Stepping Up Your Game: Workplace Experiences of Second Generation Nigerians in the United States

Introduction

This article discusses the workplace experiences of the Nigerian second-generation in the United States. Nigerians are the largest African national group in the United States and few studies have studied the specific experiences of Nigerian immigrants and their children in the United States. Nigerians are a highly educated population and one of the most educated immigrant populations in the United States. Sixty-two percent of Nigerians over the age of 25 years have at least a bachelor's degree compared to the US national average of 30 percent and 20 percent among African Americans (ACS 2016). Most studies on second-generation blacks in the United States have focused on first and second-generation Caribbean immigrants and largely on issues of identity and educational attainment (Kasinitz et al. 2008; Portes & Rumbaut 2001; Zephir 2001). As the black population in the United States becomes increasingly diverse, more studies on the assimilation patterns of African-origin groups are needed.

This article investigates several aspects of segmented assimilation theory, identifying and highlighting several limitations of the theory as it pertains to the black second-generation. Segmented assimilation theory (Portes & Rumbaut 1996, 2001; Portes & Zhou 1993) has a bleak outlook about the socioeconomic trajectories of the black and Hispanic second-generation. It predicts that racial prejudice against black people in the United States and a changing U.S. economy will cause them to experience downward mobility. Neckerman, Carter and Lee (1999) in a critique of segmented assimilation argue that the theory failed to acknowledge the existence of a black middle class, presuming that all black people are poor, and failed to recognize that

members of minority groups, including black people, have cultures of mobility that promote and foster upward mobility even in discriminatory contexts.

Furthermore, the article calls attention to a second limitation of segmented assimilation theory. The theory's primary focus on adolescents and youth is a weakness as the theory can only speculate about adult social outcomes of the black second-generation. As a result, adaptive strategies used by second-generation black adults that help them navigate discriminatory environments cannot be considered. In studying second-generation black adults, I am able to examine the relevance of segmented assimilation theory's pessimistic predictions for the black second-generation, as it specifically relates to their experiences in the workplace. Thus, this article contributes to a more complex portrait than that presented by segmented assimilation—showing how upwardly mobile second-generation blacks navigate their workplaces, the racial discrimination they experience, and their response strategies. It challenges segmented assimilation theory's perception that black immigrant groups and their children lack tenacity or adaptive strategies. Lastly, this article adds to our knowledge of the black middle class and the range of adaptive strategies used by an increasingly ethnically diverse black middle class in the United States.

Segmented assimilation theory and minority cultures of mobility

According to segmented assimilation theory, racial status and ongoing racial discrimination places barriers to successful middle-class of the black and Hispanic second-generation populations, putting these second-generation groups at greater risk of downward mobility. However, more recent studies find that the prediction of a decline among second-generation blacks and Hispanics was too pessimistic (Alba & Nee 2003; Farley & Alba 2002;

Kasinitz et al. 2008; Park & Myers 2010). These studies find that, on the whole, members of the new second-generation (children of post-1965 immigrants) are doing better than their parents educationally and occupationally (Park & Myers 2010; Kasinitz et al. 2008).

On the job front, several studies find that many of the new second-generation, including the black second-generation, are entering white-collar professional jobs in the American mainstream (Farley & Alba 2002; Kasinitz et al. 2008; Park & Myers 2010). However, even as we find that a sizeable proportion of the second-generation are entering white-collar professional jobs, not much is known about their experiences of racism in the workplace and their response to it. This article fills this gap in the literature.

We know little about the experiences of the supposed second-generation decline beyond a certain demographic image of blackness as postulated by segmented assimilation scholars. Segmented assimilation theory has assumed a poor or working-class Black person as emblematic of blackness and been challenged for ignoring minority cultures of mobility that may foster assimilation among blacks. It has been criticized for coming dangerously close to labeling some cultures as bad and others as good and specifically, reproducing commonly held stereotypes that Asian culture is good and black and Hispanic cultures are bad (Neckerman et al 1999). Neckerman, Carter and Lee (1999) claim that minority groups have cultures of mobility that foster upward mobility. They define minority cultures of mobility as "a set of cultural elements associated with a minority group, and that provides strategies for managing economic mobility in the context of discrimination and group disadvantage." They are accustomed to navigating problems that arise from contact with the white majority in professional settings and from interclass contact within their minority community, and they provide "interpretations of and strategies for managing these problems" (946).

