college, I also was a perfectionist. But I have learned in college that is not possible. In college I have realized what my strengths and weaknesses are and what I am really passionate about.
12. Do you feel welcome on your campus? Why or why not?  
-No, not at first but it has evolved. It wasn't until college that I think I really felt my difference and what my blackness really meant. What helped was having a community around you even other communities of color who felt some of the things that you were/ are going through. It helps when you are finally able to develop some confidence and resilience. I have to take ownership of my own education even if someone does not think I belong on that campus.
13. What were/ are your parent's thoughts on the US Schooling system?  
-I am not sure about before; I was two when we came to the US.
14. Why did your parents say that they immigrated to the United States?  
-For my education.
15. Where you bullied in school or outside of school due to your ethnicity?  
-I don't think I was conscious enough to know that I was being bullied because of my ethnicity.
16. Were you ever classified as African American? If so, Why?  
-Yes. That is what people see and assume until they take the time to know me because once they do they will hear me talking about my ethnic or immigrant background. I think that on the sheets that make us check a box... that shouldn't even happen. We should have one box and a line next to it so that it is more inclusive especially to those who or multiracial. It is not fair to make them choose which one they identify with more.
17. What identity of classification do you give yourself (African, African American, etc.)? Have you, or others in your schooling, defined or made distinctions between the two? If so, how do you feel about those distinctions?  
-I am Nigerian American. I like being called that better because it tells my true identity and makes me feel different. I am proud of my African heritage.
18. What classification did you give yourself when you were younger?  
-I have always been aware of who I am because it was reinforced when I was at home, I never lost a sense of my culture because of this.
19. What is your relationship like with African Americans?

-I have some friendships with black identified people but in elementary, middle, and high school I felt like I had to drop my identity and pick up a new. This is the same thing that I felt when I was with my white friends. I couldn't be authentically me because I wasn't welcomed. I had to put on my blackness- put on black stereotypes. I still have to do that sometimes in college even though not as much.

20. What have your experiences been like with White students, or with other students who are not of African descent?  
-I have a lot of good relationships with non-white communities more. I like learning about their cultures and identities.
21. What is culturally different from being a women in US society and when you are home with your family?  
- Are supposed to be submissive to the men and your parents, composed, not supposed to wear pants but skirts or wraps. Most women here are more outspoken and many times not afraid to say what they believe in and wear what they want.
22. Do you speak a different language from English?  
-No. I understand Yoruba.
23. Did you have to learn English when you first came to the US?  
-No. The official language is English.
24. Have you gone back to your country of origin?  
Yes.
25. Have you ever felt embarrassed for being an African immigrant or if you don't identify as African, been embarrassed of your parents' identity?  
-Yea. It is embarrassing when you are in class and they are playing a video about the African continent or watching the news about the continent. We are misunderstood and perceived negatively.
  - a. Have you ever been told that you are acting white? If so, by who?  
-Yes, a lot. By my peers. People would say you don't act black like you know. For example, after one of my white friends in high school said they didn't like black people I said what and they replied by saying to me that I wasn't black, I didn't act black I acted white, I was white. I felt uncomfortable but didn't know what to say back.
  - b. What does acting white mean to you?  
-This means not being the stereotypical black person.
26. Did your teachers make you feel welcome in school?  
-Sometimes. I have had a teacher talk about something related to why people need sunscreen but he looked at me during class and said that I didn't need anymore sunscreen.
27. Have you learned about history related to the African continent in school? / What history classes have you had through your US schooling?  
-No.
28. Have you taken any classes related to the African continent in college? Why? Why not?  
-No. When we do talk about Africa, it is very negative and filled with disease, poverty, and wars. The courses related to Africa don't offer a different story, one that tells its full history before colonization.
29. Do you consider yourself a leader?  
-Yes.
30. What does leadership mean to you?

- There are different types of leaders: charismatic, encouragers, servant leaders, and so on. I consider myself a servant leader because I want it to be a communal process.
31. What events on the African continent have impacted your experiences in the United States?  
-The kidnapping of the girls in Nigeria.
32. How have these events shaped your identity?  
-That one hit home. It hurt to hear the apathy of the Nigerian president and to know that the US and other countries have some of the resources to bring back the girls but need convincing to do so.
33. How have these experiences impacted your experience?  
-As I said, it home and has made me want to work in disadvantaged and disregarded regions. I want people to feel powerful because these situations make them feel powerless.
34. How have you dealt with the impacts that these events have had on your identity?  
-I have had to tell people that these situations and Ebola are not things to laugh at or pity Africans. These things are occurring because of systemic and oppressive things that are still happening on the continent. We don't make fun of cancer or other diseases so we shouldn't make fun of Ebola, it is such a horrible disease to endure. They don't have the same resources to treat the disease. It is funny that those who were US citizen who had the disease were treated but many West Africans had to die from the disease (sarcasm).
35. What do you think your peers, who are not African immigrants, know about the country that you immigrated from?  
-Poverty, disease, and lack of resources.
36. Why do they know this information?  
-The media. CNN misplaced Nigeria on a map. This shows that people in this society don't know much about the African continent. All they see are a couple stories and believe those few stories that the media shows them.
37. What is different from the person you were when you were younger and now in college?  
-I am more out of myself now. Basically, I was more in my head when I was younger but now I am more open and speak my mind more.
38. Do you feel closer to your culture now or when you were younger? Do you feel comfortable using language or participating in other cultural practices related to your ethnic heritage?  
-Definitely closer to my culture now than before. It was not until my sophomore year of high school that I wanted to learn more about my culture because I went to Nigeria. Being on the continent made me realize how much I had assimilated into the American culture and had forgotten about my own cultural identity. Now, I love the clothes and fashion and language and food.
39. As an African and girl, what micro-aggressions have you faced? (Definition will be defined)?  
-People asking me how I got here when I tell them where I am from, ask me about other countries, people not expecting me to know about my identity and expecting me not to be intelligent. Women wise, I can't think of anything right now.
40. Is your experience as a women different from that of African immigrant men? Why?  
-Yea, especially if they have a thick accent. They don't pity them as much as African women.
41. Do you plan to work in an African country?



-Yes, eventually. After I got the resources and education needed to work with communities there and assist them with any needs that they identify.

