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AFRICAN IMMIGRANT CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN CALIFORNIA: RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

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The messages contemporary African immigrant parents' and their children receive from the American society are vital to their overall adjustment, the children's school experience and identity construction. This study brings attention to the educational experience of the children of African immigrants and the challenges they face as they adjust to a new country and a new culture. The paper highlights the findings from interviews that were conducted among twenty two college students whose parents emigrated from Africa in the last decade. In addition the paper addresses the role of schools in the identity construction of African immigrant children; the effects of stereotypes and discrimination in the process of assimilation, and identity construction. African students struggle with accepting the messages and guidance they receive from their immigrant parents; the challenges of meeting their parents' expectations of adhering to the African culture and way of life while also striving to embrace the American culture and way of life. The interviews show that the level of prejudice and discrimination the students experience at school is highly associated with the level of their ambivalence or reluctance to embrace their new American identity. In addition, immigrant parents' quality of communication and involvement in their children's lives is associated with how well the children perform and adjust in American schools.

Keywords: Education, African immigrants, Immigrant education, Racism, School experience.

Introduction

The objective of the study is to bring attention to the unique educational experience of African immigrant students and how that experience affects their identity construction. To raise African immigrant parent's consciousness regarding their children's educational experience, the trials they face as they adjust to a new country, culture, and racism. To encourage African parents to become more actively involved in the events at their children's school, instead of just trusting the teachers and other school officials. Finally, recommend ways in which parents can advocate for their children in schools. For the purpose of this article, the term "immigrant children" is used to refer to foreign-born children who have migrated, not the United States-born second generation. "Children of immigrants" refer to both United States-born and foreign-born children" (Suárez Orozco & Suárez Orozco, 2001, p.1). This paper focuses on Black African immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa as opposed to all African immigrants who include White and Arab African immigrants.

Characteristics of Recent Black African Immigrants

In recent years, beginning in 1990s, there has been an increase in the number of African immigrants in the United States as a result of changes in the immigration laws. Capps, McCabe and Fix (2012) in their study of African immigrants report, "Though currently small in number, Black Africans are among the fastest growing immigrant population in the United States" (p.46). In 1980 the total of African born population was only 64,000 but by 2010 the total of the African Black immigrant population had risen to 1.6 million. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were approximately 155,000 African Immigrants in California between 2008 and 2012. Black African immigrants come to the United States for different reasons including displacement due to political, social and economic instability. Africans enter the United States in different ways, as refugees, as students and through family reunification. "Refuge source countries include: Ethiopia, Somalia, Liberia, Sudan and Eritrea, together they accounted for 30 percent of Black African immigrants in 2009" (Capps, McCabe and Fix 2012, p.52). Since the immigration reform in 1965, more African immigrants have entered the United States either through employment or via diversity visa. Africans from Anglophone Africa tend to be fluent in English because the English language is the official language in the British colonized countries. On the other hand, Immigrants from former French and Portuguese colonies are not fluent in English and have to learn the language once they get to America. The Africans from Anglophone countries have a language advantage but because of their strong accents they still stand out as different from the native African American population.

Research has consistently indicated that Black African immigrants are among the best-educated United States immigrants (Capps and Fix 2012; Kaba, 2007; Mason & Austin, 2011). The high levels of education have been explained by the fact that a large number of Africans are admitted through the diversity program, "which requires immigrants to have at least a high school degree or two years of experience in an occupation that requires at least two years or more of training to perform. High travel costs also partially explain the relatively high share of skilled Africans among United States immigrants" (Capps & Fix. 2012, p.60). Contrary to popular belief that education does translate into affluence, a recent study by Mason and Austin (2011), concluded that despite high education rates, Africans continue to face discrimination in employment because of color ('race'), and nationality. Capps and Fix (2012) also found:

the high education attainment and English proficiency of Black Africans do not lead to high earnings. In 2007, median annual earnings for Black African immigrants were \$27,000, just above the median for all immigrants (\$ 26,000) and about 20 percent below median for United States born workers (Capps et. al. p. 65).