While it emphasizes second-generation blacks' downward mobility, segmented assimilation theory does not consider black immigrants' adaptive strategies. While Portes and Rumbaut (2001) and Haller, Portes, and Lynch (2011) recognize that all second-generation individuals from middle- and upper-class families should be able to navigate the barriers of race with "equanimity," they are silent about the strategies employed by the black second-generation. This oversight informed Neckerman, Carter, and Lee's (1999) critique of segmented assimilation and their discussion of the cultures of mobility among blacks that are similar to those of other nonwhite immigrant groups. I expand on this point by discussing the adaptive strategies second-generation Nigerian adults use to navigate racial discrimination and ensure survival and success in the workplace.

Moreover this article adds to the small, but growing literature on the African second-generation in the United States. Because most of the seminal studies of the black second-generation in the United States have focused largely on the black Caribbean experience, we don't know much about how African-origin second-generation blacks fare in terms of socio-economic assimilation, which is defined by Alba and Nee as "minority participation in mainstream socioeconomic institutions (e.g. labor market, education) on the basis of parity with ethnic-majority individuals of similar socioeconomic origins" (2003, pg. 28). Additionally, because many studies on the "new second-generation's" labor market performance in United States are quantitative, they lack sufficient data to analyze the qualitative experiences of the second-generation or to speak about how they navigate the social dynamics of the workplace (Kasinitz et al. 2008 very briefly discuss some qualitative workplace experiences of the adult Caribbean second-generation in New York).

In this article, I show that second-generation Nigerians differ in whether they perceive racial discrimination in the workplace. There was an almost even split between respondents who

felt they had been discriminated against because of their race and those who said they had not experienced anti-black discrimination. For those who felt they had been racially discriminated against at work, their experiences took very similar forms to those of African Americans, but the experiences of black and African Americans in the workplace is dynamic. Two types of strategic responses were found among respondents. I call the strategies minimizing ethnic difference and the strategy of stepping up your game.

Data and Methods

My analyses use data from semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 67 adult respondents between 22 and 58 years of age. All respondents were adult children of at least one first-generation Nigerian immigrant. My role as a researcher was that of an insider because I am a first-generation Nigerian immigrant. This was an advantage, as respondents were extremely candid with me about their experiences in the United States and about the challenges they have faced and continue to face. As a Nigerian immigrant, I have friends, family and other contacts in the Nigerian community that gave me entry into the Nigerian embassies, churches, and ethnic, social, and professional organizations. The only negative aspect of being an insider was my respondents' unwillingness to divulge their annual incomes, although I am not sure that they would have readily divulged this information to an outsider. Nigerians tend to be suspicious of such questions. I compensated by getting detailed occupational and educational information.

I use education as my indicator for class in this article, following the example of prominent scholars such as Robert Putnam (2015) and Douglas Massey (2008). Massey (2008, 252) defines class as "access to human capital—or more specifically, education, the most important resource in today's knowledge based economy." Consequently, like Putnam (2015), when I talk about middle-

class individuals, I am referring to individuals who are college graduates, i.e., who have at least a bachelor's degree. I confirmed with respondents that their own use of "class" was consistent with this definition. Two out of the 67 respondents had less than a bachelor's degree. See table A1 in the appendix for a breakdown of respondents' occupations.

The sample was collected in two ways. First, respondents were sampled from visitors to the Nigerian Embassy in New York. There were three main types of visitors to the embassy. Those engaged in frequent transnational activities, those who had never visited Nigeria or were infrequent visitors, but needed to go because of a critical life event such as a death or wedding in the family, and those who had no business in the embassy or in Nigeria, but were serving as escorts to members of their social networks. This great mix of second-generation Nigerians at the embassy ensured that I did not only sample or oversample individuals actively and seriously engaged in transnational activities. After I exhausted the embassy as a site for interviews, I added snowball sampling. I diversified my sample so as not to not oversample from any one social network, not to sample on the basis of identity issues and to control variation in involvement in community.