42. Do you plan to work with African communities in the US? In what way?

-Yes, always. I want to work with African communities in whatever I do in the US because the African community, not only Nigerians, is really important to me.

Notes: In our culture we are afraid of questioning our parents or our cultural values, which can be detrimental to us. Africans have a stolen history because even in African schools kids are not taught about their own histories or roots, they are taught the histories European countries or other countries in the world. Being Black on my campus means being an exception to the rule or stereotypes, being the darkest person in class, people seeing you but also not-you are visible in the sense that they see a black women in the classroom but don't want to get to know her and are surprised by her being there. When they see you they see a list of stereotypes and when you don't align with some of those stereotype they think you are the exception. It also means being the spokesperson for all black people, of all African people. My leadership style and definition comes from the African values about community, which is exemplified by the African Students Association that I am involved with.

My parents and I talk about leadership in the context of religion and taking the different mistakes or success of the people in the Bible to think about how I can be a better leader.

My African community makes fun of my accent sometimes since I don't have a Nigerian accent.

#### Case Study: Interview Results (3 out of 7)

Narrator: Mahra

Educational Level: College Senior, Fifth year

Gender: Women

Age/ sibling order: 22 years of age, second oldest

Immigrant Background: Ghanaian

Immigrant Status: 1.5 generation

#### Interview Questions

1. What is your name?

-Mahra

2. What is your country of origin

-Ghana

3. What year of schooling are you in?

-Fifth year

4. How long has your family lived in the United States?

-For about 15 years but I have been here for 10 years.

5. For elementary, middle, and high school what type of school did you go to? (Public, Charter, Private, etc.)?

-Private schools in Ghana but public school from eighth to 12<sup>th</sup> grade in the US.

6. What was the race/ ethnicity of the students who attended your school?

-My eighth grade school had a lot of Asian and Latino/a students. I had friends of all race, which is different now because I have mostly African friends since my campus is

predominantly white. I don't have a lot of African American friends because we have not connected as much as I thought we would.

7. What are you majoring in? Why?  
-Accounting and Entrepreneurship. You need a knowledge of business like fiancés to make sure that your business runs well. The entrepreneurship certificate gives me more knowledge and insight to my dream of building a school in Ghana and using my experience in the US and that of my culture to share with students in Ghana. I just want a degree so that I can go back honestly.
8. What are your goals after graduation?  
-At first, I wanted to go back to Ghana to start my plan of building a school but then I decided that I would finish my schooling like graduate school before doing that because it will be a lifelong career.
9. What student groups are you involved in? Why?  
-African Students Association because I feel right at home when I am with them. They are my second family.
10. What expectations do your parents have about your education?  
-They have high expectations of my education, for me to get A's, but this expectation of getting all A's changed a little bit in college because my father understood that although I was not getting all A's, I was working my hardest.
11. What expectations do you have about yourself and your education?  
-Because of my parents expectations, I have always wanted to be a perfectionist and get all A's. Those expectations of me being a perfectionist has diminished a little. I have understood that as long as I work my hardest and persevere, I can achieve my goals of building a school.
12. Do you feel welcome on your campus? Why or why not?  
-Yes and No. I didn't when I first came her but once I started to love my identity, and myself I didn't care anymore. I was now comfortable in speaking in class, raising my hand, and participating in class activities. Do you work on campus?
13. What does your work entail?  
-N/A
14. What were/ are your parent's thoughts on the US Schooling system?  
-Very high thoughts. My father believed that with as US education we could do and work any where in the world.
15. Why did your parents say that they immigrated to the United States?  
-For his children to receive a better education. My siblings and I were specifically told that the only reason we were emigrating to the US was for our education so we better work hard.
16. Were you bullied in school or outside of school due to your ethnicity?  
-I would like to say no because where ever I went I would carry around the prideful African attitude and the strong independent women role.
17. Were you ever classified as African American? If so, Why?  
-Yes because people automatically assume that because of my skin color I am African American or just a black person without realizing that there are many differences between black communities. Also by those sheets where you had to check off as African American or Black. They need to fix that because it is not cool to just homogenize us like

- that. Our identities are different and important. What about Afro Latinos or people from the Caribbean. I usually check the other box and put African or Ghanaian.
18. What identity of classification do you give yourself (African, African American, etc.)? Have you, or others in your schooling, defined or made distinctions between the two? If so, how do you feel about those distinctions?  
-I want to be called Ghanaian or Ghanaian women or an African women.
  19. What classification did you give yourself when you were younger?  
-As a Ghanaian women. It is not until I came to the US that I realized how important racial classifications are.
  20. What is your relationship like with African Americans?  
-Honestly, I have identified more with Asians and Latinos/as than with African Americans. I have tended to stay away. The ones I have interacted with especially African American women try to be that stereotypical African American women.
  21. What have your experiences been like with White students, or with other students who are not of African descent?  
-A good one. As long as they don't disrespect me and who I am we can have a good relationship.
  22. What is culturally different from being a women in US society and when you are home with your family?  
-At home I am more outspoken, this is different from when I was younger. My parents are the reason for this because they joke around with me and allow me to speak my mind. In public I am quiet and more reserved.
  23. Do you speak a different language from English?  
-Yes. Twi, Spanish, and understand French.
  24. Did you have to learn English when you first came to the US?  
-No. The official language of Ghana is English.
  25. Have you gone back to your country of origin?  
-No.
  26. Have you ever felt embarrassed for being an African immigrant or if you don't identify as African, been embarrassed of your parents' identity?  
-Yes. When I am with other Africans but that is only because we like to make fun of each other and joke around.
    - a. Have you ever been told that you are acting white? If so, by who?  
-No.
    - b. What does acting white mean to you?  
-It means, I guess, speaking intelligently, quiet and submissive, and just not being the stereotypical black person.
  27. Have you learned about history related to the African continent in school?  
- In Ghana, yes. In the US, no because it is not African history it is an Americanized history of Africa. They don't talk about what was in or going on in Africa before the white man came. It just centers on the white man coming to find resources and on his way out he enslaves Africans. They don't make themselves look as the bad person they just want you to pity the African.
  28. Have you taken any classes related to the African continent in college? Why? Why not?

-No. On this campus? No. There are not a lot of classes about the continent. I want to learn out our positive histories with universities, intellectuals, and other amazing things before the white man came.