The low earnings of African immigrants are attributed to underemployment among the highly skilled as well as difficulties with credentialing and racial discrimination in the United States labor market. "Discrimination in terms of wage and job hiring is worse for African immigrants than that of African Americans (Mason & Austin, 2011).

The low earnings of African immigrants have implications for their children's educational attainment. Alejandro, Portes (2002) contends that foreign workers are attractive to employers because they accept to work for low wages. However, low wages translate into poverty and inferior schooling for immigrant children. Portes warns that those children who "attend poor schools, live in tough neighborhoods and lack role models have their high aspirations unrealized" (p. 2). The children of poor immigrants are also encountering difficult conditions of blocked opportunity and external discrimination (Portes, 2002.p.3) He contends that immigrant children who find themselves structurally marginalized and culturally disparaged are more likely to develop an adversarial style of adaptation, which leads to problems in schools. Thomas (2012) notes that "even though black immigrants generally outperform black natives (Massey et al., 2007; Bennett and Lutz, 2009), possibly because of parental migrant selectivity (Feliciano, 2005), race is still an important mediator of schooling differences among the children of immigrants" (p.40) Furthermore, Crosby and Dunbar (2012) found that "Black immigrant

parents report higher expectations for their children's eventual educational attainment than every other group of parents except East Asian and Indian Asian immigrant parents." (pp. 203-204)

In spite of the high parental expectations, African immigrant children face similar levels of educational discrimination that the native born blacks face, however, the Africans are just becoming familiar with the educational system. Once it is understood that African immigrant children are not seen as different from native African American children, then theories relevant to the education of African Americans can be applied to the education of immigrant African children. Those theories range from cultural deficit theories to cultural difference (Heath, 1983; Hale, 2001; Delpit, 2005) to structural theories (Kozol 1991; Murrell, 2007). In addition there is a presumed conflict between African American identity and academic achievement. Foster, (1997) notes "African American students' school success is related to the expectations of their parents and of teachers who believe they are capable of learning" (p.104). In America, schools act as socializing agents that blend all children into the mainstream culture. When African parents send their children to school, they are literally immersed in a different culture from their home culture.

African immigrant students with educated parents benefit from early introduction to literacy, ability to afford private schooling and academic support, all of which is important for academic achievement. However, African parents being new to America may not fully appreciate the effects of racism and discrimination that their children face; and the stereotypes that already exist against blacks and their academic abilities. Furthermore, scholars such as Ogbu (1991a).; cited in Ainsworth-Darnel & Downey (1998) suggest that voluntary immigrants develop optimistic attitudes regarding both their chances for success in the new country and the payoff for efforts aimed at promoting achievement (p. 536). For these reasons, we see African immigrant children performing at high levels in spite of real challenges.

Another and related question is how do different generations of African immigrants identify themselves and how does that play out in school? If the immigrant parents prefer to emphasize their ethnic identities, national origins and African roots, do their children feel the same way or do they try to find a group to belong to? In that case, what are the educational consequences for the children of African immigrants who choose to assimilate into the native African American culture? Suarez-Orozco et.al (2001) note "the meaning immigrant children make of anti-immigrant hostilities as well as their perception of their opportunities will influence their integration" (p.29). They discussed the concept of "social mirroring" whereby children's sense-of-self are affected by the reflections mirrored back at them from significant others" (p.98). The media rarely portray Africa in a positive light, which leads American students both white and black to have a distorted negative view of anything African. This has real consequences for African immigrant children as will be shown in their responses to the question about their experience of discrimination based on the color of their skin. In his research, Thomas (2012) showed that: "while all foreign-born children of Black Africans, regardless of age at arrival, outperform second-generation children; the first-generation advantage is clearly driven by children who immigrated to United States in early childhood. In general, these children are more acculturated than other first-generation children, but generally differ from second-generation children in their language attributes, educational attainment, and eventual occupational trajectories" (p. 53). This paper, in addition to raising parental consciousness to racism¹ in the educational system, tries to find out how racial discrimination affects African immigrant students' identity construction.