The interviews were conducted from January to November 2009. The interviews ranged from thirty-five minutes to two hours and nine minutes in length. The average length was an hour. Twenty of the interviews were face-to-face and forty-seven were by telephone. Sixty-three percent (N=42) of respondents were female and 37 percent (N=25) were male. 59 out of 67 subjects came from Boston (20), New York (19), Texas (11) and Maryland (9), which are four of the five cities/states with the largest populations of first- and second-generation Nigerians in the United States. The remaining 8 came from Atlanta (2), Philadelphia (2), North Carolina (1), Missouri (1), Illinois (1) and California (1). Interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically with Atlas.ti. All names used are pseudonyms.

The analyses are based on respondents' individual accounts of their experiences in the workplace. Individual accounts are an extremely valuable resource in understanding the social dynamics of people's lives, their experiences of racism, and their resilience in the context of such experiences. Essed (1991) notes that individuals' own accounts of racial discrimination should not be dismissed or be seen as having limited legitimacy because research shows that individuals are competent to make sound and objective judgments about events affecting them, especially when they are recounting incidents of racism. Research finds that black people are very careful in observing and considering an incident where discrimination is perceived to have occurred before accusing people of racism (Essed 1991; Feagin & Sikes 1994).

Workplace Experiences

Respondents' reports on their workplace experiences were varied. Because these are perceptions of racial discrimination and not confirmed cases, it is possible that some respondents who have not perceived discrimination at work have been discriminated against and vice versa. Consequently, I do not overemphasize the percentage breakdown of those who felt they had been discriminated against racially and those who did not. Rather, I seek to highlight the range of workplace experiences of the adult African second-generation in mostly white-collar middle-class jobs. Sixty-three of the sixty-seven respondents had middle-class white-collar professional jobs.

Less than half (43%) of the Nigerian second-generation felt they had not been discriminated against because of their race (being black). The majority (57%) felt they had been discriminated against because of their race. Some respondents who felt that they had been discriminated against at work thought that their experiences of workplace discrimination were, in the words of one respondent, "analogous to that of African Americans." Others seem to have

experienced a combination of being racially discriminated against by some bosses and colleagues while at the same time enjoying support for being a minority.

For respondents who said they had been discriminated against at work, they felt the discrimination occurred at certain key points in their careers: from clients, evaluations and promotions, mentorship and organizational support. These points are very similar to the points of workplace discrimination experienced by African Americans (Benjamin 2005; Collins 1997; Feagin and Sikes 1994; Fleming, Lamont, and Welburn 2012).

Respondents in jobs with a lot of face-to-face client interaction reported that they often felt that clients did not want them to attend to them because they were black. Respondents who were nurses told me of occasions when patients refused their service, expressed preference for another (white) nurse to the nursing supervisor. If they could not get another (white) nurse, they were hostile and uncooperative when receiving personal assistance from them, and thought the nurses were incompetent or dishonest. This is definitely relevant in Linda's experience, who knew that some older clients did not want her to take care of them because she was black.

> In my nursing clinical when I go there and perform my duties, every once in a while older Caucasian patients may not want me to touch them for any reason. Just little things like that. They don't out-rightly say, "I don't want your care," but whenever I enter into their rooms, they are like, why do I have to get this one? They look at me weird to see if I'm not taking anything from their room.

> (New York, 3/24/2009)

A few respondents mentioned that they had been discriminated against by African Americans working in contract and grant offices, often in the public sector. Some African Americans in these offices felt that they, as black ethnics, did not qualify for the same opportunities

8

as African Americans. Wole, a self-employed contractor in Maryland, frequently finds his company being removed from consideration for some contracts by African-American state workers because he is "not really African American," even though he is an American citizen. Yinka, a nurse working in a hospital told me she felt she was discriminated against by her African-American colleagues. They "excluded her...always make me feel like a foreigner and not one of them." Her African American supervisor always gave her "bad shifts." "On several occasions she refused to give me a different shift even after I had let her know I had pressing family events", Yinka said. She said this supervisor "gave me a bad review so that I would not get promoted to a supervisory position. Wole and Yinka's experiences reveal that the recognition of different ethnicities among black people is also happening among black people themselves, and for them, this interplay of race and ethnicity and recognition of their ethnic difference was not to their benefit.