29. Do you consider yourself a leader?

-Yes.

30. What does leadership mean to you?

-It is someone who has a goal and vision that is achievable. A leader also has to be a student- someone who learns how to get better as they progress in their leadership style by learning from the people who you are working with. Younger people can teach a person a lot.

31. What events on the African continent have impacted your experiences in the United States?

-Ebola in West Africa.

32. How have these events shaped your identity?

-It makes me have to defend my identity and culture even more and become an educator about the what is going on, which is unfair.

33. How have these experiences impacted your experience?

- I have had people say terrible things about people on the continent and think that it is another moment of despair on the continent.

34. How have you dealt with the impacts that these events have had on your identity?

-Sometimes I just ignore their ignorance or educate them about the situation.

35. What do you think your peers, who are not African immigrants, know about the country that you immigrated from?

-Africa is a place full of poverty, hunger, lack of resources, and black people.

36. Why do they know this information?

-Because of what they learn from the media.

37. What is different from the person you were when you were younger and now in college?

-When I was younger I wouldn't speak my mind and would stay to myself but now, like my person say, I have become a stronger and more outspoken woman. This has come from the bullying and micro aggressions that I have faced in the US.

38. Do you feel closer to your culture now or when you were younger? Do you feel comfortable using language or participating in other cultural practices related to your ethnic heritage?

-You know the expression you don't know what you had until it was gone, well I learned what that expression meant when I came to the US. I appreciate Ghana more. I want to wear African clothes even more now, eat African food, anything that lets people know that I am African. Before I was neglecting my culture and was trying to assimilate. I decided that I needed to hold on to it before I forget my culture and language. It is a work in progress.

39. As an African and girl, what micro-aggressions have you faced? (Definition will be defined)?

-I don't think anyone has said anything to me in my face, I just get stares especially when they see my skin color or when I change my hair styles. I think it happens more because we are in a town with a lot of white people who are not used to people of color being around.

40. Is your experience as a women different from that of African immigrant men? Why?  
-Yes, I agree. African women are pitied more than African men when it comes to their accents. Because of stereotypes about women and men, people tend to want to nurture women more. I notice by the way that people react to my parent's accents. My dad gets harsh responses. On the other hand, in terms of relationships, African men are preferred. Women who are not African find African men sexy but African women are not approached in the same way. This relates to men in my culture having more freedom than women. Women are expected to do household duties, help out with other things, get their education, get married and have kids.
41. Do you plan to work in an African country?  
-Yes because I don't picture myself here for that much longer. The American Dream does not exist, only for white people. Freedom and liberty are illusions. Back home, I know that I am welcomed, not as stressed, and happier. I am around my community. Africans may not have as much as other people or countries but are happier.
42. Do you plan to work with African communities in the US? In what way?  
-I don't know. I have never thought about that question because I have always thought about my plan being getting my education and resources to build a school back home. I have always thought about going home. People back home are... living.

Notes: I want to show kids the importance of working hard and not giving up. In our culture, making mistakes is a bad thing but from being in the US I have learned that making mistakes leads to you learning more and becoming a better person, this is a lesson that I want to take back to the students who will hopefully attend my school. Africans had been to different parts of the world before the white man came.

You are not seen as a human being but a black person on a predominantly white campus. My definition of leadership comes from my understanding of what many African presidents exhibit, this sense of having or wanting power and not caring about the impacts that has on their communities and country. I would rather be behind the scenes and make change or laws without the people knowing and telling the people or letting them know that they make/ made the change. One has to have humility. This to me would start with thanking God before anything or anyone.

Mahra wanted me to point out that the people who read her responses and that of other narrators should take the stories that have told as a single story and not a story that should generalize African people. Not all African experiences are the same; this is just some experiences and stories of some African women.

#### Case Study: Interview Results (4 out of 7)

Narrator: Hope  
Educational Level: College Graduate  
Gender: Women  
Age/ sibling order: 22 years of age, oldest  
Immigrant Background: Ghanaian  
Immigrant Status: 1.5 generation

#### Interview Questions

1. What is your name?  
-Hope
2. What is your country of origin?  
-Ghana
3. What year of schooling are you in?  
-College graduate
4. How long has your family lived in the United States?  
-Almost 15 years
5. For elementary, middle, and high school what type of school did you go to? (Public, Charter, Private, etc.)  
-Private school in elementary school, and public after that since it was too expensive
6. What was the race/ ethnicity of the students who attended your school?  
-Majority white students in private school, and then in public school more students of color. I was in an IB (International Baccalaureate) program in high school so there were more white students within that program but not the school itself. There were two other African students in the program.
7. What are you majoring in? Why?  
-Integrated Physiology and Psychology because I have always wanted to be a doctor but when I came to campus I was a history major. I changed it after deciding that there was not a low that I could do with a history degree and wanted to go back to my first passion. There are a lot of disparities and inequities in medicine. I would like to work with girls and women and young children, as we do not have a lot of decision in policy making when it comes to our health. As an African woman I know this, as there are decision made for me.
8. What are your goals after graduation?  
-I am applying to nursing schools that have public health programs.
9. What student groups were you involved in? Why?  
-African Students Association, a multicultural sorority, and LGBTQ community
10. What expectations do your parents have about your education?  
-There was never any pressure to do what my parents wanted me to do, like saying “you will not disgrace me.” Out of all of my cousins, I am the only one to have gone to college and have always liked school. Maybe it was an unspoken rule not to do something that would “disgrace” them. Every African parent wants their child to major in something that brings prestige and honor to their family.
11. What expectations do you have about yourself and your education?  
-I expected the highest of myself and would get mad at myself for not doing well. I wanted to achieve great things in life and knowing that I was an African immigrant, I had to try to try harder than everyone else. When I was growing up my parents used to tell me that for the most part African Americans have not been able to achieve as much educationally like whites.
12. Do you feel welcome on your campus? Why or why not?  
-Sure. I had a false impression because my brochures told me that there was a lot of diversity on my campus but once coming to campus, I found out that was not true.

Notes: People think Africa is full of exotic animals that Africans escape from Africa seeking asylum. By living in the US and going through the educational system I understand race more, understand the society that I live in- have gained consciousness about my identity, stereotypes

associated with it, and expectations. I try not to let the stereotypes or assumptions define me. As a woman and African I am seen as exotic, sexually. African men in the US are seen as sexy and hard working.