¹ Cultural racism "the cultural images and messages that affirm the assumed superiority of whites and the assumed inferiority of people of color, it is like smog in the air" (Tatum, 1997, p. 6). Racism "is a culturally acceptable beliefs that defend social advantages that are based on race" (Wellman, 1977, p.4). Racism is a system involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals" (Tatum, 1997, p. 7)

Methods

This study used qualitative methods of research, employing individual as well as focus group interviews of African parents and college students. Parents and students were given questionnaires to fill in. The fifty three respondents including twenty two students and thirty one parents were from three areas in California, Los Angeles, Sacramento and the Bay area. Participants came from different countries in Africa namely: Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, Uganda, Ghana, Rwanda, South Africa, Eritrea, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone. This paper focuses on the responses of the students the majority of whom were foreign born and migrated to the United States at different ages. Participants of whom seven students are American born to immigrant parents, eight males and fourteen females between the ages of eighteen and thirty were interviewed. Participants were found at college campuses, country community gatherings and through snowball methods where by the first group of students identified others willing to participate.

Face to face interviews as well as focus group interviews were recorded and analyzed following major themes in the responses. The students were asked about their experience in school specifically what role school played in their identity construction, and their experience with racism. Other questions included any discussions about racism between parents and children, discussions about the parents' educational experiences and how involved the parents were in their children's school activities. This paper focuses on students' responses to the questions regarding the schools' influence on their construction of identity². In addition, analysis is made of answers to the question dealing with their experience with racial discrimination and how they responded to these experiences in their social and academic life. Theories of identity construction are used as the basis for understanding the experiences of African immigrant student's school experiences. Identity is a feeling, intersubjectively shared by individuals in a given group that is based on a sense of common origin, common beliefs and values, common goals and a sense of shared destiny (Suarez-Orozco et al. (2004). Personal identity refers to how one views oneself and is influenced by the dominant ideologies; and social identity refers to how society around us views us. Because the students were either in college or had completed college, the sample is skewed in favor of those Black African immigrants that have been successful academically.

Results

Like any other group, African immigrants comprise many groups, including: a self-selected group that come for post graduate education and have at least a first degree; groups that came to this country as refugees escaping political and religious persecution and recently those that come through the diversity program. African immigrants mostly live in urban areas in New York, Los Angeles, Boston, Philadelphia, Wisconsin and others. They are attracted by job availability and existence of other members of their community. The majority of African immigrant children attend public schools but parents that can afford it put their children in private schools. As indicated earlier many immigrants who come from war riddled African countries tend to have limited education (Capps and Fix, 2012). These parents are not as involved in their children's school life leaving the children to fend for themselves in an unfamiliar educational system. In this section, I give excerpts from the responses to the questions regarding identity construction, the role schools play in that process; and the student's experiences of discrimination. In addition, I indicate their country of origin and age at immigration to give context. For example; in answer to how aware of the discrimination the parents and children were? Lily, who moved from South Africa with her mother when she was ten-years-old said, "As an immigrant with an accent, I was often teased to the point of not wanting to speak. My mother was too busy working and felt she would not be taken seriously at my school with her accent."

² Identity is both conscious and unconscious, and is a coherent sense of self which gives an individual a sense of wholeness, of integration, of knowing what is right and wrong and being able to choose (Erikson, 1968).

This response shows a range of concerns that immigrant parents and students have in learning the American educational system, which can have positive and negative outcomes. Lily suffered discrimination based on her identity as an African with an accent.

The educated parents in the study indicated that they help their children academically with homework; and are somehow familiar with the complex American educational system; or are able to learn the system faster. Lotus came from Sierra Leone when she was eleven-years-old in sixth grade and acknowledges that

school heavily influenced my American identity, it has shaped the way I speak, and think about my identity. It was through school and peers that I learned the behavior of “the American” The parents weren’t fully aware of the discrimination and they believed that the best way to deal with discrimination was to perform better than “the white kids”; to excel at all I do.” “They believe that hard work is the primary way to overcome those challenges

One way participants responded to the discrimination is to work hard and show how smart they are. Paul, who emigrated from Uganda when he was twelve felt out of place at school and did not fit in with the African Americans.