The experiences of respondents who felt discriminated against by African Americans reveals saliency of ethnicity over race among black people in some work settings. This finding is in line with Showers (2015), who found in her study of African immigrant women in healthcare occupations, that African immigrant women felt discriminated against because of their "foreignness and particular location as women from Africa" (pg 1822). In interaction with African Americans, these African nurses felt that "their foreign status which was perceived on both sides as making them different from African Americans prevented them from building alliances with their African American coworkers," whom they believed saw them as of lesser status because they were African (Showers 2015, 1823). Even though my respondents were second-generation and black, their being children of African immigrants and identity as African was seen as a source of foreignness and difference by African Americans in some work settings.

Many respondents believed that black people are discriminated against with regard to promotions. In their experience, being a black ethnic did not matter. The discrimination was against all black people. Laura, a banker for over 15 years in New York, felt that she was not given the same opportunities as her white colleagues even though she was more qualified than they were. She told me;

> In a corporate setting racism manifests itself in the opportunities that are given or that are made available. As a minority person, it is typical to have to do pretty much double or triple the effort. I find myself, as a college graduate with a master's degree and a very difficult certification to come by, having to compete with people of different races but who have just a college degree. So I think in that respect, and this is just speaking frankly, that the opportunities are less available in terms of moving up. I have worked in three big companies, and it seems that the rule of engagement is quite the same, in the sense that opportunities are less available for black people. And my edge is usually that I have all these qualifications but in certain instances they don't seem to make a huge difference.

> (New York, 2/6/2009)

Being discriminated against because of her race has been Laura's experience throughout her career. Sometimes, being more qualified than her white colleagues mattered, but often times, it did not.

Respondents' stories of being disadvantaged during promotions were tied to their perceptions that they are poorly mentored in their organizations. Many respondents complained that their white colleagues had much better mentoring and company support than they did. They felt that their superiors gave their white colleagues many more opportunities to prove themselves and hence make their case for promotion. This feeling was especially pronounced among

respondents who were lawyers. They said they could not get partners to take them on as protégés and either formally or, more importantly, informally mentor them. For this reason, many of them struggled with feelings of not belonging. Ima is a good example of how this lack of mentoring and organizational support becomes internalized, giving rise to a sense of inferiority:

> At my workplace or should I say for lawyers, it is difficult for us to succeed. We have less support. It is something that just manifests itself very quietly. You just don't get mentored. You don't make the connections you see other people making with the partners and senior lawyers. And you get to thinking: Is it me? Is it something I did? Am I not good enough? I find it very frustrating always having to question myself and whether I belong. I don't think my non-black peers are troubled about these issues. We are disadvantaged in the patronage system.

> (phone interview, 5/12/2009)

This creeping sense of self-doubt was widespread among respondents who felt they were being discriminated against at work for being black. They re-interpreted this experience as being a personal fault and not something external to them, whereas, in fact, discrimination is a product of historical and contemporary formations of race in the United States (Omi and Winant 2015).

Unprompted by the interviewer, Gbenga, a male lawyer in his mid-thirties commented on similarities he saw between his experience and that of African Americans. Like Ima, he too felt that he did not have enough white people looking out for him and his interests. I asked him how he would describe his experiences at work, and he said:

> My experience more closely mirrors the African American experience in the professional setting. I think you have to be better, you have to work harder, and I feel like that more than my white counterparts. I feel that my work product has to be better and I can never

11

make a mistake, that kind of thing. I also feel that I have to create more of my own opportunities. I feel, professionally, that my white counterparts, they have opportunities carved out for them, and I may have to make more of my own opportunities. So what does that look like for me in the law firm? I think one of my white peers may from the senior partner be given a small client for him to develop and groom in a relationship over time. For me, I don't see anybody doing that for me. I have to bring in my own clients, create my own clients. So in a sentence, I think my experience at this law firm more closely mirrors that of the experience of African Americans in general. When I am at work, I think I'm going through the same things that African Americans are going through.