In my elementary school, my parents wanted to put me in a higher-level class but I had to be tested first. I got a good score but my principal did not believe that I could score that high so he had me take the test many times, but I still scored well.

My younger sister likes to write and do artsy stuff so I think that she will do that. I don't think my parents will be against it because there is less burden on her since she is not the oldest and first to be educated in the US.

If I have the privilege of going back to Ghana to work there I would like to but I also want to work in a lot of other locations not just Ghana. In terms of working in the US, Africans in the US and organizations are too much, they are very stubborn.

#### Case Study: Interview Results (5 out of 7)

Narrator: Zebra

Educational Level: College Graduate

Gender: Women

Age/ sibling order: 22 years of age, second oldest

Immigrant Background: Eritrean

Immigrant Status: 1.5 generation, born in the United States

#### Interview Questions

1. What is your name?  
-Zebra.
2. What is your country of origin?  
-Eritrea.
3. What year of schooling are you in?  
-College graduate
4. How long has your family lived in the United States?  
-Since 1974.
5. For elementary, middle, and high school what type of school did you go to? (Public, Charter, Private, etc.)  
-A public school for all three.
6. What was the race/ ethnicity of the students who attended your school?  
-Middle half of elementary school was primarily Latino and Black and immigrants, second half of elementary school to high school was mostly white.
7. What are you majoring in? Why?  
-I double majored in International Affairs and Economics. I chose International Affairs because I wanted to study something that taught me more about the world and how different systems are connected and how my identity as an African connected to my identity as an American. Also, learn about issues related to the "Global North and Global South" and what development means. Economics was something that tied into the development literature that I read.

8. What are your goals after graduation?  
-Before graduating college my goals were to have good connections and to do something related to diplomacy, research, anything international in nature, and personally learning more about the communities within the black culture. After graduation, my career goals were more social justice oriented and law (human rights, immigration- domestically and globally). Also, to become an intermediary between the global north and south.
9. What student groups are you involved in? Why?  
-African Students Association, Black Student Alliance, Academic support centers for people of color.
10. What expectations do your parents have about your education?  
-They expect me to go as far as I can with my education. That's why they have made the sacrifices of being in another country, being discriminated against, made fun of because of their accent, and having to work ten times as hard as everyone around them. I know I have to do the same.
11. What expectations do you have about yourself and your education?  
-I have the same expectations for myself. I plan on attending graduate school next year, law school. I want my education to be meaningful by being able to apply to my social justice passion.
12. Do you feel welcome on your campus? Why or why not?  
-Yes, by some but not others. Students I knew from high school attended the same institutions so they were like my mentors, as well as places on campus that welcomed students of color. I didn't feel welcome though by the majority of my campus. People always looked at me in class because I was one of the only black people in the class.
13. What were/ are your parent's thoughts on the US Schooling system?  
-They thought it was good. My father came on a student visa and my mother as a refugee.
14. Why did your parents say that they immigrated to the United States?  
-The plan was to go to school in the US and go back to home. My dad wanted to train in the US to be whatever the country needed like studying agriculture or to be a pilot but he finally settled with what he wanted to do, business. Unfortunately, in the 80's there was a famine and war, which led to him staying here in the US.
15. Were you bullied in school or outside of school due to your ethnicity?  
-Kind of. I had a boy in middle school that made fun of my hair and other characteristics but the ironic thing was that he was also black.
16. Were you ever classified as African American? If so, Why?  
-Yes. They didn't know my background they just saw me as a Black American.
17. What identity of classification do you give yourself (African, African American, etc.)? Have you, or others in your schooling, defined or made distinctions between the two? If so, how do you feel about those distinctions?  
-African American, black, African, immigrants kid, a moderate, cisgender, Eritrean American. Others classify me as being just being black especially in college only those closest to me knew I was Eritrean American. This is because of my American accent, which I got from my ESL classes. I had an Eritrean accent before. This has taken away my African linguistic identity.
18. What classification did you give yourself when you were younger?  
-I thought I was white washed because people would tell me that I wasn't white that I talked white, had straight hair (I straightened my hair), and wanted to change my middle



name to something that was American like Tina. I wanted to hide as much of my identity as I could so that I could assimilate better. I didn't speak my language in public or want my family to pick me up from school because then everyone would know my real identity.

19. What is your relationship like with African Americans?
  - Great. We are all one people. It is good now. When I was younger I was anxious and scared because I had a us versus them mentality. It goes back to colonial days of divide and conquer.
20. Did you have any expectations that were different from that of your siblings from your parents?
  - Yea. My education or life goals though are more aligned with my dad's goals or expectations of working as hard as one can, having morality, and valuing justice. My siblings are into political science and computer science, and are learning different languages such as Arabic and Spanish. We all value working hard, and respecting the cultures of others.
21. Did you have any expectations that were different from that of your classmates?
  - Yea. Just coming into a classroom I think about the sacrifices that have been made for me and the privileges that I have which leads me to want to pay it forward.
22. What is culturally different from being a women in US society and when you are home with your family?
  - As a women in the US you are expected to be an equal to men even though in a paradoxical way they are earning more than the women but women have an opportunity to apply to different jobs but then you may have to juggle motherhood and a job. So a lot of pros and cons. Back home, household rules are very gendered and occupations are very gender specific. Rape, abuse, and violence are normalized. A women having less education than the men is normalized. Although, women have been a important part of history because when Eritrea was fighting for its independence, were also at the front lines. A lot of kids were born in the trenches and were named freedom because of that. Everyone was recruited to bear the price of freedom.
23. Do you speak a different language from English?
  - Spanish, Tigrinya, and I understand a little bit of Amharic.
24. Did you have to learn English when you first can to the US?
  - I was born in the US but had to take ESL classes to get rid of my accent, as Tigrinya was my first language.
25. Have you gone back to your country of origin?
  - Yes, in 2010, which made me want to focus my academics in relation to my identity and experience in Eritrea. I also went in 2012 to do research.
26. Have you ever felt embarrassed for being an African immigrant or if you don't identify as African, been embarrassed of your parents' identity?
  - Yea, when I was younger. I was afraid of coming to school smelling like onions or talking to my parents in our native language. When I was younger, before ESL, I was embarrassed about my accent it was quickly erased by ESL though.
    - a. Have you ever been told that you are acting white? If so, by who?
    - b. What does acting white mean to you?
27. Did your teachers make you feel welcome in school?
  - Yea.