African Americans poke fun at the way you speak because you have an accent. It frustrates me because I feel like a double minority at times. Being black but not black American makes me feel even lower than the blacks who are born here.

Paul’s experience and his feelings raise questions about what place the African child feels he occupies in the social hierarchy, as well as, his ability and motivation to assimilate if he feels less than the African Americans?

Carol a second generation African American whose highly educated parents came from West Africa (Nigeria) said this about racism at school “My parents never spoke to me about discrimination. Luckily, they didn’t have to because besides the normal bullying /being picked on by others that kids usually experience, I never experienced any discrimination during my academic career.” Carol did not have an accent and having parents that were familiar with the educational system eased her educational experience.

Kim, a woman with parents from Nigeria said: she felt like she was always struggling with her “American” identity because many of the things that other black students got to do, she could not do. She also felt as though it was hard to make friends at school. When one is discriminated against because of their skin color, the way they speak or any other characteristics, it makes it hard for those students to construct or fit into the mainstream American identity. It is even harder for African students to face discrimination from native African Americans. Many students indicated that they were not telling their parents about the incidents of discrimination at school, because they did not want to add to the burden the parents have, working and taking care of the family.

Aaron, a second generation son of immigrants from Nigeria responded

School played a huge part in the development of my American identity. My parents enforced their cultural rules to some extent but they never really made it a big part of my life, so the American culture is the first thing I picked up from school” My parents are extremely aware of the racism. They always told me to keep to myself and not get into fights or arguments.

The message African immigrant parents try to get across to their children is to encourage them to cherish and make the most of their American education. In conversation, the parents constantly remind the children of the benefits of receiving an American education. The existence of greater opportunities after school, a higher level of education, and lower costs are all benefits the students are constantly reminded of. All African parents have very high expectations for their children; they also appreciate the lower cost of education. The point about the low cost of education as an incentive for their children to perform well came up in majority of responses. In an effort to motivate their children, parents tell stories

of their struggles to acquire education back in Africa and encourage their children to take advantage of the opportunity they have in the United States.

Charlie, another second generation student with Nigerian parents indicated that school had not influenced his identity development a lot.

It is difficult to explain, but because my family has always been together and close knit we've always been able to stick to our cultural traditions. Being around my family has allowed me to be influenced by our culture instead of forcing me to find my identity solely through the American system

Roda, another second generation daughter of Nigerian immigrants responded

I feel that school has greatly influenced my identity development. Growing up I would always be focused on my school work. I consider myself Nigerian not African American. Not being around many other blacks in my honors and AP classes kind of set me apart from them. Socially, I felt distanced from them, it really influenced my identity.

With respect to racial discrimination, Roda said her parents were aware of it all.

My dad always stressed it more on my brothers that they would have to face prejudice simply because they are black and male. We all would have to face prejudice. My situation, however, would be easier than my brothers because I am a female but none the less, the race issue would always be present.

In their study, Suarez-Orozco and Qin, (2006) found that "compared with boys, immigrant girls were more likely to have friends who were serious about schoolwork and supportive of academics. Furthermore, they found that boys of color, often face lower expectations, more stigmatization, and are subject to more blatant discrimination than girls and are thus at greater risk for academic disengagement" (p.39) There is a clear history of stereotyping of young black men in this country, a practice that is reinforced daily by the media portrayal of these young men. Immigrant parents need to become aware of these stereotypes and how they impact their children. Clearly some parents are very aware of these stereotypes and their consequences and they caution their sons about these concerns.

Daffodil came to the United States from Ethiopia when he was 13 years-old; he indicated that his parents knew very little English when they came. The parents just looked up the local school in the area and enrolled him as soon as they arrived. His parents just wanted him to do well in school. Dahlia, another Ethiopian immigrant who came at age ten said,

my family and everybody else in Ethiopia had the same idea about the American school system, they believed it was the promised land. This information is passed on through people and media. My parents did not know anything about the level of discrimination that a minority child faced. What they saw is they gave me this opportunity to go to a good school so I should be responsible for how hard I work and get good grades no matter what the situation is.