(phone interview, 4/28/2009)

This lack of institutional support and good mentoring stalls the progress of Blacks in these organizations (see Collins 1997; Feagin and Sikes 1994). A few respondents who felt they were not well mentored compared to their white colleagues left those jobs because they said their bosses began to express doubts in their competence and ability to succeed in the company. Their white bosses did not consider that the lack of support and mentoring for Blacks compared to Whites is one of the main reasons why black employees seem not to excel at these jobs. Some respondents left their high flying jobs because of the lack of institutional support. Others stayed but suffered emotional pain internalizing feelings of inferiority. These two responses are some unfortunate developments of workplace discrimination against Blacks. For these respondents, their experiences, as Gbenga notes, are similar to that of African Americans (Benjamin 2005; Collins 1997; Feagin & Sikes 1994; Fleming, Lamont, and Welburn 2012).

Perceptions of Being Advantaged as a Child of a Black Immigrant

Having an ethnic name is a key cultural marker that makes employers and colleagues aware that one is a black ethnic. For some respondents, having an ethnic name was an advantage in the workplace. They said it led to warmer relations with their white bosses and made their bosses trust them more over African Americans and consider them more quickly for managerial positions. Take for example Dele, a department manager in a paper goods company. He told me that he "had been working about a year in my company and then one day I met my boss who after I introduced myself to him realized that I was an African immigrant." His boss asked him where he came from and "I told him my parents were from Nigeria." Dele says immediately his boss warmed to him. "He kept having conversations with me about being an African/Nigerian immigrant and how African immigrants are very hard-working." He was given more responsibilities at work and encouraged to take the lead on certain projects. After a year, Dele was promoted to a department manager. He believes that his boss's realization that he was an African and not African American made his boss trust him more and that it quickened his rise in the company. This was Obinna's experience also. He is a twenty-seven-year-old pharmacist born and raised in the United States. He says;

> Now that I'm working, I kind of see having an ethnic name as an advantage. There is a big generalization, I think, when it comes to African-Americans in this country. So, a lot of times when I am like working, yeah, and I come across a manager who is from a different race and he sees my name is different, he usually then asks me where I am from. And you can see the difference in tone, in terms of like having a conversation with me, and finding out that I am from a different country and I have such a unique name. Usually, when people hear my name I usually get positive responses.

(Boston, 8/4/2009)

13

Other respondents reported that when their white bosses and colleagues heard their ethnic names, their interaction with them noticeably improved. For these respondents, an ethnic name made it clear, to those bosses that had a bias against African Americans, that they were the "better" or "preferable" blacks (Greer 2013; Rogers 2006). Some respondents without ethnic names also enjoyed the advantage of being a child of black immigrants once their biographies became known at work. Waters (1999) found that some white employers preferred to hire black immigrants rather than African Americans because they are seen as more hardworking and less confrontational. The experiences of some of the Nigerian second-generation suggest that this preference for black immigrants is being extended to the black second-generation.

However, having an ethnic name was not always an advantage in the workplace. Those employers who wanted to hire a black person but not an African American used these names to identify their preferred candidate. Some employers found ethnic names too hard to pronounce and discriminated against black people with such names. Chinedum, a thirty-year-old male manager, said "when I was looking for work, the HR lady asked me if I had a U.S. name." Some Nigerians have Christian names but he does not. She asked "do you have a different name because this one is too hard?" He did not get the job.

Simultaneous processes of discrimination and advantage: the Case of Idowu

Sometimes incidences of anti-black discrimination overlap with experiences of being preferred by employers/supervisors because one is a child of black immigrants in the same organization. Idowu's story is a case in point. He is a twenty-four-year-old stockbroker on Wall Street. He felt that he had been discriminated against by some white colleagues. He got his internship with a financial organization on Wall Street through a non-profit organization that seeks

to place young male minorities (blacks and Hispanics) in companies on Wall Street and in the Banking District in London. During his first few weeks as an intern, he was given a poor evaluation that would have destroyed his chances of getting a job in the company:

> I remember early on in the internship, they sent a report back to my sponsoring organization that said "We are not sure that he has the right quantitative ability." And to me, I felt that was a joke. I will do calculus around your head, you know. And these people said I did not have any quantitative ability. I think what was even more upsetting about that was that they had not given me any quantitative work to do. And my sponsors came back and said that "we are very confident in this guy's quantitative ability. We think you need to look harder." And then they did. And then during the internship I worked on different projects and I demonstrated that I had the requisite skills.