28. Did your classmates make you feel welcome in school?  
-Yea.
29. Have you learned about history related to the African continent in school?  
-If it was, it was about colonization or anything depressing. I learned more about the history of the state I was in and about European history. When I tried to write about Eritrean history in one of these history classes, I was told that it was a wash I wasn't going to get anything out of studying that history. That it is pointless. I felt as though my history was pointless. So I took the time to talk to my family, friends, and other resources to learn for myself since I thought it was important.
30. What history classes have you had through your US schooling?  
-I didn't have any just when I did a study abroad program. I learned about the history of the slave trade from other Blacks in the diaspora.
31. Have you taken any classes related to the African continent in college? Why? Why not?  
-I took an anthropology class that discussed the continent of Africa. There are not a lot of classes because it puts the west in a bad light and a lot of our history has been destroyed, especially during colonization. It was a strategy to wipe out our societies and histories. I want to learn more about the continent and my identity and people.
32. Do you consider yourself a leader?  
-I think so but I have a lot of improvement. I am trying to make the world more inclusive.
33. What does leadership mean to you?  
-Being a visionary, having tunnel vision so that your dreams are not deterred, and having/supporting other visionaries around you. Leadership is a communal thing; one has to be humble.
34. What events on the African continent have impacted your experiences in the United States?  
-In seventh grade I had a student ask me if I was from Africa because there was an AIDS outbreak. The continent is so disrespected. Then, what has happened in the Sinai Desert since the Egyptian revolution where refugees, Eritrean and others, have been kidnapped and have been killed so that their organs can be traded for profit. There is a huge humanitarian crisis going on.
35. How have these events shaped your identity?  
-When I was younger, I was embarrassed but now I am empowered. This has motivated me to want to pursue this type of work, humanitarian work and to pursue a graduate law degree human rights.
36. How have these experiences impacted your experience?  
-I remember being embarrassed a lot. I am now empowered and motivated.
37. How have you dealt with the impacts that these events have had on your identity?  
-Educated myself on these issues and others that are occurring on the continent of Africa. I have used these events as a source of motivation. I am more vocal because my voice is a gift and it matters. I am more awake and grateful for the privileges that I have.
38. What do you think your peers, who are not African immigrants, know about the country that you immigrated from?
39. Why do they know this information?  
-The media shapes the continent in a very negative light. All people know about it is the suffering that goes on. When people are not exposed to other cultures they don't learn about them.

40. What is different from the person you were when you were younger and now in college?  
-I am more confident and proud of my identity and my history and culture.
41. Do you feel closer to your culture now or when you were younger? Do you feel comfortable using language or participating in other cultural practices related to your ethnic heritage?  
-Oh yea. I feel more connected to my culture but it is a work in progress.
42. As an African and girl, what micro-aggressions have you faced? (Definition will be defined)?  
-That I look white. I am beautiful not because I am African but because I have white features, which is ironic because civilization began in Africa so shouldn't we say Europeans look like Africans. Or that I look beautiful because I look Arab. A lot of conflict happened between east African countries and Arab countries. If I didn't know my history I would have still accepted these micro-aggression.
43. Is your experience as a woman different from that of African immigrant boys? Why?  
-Yes. Guys have more privileges. They can perpetuate a lot of stereotypes about women from back home, which can result in anger and violence if the woman is assimilating too much to where the men feels threatened.
44. Do you plan to work in an African country?  
-Yes.
45. Do you plan to work with African communities in the US? In what way?  
-Definitely. With refugees or Africans who have recently arrived. At African community centers or non-profits.

Notes: Study abroad, visitor, Eritrea- reverse culture shock, realized blanket statement myself as just an American took away from my history, culture, and sacrifices made for my parents to immigrate here and have the privileges that I have. This speaks to my identity as an immigrant daughter and Eritrean identity because it makes you realize that we are all immigrants, except for natives of this land, which makes my experience in the US so much more real. My racial identity changes depending on the situation or space I am in or what we are talking about. For example, when speaking to a police officer that racial profiles me, I might say I am not African American but African, that I am the better one just to appease them but this may not work. I use the language of the better one because when people emigrate from Africa the closets person that looks like them are Black Americans, from what I have heard, but they are also the first ones to make fun of your accent. African parents sometimes don't want their child to hang out with Black Americans they believe the American stereotypes of Black Americans so African immigrant kids are told to be the model minority, to be smarter. For my international affairs class I will talk about being an Eritrean American or in talking with other students I might say black.

#### Case Study: Interview Results (6 out of 7)

Narrator: Star

Educational Level: College Freshman

Gender: Women

Age/ sibling order: 19 years of age, youngest

Immigrant Background: Ethiopian

Immigrant Status: 1.5 generation

### Interview Questions

1. What is your name?  
-Star
2. What is your country of origin?  
-Ethiopia
3. What year of schooling are you in?  
-Freshman
4. How long has your family lived in the United States?  
- My sister has lived in the US for about 14 years and my mom has lived here for about eight years. I have been here for three years.
5. For elementary, middle, and high school what type of school did you go to? (Public, Charter, Private, etc.)  
-Public school.
6. What was the race/ ethnicity of the students who attended your school?  
- It was diverse; there were people from all over the world. Like Black, white, Hispanic, Somalians, Indians, and a lot of other people.
7. What are you majoring in? Why?  
-I am undecided but am thinking about majoring in social services like human services because I want to be able to help people.
8. What are your goals after graduation?  
-First getting a job and have my own life, be independent. Get married, have kids, and have a stable job.
9. What student groups are you involved in? Why?  
-No.
10. What expectations do your parents have about your education?  
-They want me to be a better person, have good grades, and graduate. They don't like me wanting to major in social work because they want me to get a job in the medical field but I don't want to do that. So I am going to do what makes me happy. They think that with a medical degree I can work anywhere in the world and will have more opportunities.
11. What expectations do you have about yourself and your education?  
-I want to do the things I like. I don't want to do what my parents want me to do if it will not make me happy, if helping people with social work makes me happy then I will do that.
12. Do you feel welcome on your campus? Why or why not?  
-Yes because the teachers and everyone knows that I am foreign and they try to make me feel welcome.
13. Do you work on campus?  
-No.
14. What does your work entail?  
-N/A
15. What were/ are your parent's thoughts on the US Schooling system?  
-They thought that it would give me a good opportunity. But now my sister thinks that it is not good because she thinks the teachers and kids and don't do what they are supposed to do. But I think they do a good job. She thinks the teachers are failing the students.