Norah, a college student who came to the United States from Ethiopia at eleven-years of age with her parents had this to say about discrimination:

Diversity wasn't a topic the school discussed, "people especially the white girls were uncomfortable talking about race and I'd be like ... imagine how it is for me! I am African!" I was among 150 African Americans at the school. I especially found it hard to get along with native African Americans they would treat me differently. They would say things like "you not black...etc." some of the comments really hurt because I was stuck in the middle. The white students did not accept me and neither did the very close black community at the school. Things were always segregated especially at lunchtime when everyone sat separately. I made friends with those that did not belong to either group many of whom were students of mixed background. I do

not feel much influenced. I didn't let my parents know about this because I did not want to stress them anymore.

Some see the strategy of choosing friends who are not affiliated either with white or black groups as the best way for African immigrant children to deal with school discrimination. Norah's parents were not able to advocate for her because she did not inform them of her experiences. Her coping strategy was to befriend others like her who did not belong to the traditional camps of black or white.

Tim, another student who moved to United States from Ethiopian at age ten, said "my education only made it more evident to me about the racial discrimination in America, and that even the people who worked hard and were good people were constantly being discriminated against". He received ridicule from both white and blacks. He no longer sought to embrace his American identity but he decided to have pride in his Ethiopian heritage. This student's response shows how students who face an unwelcoming environment at school are not so eager to shed their African identity. In some cases, parents who are themselves dealing with discrimination at their work or education do not know how to advise their children so they just encourage them to work hard. Tim said his father always told him to "work hard and prove them wrong".

Amos, another male student who moved from Nigerian at seven years old said:

In grade school I felt like I was constantly reminded that I was not just black but African. It was crazy that even black students made fun of me. The teasing decreased in Junior high where I was on a sports team.

In her work with Ethiopian immigrants in Washington, Chacko noted about the majority of her participants that; "the desire to have an identity separate from that of native Blacks was compounded by negative personal experiences with members of the group, especially during middle school and high school years. When native Blacks were vocally critical of them, young Ethiopian immigrants reported being more upset and offended than if the comments had been made by Whites (p. 498).

Rose was thirteen when she came to the United States with her mother from Kenya and said

I do not see myself as African American. I guess I am still searching for where I fit in. My mother learned that there was no difference between African American and African. She often expressed to me how in her community college classes she felt overlooked and unimportant. It was here that she learned to fight for her rights as a student of color.

This is very important because some Africans think that just by identifying themselves as Africans they will be spared the discrimination faced by native African Americans.

Camilia, who came to the United States as an eleven-year old from Ethiopia responded;

I feel, since I am black, I am automatically put into the African American category although my experiences are different from blacks who were born here. I identify more with Africa but in school you are not categorized as this black kid from Ethiopia and this black kid is from America ...but it is these kids are black. This takes away from your identity and puts you in a category with others who look like you but are very different from you.

Like many immigrants, Camilia's parents knew that racial discrimination in America was an issue in the past but didn't realize it was still a major problem until they came here and experienced it. Camilia is a student who would like to be seen as an individual with different experiences from other black students but who finds herself automatically identified with other black students leaving no room for her African identity to be manifested. Many new African immigrants want to be seen as different from native African Americans for many reasons but especially because of the negative media representation.

Viola came from Nigeria to the United States with her parents at the age of seven. The parents were not aware of the extent of discrimination; "In Africa, America is so highly upheld. It wasn't until my mom began working in the educational system that she experienced the reality of discrimination first hand".

Elvis who came to the United States from Ethiopia at age eight revealed:

School had a huge impact on my development. When I first came to the United States, my English wasn't very good. I was a shy kid growing up; the school system helped me become social.

For many of the African immigrant students, school plays an important role of socializing them into the American culture. School is where they learn the English language, and other characteristics of the American culture.