> (phone interview, 6/22/2009)

At the same time, he had some ethnic minority colleagues who mentored him. They made it possible for him to get his present job in the same company where he did his internship in. He says:

> During my internship I worked with a lot of junior people, and it was much more a diverse at that level. There was actually a Nigerian guy, an analyst, who I kind of latched myself onto. I hung out with him, and you know, it was probably because of him and a few of the others that I was able to get the job offer. It was easier to connect with those guys because a lot of them were immigrants from Pakistan, India, etc. I just connected with those folks. I and other immigrants just have a kind of connection.

> (phone interview, 6/22/2009)

15

Even as Idowu enjoyed the advantage of being a black ethnic among his non-white immigrant colleagues, he also benefited from being categorized as racially black, as his racial status was what allowed him to enter the program that placed him in the internship. Idowu's experience provides support for the argument that middle class occupations will get more racially and ethnically diverse as more ethnic minorities get opportunities to ascend into them (see Alba 2009; Myers 2007). And as Idowu's case shows, ethnic minorities in such positions can then in turn help other ethnic minorities get similar jobs. His experience shows how coalitions can be built among ethnic minorities in mainstream middle class jobs. Without his ethnic minority colleagues the white bosses who discriminated against him might have succeeded in barring his entry.

Furthermore, Idowu's experience reveals weaknesses in segmented assimilation theory as his experience shows that there are better outcomes than downward mobility into the underclass for the black second-generation. Middle class second-generation blacks have social capital from being immigrants and or ethnics that help them negotiate discriminatory environments and achieve economic mobility. Additionally, affirmative action policies are a tool of upward mobility for black immigrants and their children (Kasinitz et al 2008), a fact that is ignored in segmented assimilation's prediction of downward mobility for the black second-generation and acquisition of an oppositional culture.

Responses to Discrimination: The Strategy of Minimizing Ethnic Difference

An important theme that emerged from subjects who had experienced discrimination in the workplace was the need to minimize the ethnic difference between themselves and their work colleagues, especially their white colleagues. This made white colleagues and bosses more comfortable with them, which would in turn ensure that they received better evaluations, were

admitted into those social networks important for promotion, and were considered for promotion when the time arose.

Some respondents were advised not to do anything that will call attention to their difference. Idowu's sponsoring organization taught him the importance of minimizing ethnic difference if he wanted to make it on Wall Street. According to him, the organization basically coaches "you through your internship so that you can navigate all the cultural issues that you might face. And they make sure that you get a job and that you start your career successfully."

There are a lot of Afro-Caribbeans and Africans who took advantage of this organization; so even though it is an affirmative action program, the key beneficiaries are often immigrant blacks. But that said, one of the things they stressed was dress, "Look, a lot of you guys are in this organization because your skin color is different. You are different. You cannot afford to accentuate those differences in any other way. So do not go to the bank and dress differently or dress loudly or try to dress spectacularly. That would make you look even more different, and that is alarming to people." They don't want that, etc. So, in my dressing, when I go to work, I wear either a white or blue shirt with dark blue or black suit. No pinstripes. No checkered prints, nothing. I wear black shoes. I make sure they are laced up. Don't ever wear loafers. Make sure your hair is cut. Make sure you don't have facial hair. You cannot join them with facial hair. You will look too different.

(phone interview, 6/22/2009)

Idowu is learning how to play golf to increase the number of things he has in common with his white managers not because he is a fan of the sport, but because he recognizes the necessity to relate to his white peers. It's clear that he perceives minimizing ethnic differences as borderline racial injustice. "When you are asked to minimize your differences, it's all worked in a way to

17

reinforce social hierarchy. I think the challenge we will have as a society is separating where you have to dress or look a certain way because of a criteria of attractiveness that has nothing to do with race and times when it is a racial injustice that is going on. It is a murky boundary, to say the least." He goes along with it to support himself and his family while recognizing the complexities of being a second-generation black man in the workplace.