16. Why did your parents say that they immigrated to the United States?  
-Think it is a good opportunity for my education.
17. Where you bullied in school or outside of school due to your ethnicity?  
-No. I hung out with mostly Ethiopians, so I felt right at home.
18. Were you ever classified as African American? If so, Why?  
-Yea, but I think I am African. They think that I am from here.
19. What identity of classification do you give yourself (African, African American, etc.)? Have you, or others in your schooling, defined or made distinctions between the two? If so, how do you feel about those distinctions?  
-I am African but if there is no choice I will say African American because that is the closes. No, distinctions were made because there were a lot of Ethiopians in my high school so they already knew about Ethiopians.
20. What classification did you give yourself when you were younger?  
-Ethiopian but after coming here I started calling myself Black or African because some people outside of my school did not know where Ethiopia was but they knew about Africa.
21. What is your relationship like with African Americans?  
-Good, I didn't have that many friends that were African American.
22. What have your experiences been like with White students, or with other students who are not of African descent?  
-Good. I am friendly with everyone and am not racist.
23. Did you have any expectations that were different from that of your siblings from your parents?  
-Yes. I am the first one to have the chance to come here and get to go to college. My siblings (all women) are married and have kids. They are expecting a lot from me since I am the youngest.
24. Did you have any expectations that were different from that of your classmates?  
-No.
25. What is culturally different from being a women in US society and when you are home with your family/ in your home country?  
-Here people are more of feminists but back home women are pushed down. There is more of a chance for school and other opportunities here than in Ethiopia.
26. Do you speak a different language from English?  
-Yes. Amharic.
27. Did you have to learn English when you first can to the US?  
-Yes, I had to take ESL classes but we learned some English when I was back home. The teachers helped me with my mistakes.
28. Have you gone back to your country of origin?  
-No.
29. Have you ever felt embarrassed for being an African immigrant or if you don't identity as African, been embarrassed of your parents' identity?  
-No, I am proud of it because that is who I am and who they are. I am proud of where I am from and my culture and everything.
  - a. Have you ever been told that you are acting white? If so, by who?  
-No.
  - b. What does acting white mean to you?

-Taking more of the culture of white people just to fit in and leaving ours behind.

30. Did your teachers make you feel welcome in school?

-Yes.

31. Did your classmates make you feel welcome in school?

-Yes.

32. Have you learned about history related to the African continent in school?

Yes.

33. What history classes have you had through your US schooling?

-Not in high school because I was only able to take the classes that I had to in order to graduate.

34. Have you taken any classes related to the African continent in college? Why? Why not?

- African civilization class because I wanted to learn more about Africa. I have never been outside of Ethiopia and able to visit other countries in Africa. Also, there are a lot of white people at my school and I wanted to connect with my identity more.

35. Do you consider yourself a leader?

-No. I am not a leader but I am confident. I don't know if I would call myself a leader. I don't know I follow what my parents say because I respect them. I am in the middle.

36. What does leadership mean to you?

-It means being a confident person, leading people in a good way.

37. What events on the African continent have impacted your experiences in the United States?

-The separation of Eritrean and Ethiopian people (two separate nations) because a lot of people mix up Eritreans and Ethiopians. Some people don't like people called Ethiopian if they are Eritrean and Eritrean if they are Ethiopian. I think they are the same.

38. How have these events shaped your identity?

-Not really. I would not get mad if someone called me Eritrean I would just tell the person where I am from.

39. How have you dealt with the impacts that these events have had on your identity?

-Just explain to them why they shouldn't call someone Ethiopian or Eritrean if they are not.

40. What do you think your peers, who are not African immigrants, know about the country that you immigrated from?

-A lot of them think there is a lot of poverty. I had someone ask me if we still live in the jungle. They think we are not civilized or modernized and that we are not educated.

41. Why do they know this information?

-The media tells them that we are dying and starving. Everyone right now thinks everyone in Africa has Ebola. The countries that have Ebola have it because they don't have the medication to save everyone.

42. What is different from the person you were when you were younger and now in college?

-Nothing. I still think I am the same person but there could be some change.

43. Do you feel closer to your culture now or when you were younger? Do you feel comfortable using language or participating in other cultural practices related to your ethnic heritage?

- I would say now because now that I don't see people or everyone who is Ethiopian, I want to learn more about my culture. I feel comfortable and proud because I feel different and special to know another culture and language, my own culture and language.
44. Have you had to deal with racial or cultural issues since coming to the US? Why?  
-No because the people at school were understanding and many of my friends were Ethiopian.
45. Have you had to deal with these racial issues as an African or African American?  
-No.
46. As an African and girl, what micro-aggressions have you faced? (Definition will be defined)?  
-I don't think I have faced any.
47. Is your experience as a women different from that of African immigrant boys? Why?  
-Yes, because people here still have the expectation of me getting married at a young age but don't have those expectations of guys. Education wise the expectations are the same.
48. Do you plan to work in an African country?  
-Yea, I would love to. I would love to help out African countries not just my own country. I want to get educated and then be there for my own people.
49. Do you plan to work with African communities in the US? In what way?  
-Yes, with social work but I would like to work with other communities too.

#### Case Study: Interview Results (7 out of 7)

Narrator: Nikki

Educational Level: College Senior, Graduating in three years

Gender: Women

Age/ sibling order: 21 years of age, second oldest

Immigrant Background:

Immigrant Status: 1.5 generation

#### Interview Questions

1. What is your name?  
-Nikki
2. What is your country of origin?  
-Sierra Leone
3. What year of schooling are you in?  
-I am in my third and final year of my undergraduate career.
4. How long has your family lived in the United States?  
- 12 years.
5. For elementary, middle, and high school what type of school did you go to? (Public, Charter, Private, etc.)  
-In the United States I attended public institutions. Back home I went to British and American international school.
6. What was the race/ ethnicity of the students who attended your school?  
-When I first came to the US I attended a predominately Latino/a school. Once my family and I moved to a suburb, my classmates were majority white.
7. What are you majoring in? Why?