Tulip, an American born student whose parents came from Ethiopia said:

I feel like school shaped my American identity. It's the foundation of my American identity. At home, my identity as an Ethiopian was formed by my parents. At school, I was able to interact with other children from other races. "I never really told my parents about any racist encounters. I felt like there was a disconnect between me and my parents when it comes to discrimination because they didn't go to school here. I don't think they would be able to relate to what I was going through.

For students born in the United States, there is an appreciation of the contribution of the schools to their identity construction, especially if they did not experience much discrimination. Many parents who have not gone to school in this country it is hard to comprehend the discrimination that their children face daily at school.

Daisy who came from Ethiopia when she was fourteen said

I think school has affected my identity to a certain extent. I would say that I have learned a lot about myself since I moved out here. I have managed to incorporate some parts of the American culture into my Ethiopian culture. I learned most of the stuff I know about American culture from the whole experience of going to school.

The role of schools to these students' identity construction process cannot be overstated.

Sunny came from Burkina Faso to the United States at sixteen attend community college and transferred to a four-year-college. On the identity question he asked:

How can you learn and promote a positive American identity when you have to deal with discrimination at school? Right now, I don't feel like I belong or I am welcome.

It is a balancing act these students have to go through as they balance their parent's calls for hard work and a school environment that at times is challenging. As I indicated, these were students that had headed their parents' advice and were in college at the time of the study.

Discussion

The study shows that school plays a very significant role in these African immigrant students' socialization. All of the participants attested to the importance of schools to their American identity construction. At school, they learn the language and how to speak without their parent's accents. The emphasis on the American identity is important but at the same time many feel that they are straddling two cultures and identities. There is an identity that is based on the home culture, which is influenced by the parental cultural influences. With regard to identity, there were two paths taken by the students. The first path was taken by the second generation students that embraced their American identity without much reservation. The second path, mostly taken by first generation and second generation whose parents had succeeded in immersing them in their African culture; these students were ambivalent about embracing their American identity totally. They were conflicted by their experiences of racial discrimination from the American peers, both black and white; the lack of understanding and knowledge exhibited by these peers; and the devaluing of anything different and decided that it was better to keep

their parent's culture. These students are actually straddling both the American culture and the parent African culture but leaning more toward the parent culture. Academically, they just decide to work hard and show those that were discriminating against them that they are just as smart as or even better than them. The consequences of either path are not very clear but there are studies that have shown high academic achievement among the first generation and those that retain the culture of the parents. On the other hand, Portes, 2002 and others have shown that those that embrace the American culture, especially the poor immigrants might develop the adversarial culture which is anti-education or anti achievement. Owens & Lynch (2012) suggest that "with greater duration in the United States and movement out of enclaves and into neighborhoods more highly concentrated with domestic minorities, second-generation students may begin to view themselves along racial lines and begin to believe that negative-ability stereotypes apply to them." (p. 307). Consequently, young energetic African American boys failing to identify with the curriculum become unmotivated and disengaged (Murrell, 2007). They fail to develop an academic identity, which is how one views their intellectual potential. If African immigrant students feel unappreciated at school, they can choose to follow a route taken by some of native African American students who reject an academic identity. This has been suggested in the case of low achieving second generation African students who are less attached to their parent's African culture. Similar conclusions have been reached by other scholars of immigrant populations (Orozco & Orozco, 2001; Ogbu, 1991). More research needs to be done on the extent to which second and third-generation children of black African immigrants buy into the adversarial culture and what consequences that action has on their academic achievement. The process is not automatic and the majority of fully assimilated children of African immigrants do achieve academically.