-I am majoring in Sociology and minoring in Political Science. My dad chose my major. I wanted to be a history major because I wanted to go straight into law school but my dad thought Sociology would be a better route. Also, I saw that people who went into social justice type law like immigration, international or human rights had Sociology degrees. I like it now. Political science allows you to understand a system and then politically analyze those systems; it is one thing to critique a system and another to understand why I am critiquing it.

8. What are your goals after graduation?

-I want to take a year off and work. Then I want to intern at a law firm and see whether or not I want to go into law or do a masters program. Right now I am thinking about international, immigration and immigration policy law.

9. What student groups are you involved in? Why?

-The African Students Association, Black Student Alliance, South Asian Pacific communities (their organizations), National Society of Collegiate Scholars. If it is a multicultural organization, you will find me involved with that organization.

10. What expectations do your parents have about your education?

-My story is kin of atypical in the sense that my parents never forced law on to me or being academically rigorous so whatever I put my hand into my parents were very supportive. They just wanted me to be passionate about something and work hard to achieve it.

11. What expectations do you have about yourself and your education?

-Being an African woman I have a lot of expectations about my education because at sit at an interesting intersection of having access to education but also being very aware that not a lot of women of my background or sociological demographics have the same privileges that I do. This has made me work very hard. I know that this hard work paves the way for other African who can build on the sea of hard work and try to open up other avenues for those who may not have the same education or privileges that I do.

12. Do you feel welcome on your campus? Why or why not?

-No. I don't feel comfortable because I don't feel welcome but I try to find spaces that make me feel comfortable. So wide institution wise, no, but in the spaces that are created for people of color, especially of color, I feel welcomed.

13. Do you work on campus?

-Yes.

14. What does your work entail?

-Internships with business and non-profits.

15. What were/ are your parent's thoughts on the US Schooling system?

-My parents assumed that it would be a lot easier because they went through the British system of schooling and saw how school systems in a lot of different African countries were failing their students; my parents lived in three or four other countries. They thought a US/ western education might be better. They believed my siblings and I would naturally flourish here. They still think about it this way and are not as critical of a western education as I am since they didn't go through one.

16. Why did your parents say that they immigrated to the United States?

-My dad moved because of a job after getting a promotion from being a regional director of a company in an African country.

17. Where you bullied in school or outside of school due to your ethnicity?



-Yes, a lot. They made me feel like an “other,” making me feel ashamed to be from the continent and a lack of pride. I faced it even from communities I expected to have solidarity with but got targeted even more by those communities, communities of color. It wasn't until college when I understood why this was happening.

18. Were you ever classified as African American? If so, Why?

-I was very silent about my identity because I knew that if I said anything, it could cause tension and bullying so before tenth grade I classified myself as African American or Black; this created less tension. In tenth grade I started to identify as a Sierra Leonean American woman.

-I was classified as African American or black because we are black in terms of the law. In America, all black folk are the same. All of our experiences are homogenized as the Black experience, which is an incomplete story.

19. What identity of classification do you give yourself (African, African American, etc.)?

-Heterosexual, cisgender, Sierra Leonean American woman

20. Have you, or others in your schooling, defined or made distinctions between the two? If so, how do you feel about those distinctions?

-Well in college, people might know I am different because I now classify as an African woman but the term African is strange for me as well. This is because it is also assuming that all Africans are the same so I take it a step further and highlight the fact that I am a Sierra Leonean woman and that Africa is made up of many countries. I explain this to people because now I have the vocabulary and facets to do so.

21. What classification did you give yourself when you were younger?

-African American.

22. What is your relationship like with African Americans?

-It is growing in a beautiful and dynamic way, a way in which I do not think would have been possible if I had not gone through the American educational system. The relationship between Africans and African Americans is a very divisive trait of white society in America or whiteness. Had I come straight to college from the continent and not experienced everything that I have experienced, I would have chucked it up to stereotypes and not try to get to know them. Having these experiences gives me experiential academic knowledge of why there is a tension between these two communities as well as other black communities. I am thankful for this experience because I can approach things from a different angle and address tensions in a constructive way.

23. What have your experiences been like with White students, or with other students who are not of African descent?

-There has been good and bad. There have been great allies in the White community who have stood by me and are still great friends, but there are those who just don't get it. White students tend to sometimes homogenize experience or identities of people of color and have a lack of willingness or wanting to know the histories or identities of people of color.

24. Did you have any expectations that were different from that of your siblings from your parents?

-Because I was the only child that went through the elementary, middle, and high school US educational system with my parents, I have a different understanding of the

educational system and how identities can be shaped through the educational system. My siblings only went to college in the US so they have a different understanding of that.

25. What is culturally different from being a woman in US society and when you are home with your family?  
-I think is where the intersection of class, race, gender, and ethnicity come in because of my families class positionality back home, there were more equal expectation of my identity as a woman with that of my brother or other men. I was afforded the privilege of dreaming big professionally, academically, and so forth.
26. Do you speak a different language from English?  
-Creole. I can read and write in French but struggle speaking it.
27. Did you have to learn English when you first came to the US  
-No. I spoke English in my country of origin, as it is the official language.
28. Have you gone back to your country of origin?  
-No. After we left, the civil war ensued.
29. Have you ever felt embarrassed for being an African immigrant or if you don't identify as African, been embarrassed of your parents' identity?  
-Many times, whenever anything bad happens on the continent of Africa. I feel like I have to be the spokesperson for every African event/ African country. I have had to defend my father before because a restaurant because of his accent, a waiter, even though he speaks grammatical English, thought that he ordered grapes instead of ribs. I feel frustrated for my parents a lot because of their accent they are treated as incompetent.
- Have you ever been told that you are acting white? If so, by who?  
-That was the insult of my life. All through my schooling I was told that and I even internalized it. It was not until college that I understood that true meaning of those words.
  - What does acting white mean to you?  
-This is when someone associates white with intelligence and anything positive, which for a person of color is, I have learned in college, is internalized oppressions. This keeps a community down and is very much detrimental to them.
30. Did your teachers make you feel welcome in school?  
-Yes, professors. Some though irritated me because I think they could have took the time to understand the word intersectionality.
31. Did your classmates make you feel welcome in school?  
-Yes, but some question my existence on the campus.
32. Have you learned about history related to the African continent in school?  
-Yes.
33. What history classes have you had through your US schooling?  
-Related to the history of slavery, but not about what systems or societies existed before slavery or colonization.
34. Have you taken any classes related to the African continent in college? Why? Why not?  
-Yes. Intro to Africana Studies and this is because I wanted to. All of the other things I know about the continent are from my own investigations. If I didn't take those efforts I would not have had or have that knowledge.
35. Do you consider yourself a leader?  
-
36. What does leadership mean to you?

-A leader is someone who takes the role of being a servant in a community. Leaders are not those who just propel or define a vision for a community or organization, they are the one's who work alongside people to accomplish an equally distributed task. A person, who is willing to work for others, has respect, humility, and values honesty.

37. What events on the African continent have impacted your experiences in the United States?

-Definitely anything that has to do with a war, disease or any type of trauma on the continent. You name it.

38. How have these events shaped your identity?

-I have become very firm and quick about what I believe in and understand about the continent.

39. How have these experiences impacted your experience? / How have you dealt with the impacts that these events have had on your identity?

-It threw me on the defensive because I thought I knew a lot about the African continent but I really didn't and allowed me to realize that also homogenized the experiences of African people. This made me reflect on my own understanding of the continent. So I found myself telling my peers to go to this or that source to answer the question that they asked me.

40. What do you think your peers, who are not African immigrants, know about the country that you immigrated from?

-Brutal war, blood diamonds, never ending conflicts, and Ebola. Not for pharaohs... black ones... or other things.

41. Why do they know this information?

-It has to do how western media shapes the continent. Also the way that history is taught here. Africans even when talking about slavery are seen as barbaric beings that live on a dark continent and recycle bad things or violence.

42. What is different from the person you were when you were younger and now in college?

-The person in college knows how to vocalize what I was going through as a younger person.

43. Do you feel closer to your culture now or when you were younger? Do you feel comfortable using language or participating in other cultural practices related to your ethnic heritage?

-I feel so much closer to my cultural now than before. My parents even joke about it now and say that I identify with my culture more today than ever before, even when I was on the continent. But the development of my identity is still in progress in relation to my identity as a Sierra Leonean woman.

44. Have you had to deal with racial or cultural issues since coming to the US? Why? / Have you had to deal with these racial issues as an African or African American?

-All of my experiences have been layered. There has been an attach on my racial, ethnic, and gender identity. So I can't say just one thing.

45. As an African and girl, what micro-aggressions have you faced? (Definition will be defined)?

-I faced a lot of micro-aggressions at school being an African that my parents did not understand. They told me to brush it off and that I would face bigger challenges. There was kind of a generational disconnect. The micro-aggressions were directed towards my heritage and disrespect towards the continent of Africa. I got called an African booty

scratcher, a term I still don't understand. Asked if everyone in Africa has AIDS, do I know anyone who has an AIDS baby, I was marginalized a lot, even my accent was made fun of. As well as further actions that made me the other. The exotic African girl who was quite black enough but was definitely not white, and was just her own tribal like monkey girl.

46. Is your experience as a women different from that of African immigrant men? Why?  
-Yes. In the US, how we encounter the world is very different. We are black under the law as I said before so black men and are perceived differently. For instance, in terms of police brutality, black men, even though black women experience it too, are over represented in prison and there are expectations of black masculinity placed on them such as providing for their families. Therefore, when we talk about blocked opportunities for black men or African men, we talk about tensions between the relationships of African immigrant men and women because if the African woman is able to work, in many cases over worked, and the African men is not you see that the men feels threatened and may become aggressive.
47. Do you plan to work in an African country?  
-I have goals for that. I have a lot of passions and I am trying to figure out how those passions can go back to the African continent in some shape or form.
48. Do you plan to work with African communities in the US? In what way?  
- I have a deep desire for this by volunteering with African organization and/ or community centers that allow me to share my experiences with other young adults who may not think anyone understands what they are going through like their parents. I want to be the bridge between the two worlds. My older siblings even though sometimes they couldn't understand what I was going through, helped me to articulate some of my emotions when I was being too emotional.

## Recruitment Email

Hello Beautiful People,

My name is Bintou Diallo and I am working towards a BA in Ethnic Studies and a minor in Leadership. I am conducting research for my senior thesis and would love to have you participate in it. My thesis focuses on examining the social and cultural identities of African immigrant women in Higher Education and their leadership roles on campus as underrepresented students.

I am looking for African women who were born in an African country but have received elementary to high school or middle school to high school schooling in the United States and are now attending a US college or university. In a group of five to seven, we will discuss your identity in relation to your experience in the US educational system and how that has informed or influenced the decisions that you have made in your Higher Education.

Group interviews will take place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Center for Community in the Cultural Unity and Engagement Center classrooms. Your participation and any identifying factors will be kept confidential, and will take less than an hour and a half. Once all five to seven participants are identified, there will be a scheduled time for everyone to meet, which will likely to be on a Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, or weekend.

If you would like to participate in this study please email me at [bintou.diallo@colorado.edu](mailto:bintou.diallo@colorado.edu) or call me at [720-364-5012](tel:720-364-5012).

Thank you for your support and participation.

Bintou Diallo

## Consent Form

15 December 2014

This interview, which is being conducted on \_\_\_\_\_ will discuss the socio-cultural identities of my identity in relation to my educational attainment and leadership in higher education in the United States. In this interview, I give consent for it to be recorder, for my stories or anything else discussed within the interview to be used for research and thesis writing means. The interviewer has agreed to not release any information that would identify me and promises to keep the tape recording secure; only her faculty advisors will be allowed to hear the tape. Unless given written consent by me, \_\_\_\_\_, and the researcher will not use my name or any other identifiers. In addition, I acknowledge that the findings of this interview may be published for educational purposes.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (print), \_\_\_\_\_ (sign) agree to all of the above.

If I have any questions or concerns, I will contact the researcher at [Bintou.Diallo@colorado.edu](mailto:Bintou.Diallo@colorado.edu) or 720-364-5012. Any further questions or concerns, if not resolved, can be addressed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 303-735-3702.