Many African immigrant parents who are not familiar with the educational system have an unquestioning trust in teachers at their children's schools. Many of these parents do not question teacher's practices even when they may be driven by negative stereotypes about black children's academic abilities. For example, Angela, a Nigerian-American student said, "What the teachers had to say was pretty much law, I think there would have had to have been a serious incident to shake their faith. I think they just trusted them more than me". The nature of trust African immigrant parents have of the school system is a clear carryover of the trust they had for teachers in their home countries where teachers are greatly respected and unquestioned. In general, participants said, their parents don't really fully understand all of the challenges they have to deal with. All African parents, however, have very high expectations for their children pushing them to work hard in order to have a better life and to overcome the stereotypes teachers and society may have about their academic abilities. Some of the parents indicated that their children are having an easier time in American schools and colleges compared to their own experiences in their countries of origin. Moreover, the parents see their education in America as harder than their children's experience, since some have to learn English at an older age. Many others have to deal with stereotypes about foreign accents and having to prove themselves to their employers and professors. Consequently, immigrant parents push their children to work harder as they think it is easier for them but understand they have to excel to overcome the negative stereotypes. These students develop coping strategies such as, being adversarial to mainstream institutions and expectations and/or working harder than other students and excelling in everything they do.

The majority of students whose parents were familiar with the American school system got their information from relatives who had lived in the country longer. Others who had attended college in this country had some idea and those living in areas with large communities from the same country formed country based organizations. The rest of the students, especially those with less educated parents or with non-English speaking parents said their parents did not have much knowledge about the system since the system here is very different from most African educational systems. The study also highlights the need for immigrant parents to advocate for and question the attitudes of the teachers toward their children; and to help their children in negotiating and accessing required information. The educated parents have easier time learning about the new system but they usually find that teachers underestimate their academic abilities as well as those of their children. Consequently immigrant parents tend to minimize the effects of discrimination. Parents who have not lived here long may not recognize the signs of discrimination.

Students also revealed they don't report incidents of discrimination to their parents as many felt their parents would not understand. Others did not want to bother their parents, indicating that the parents already had enough worries to do with daily living.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Even though scholars have tried to engage the immigrant community and students- in this case college students- about their experiences there is a need to have more studies with the failing youth to get to the reasons for their failure. This study has shown the need for parents to be aware and to take seriously their children's experiences of discrimination and not just tell them to work hard. Majority of students do manage to cope with discrimination and succeed, especially immigrant students who still have their country of origin culture to hold on to, this does not mean all students will manage. It is becoming clear and research shows that second and third generations are failing. Some African parents have reasoned that it is because these kids have got everything and are not aware of the hardships their parents left where they came from. As a result, more and more African Immigrant parents are facing the paradox of the immigration aftermath with some of their children failing to make the grade. African immigrants should not be deceived to think that racial discrimination is a thing of the past because it is still present but just hard to notice. For example, the misrepresentation of the continent of Africa results in teasing of the African immigrant children. Therefore, it is important for African immigrant parents to learn more about the history of black people in America, especially works by African American authors to have a clear understanding of the treatment their children might face in this society. This is especially important as there is misinformation about the abilities and potential of African American and African students.

Some solutions could involve finding an adult ally at school, a coach, a counselor or a teacher, joining a sport which makes the students especially males popular. Joining an academic club for example, engineering club, science club, debate club, gives the student an identification group. Moreover, in these clubs and groups, students have access to adult mentors or allies who guide them in the absence of parental involvement. Another solution can be to keep the dialogue of cultural differences open in safe spaces, so that they are not only mentioned in derogatory comments and jokes.

Parents need to research the schools in which their children are enrolled. They need to be attending the parent/ teacher conferences and other activities at school whenever they can. They should not be intimidated because they speak with an accent or that they are not fluent in the English language. Parents also need to take their children's complaints about schools and peers seriously. Otherwise, when the children are overwhelmed by the discrimination and other issues at school they can decide to give up or take on an oppositional identity which is suspicious of the educational system. To quote Dan, "My parents don't know what it's like for a minority in an educational setting. They sympathize but they will never truly understand the feeling. At times I am overwhelmed".

The African parents may be ill-equipped to deal with racial discrimination and its consequences, because it is new to them. African American parents have developed strategies of dealing with racial bias and discrimination that the African immigrant parents do not know. For example; they socialize their children in survival mechanisms and coping strategies when dealing with law enforcement and other institutions.

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