For the young lawyer Gbenga making white colleagues comfortable with you is the best way to go, though not to the point of losing one's ethnic identity.

> I used to [think erasing ethnic difference was the way to go]. I think I came in with the idea that that would be the fix and that by minimizing difference and increasing assimilation that it will be the cure. But as I have spent more time, I don't think that's the cure at all. Now, I don't try to minimize difference so much as I try to increase comfort. I wouldn't say that what I do now on a daily basis is that oh I am actively working to minimize difference. What I do now is that I actively work to increase comfort. I make sure that I try to engage in conversation, so people know that I am a regular person that I am just like them, that I share some of the same values. I increase comfort by spending time, as I can, in after-work events, so that people can say, "Oh this guy is like me."

(phone interview, 4/28/2009)

In line with his desire not to lose himself, he keeps a picture of his family in traditional attire on his desk, even though he is the only one in the office with such a picture displayed so visibly. He, like Idowu, has learned how to play golf and eat foods he would not ordinarily eat, such as sushi, in order to connect and socialize with his white counterparts.

Making one's white colleagues comfortable by minimizing ethnic difference, broadening the base of things you have in common with them, being friendly, and letting them see you as a

18

regular person are some strategies chosen by the Nigerian second-generation to improve their chances of success in the corporate world. Many respondents see the wisdom in learning new cultural practices, such as learning to play golf and eating sushi, as ways to fit in with their colleagues. These are lighthearted but important cultural practices that need to be acquired. Others mentioned taking care to speak proper English at work, not slipping up into using slang or speaking with strong Nigerian accents or in pidgin (broken-English). Many respondents had discovered that to earn promotion into management they needed to become socially adaptable and learn those social skills that have been given symbolic significance by their white peers and superiors.

But the problem of trying to fit in by minimizing ethnic difference is not a problem confined only to black immigrants and their children. It is a problem that all black people face in the corporate world. As Feagin and Sikes (1994, pg 135) note, black people "in corporate America are under constant pressure to adapt … to the values and ways of the White world." Jackman (1994) also notes that many white people perceive black cultural styles as "inappropriate for occupational tasks involving responsibility or authority" (pg 130). The onus is on the black executive to learn the social skills considered appropriate to the position by white superiors because black cultural styles and ways of doing things are largely devalued in the corporate world (Durr and Wingfield 2011; Jackman 1994). Even though respondents said they did not exhibit an African American cultural style, they are still caught in the expectation that they learn the white way of doing things, rendering their own ethnicities, which fall within the black category, as inappropriate.

In addition, the experiences of the Nigerian second-generation in the workplace show that race is intersecting with ethnicity for black people and the value received from ethnic and or immigrant capital is a limited resource because it is subject to the whims of the dominant group.

19

Responses to Discrimination: The Strategy of Stepping Up Your Game

Respondents felt that they had to work harder than their white peers so no one would question whether they belonged in their jobs. They talked about the need to "step up their game," which they knew is something many black people in the United States face irrespective of ethnicity or immigrant status. They needed to be the first in and the last out of work. They needed to dress professionally. They needed to work very hard and do a lot of networking to ensure they were in the minds of their superiors when promotions and other opportunities were being considered. Yet the efficacy of these strategies is open to question given the persistent cultural disadvantage many of them acknowledge they face at work.

Dara, a twenty-nine-year-old events manager in the hotel industry in Texas, believed, like many respondents, that black people have to work harder than their white colleagues in order to do well in college and then to survive and succeed in professional white collar occupations.

> In college, we were the minority, and I felt that we had to work harder, and I still feel the same way now because I'm not white, that we have to work harder. But I will say this for anybody of black or African descent. Right now, I work in a company in corporate America, and the number of black people that we have is very limited, and it is kind of like the white guy with blonde hair, blue eyes, the good-looking guys, that is the president of the company. There is a lot of the networking which we don't have any entry into. I have seen a lot of students get jobs because of where their parents hold positions. So you just have to step up your game a little bit to make sure you get yours.

> (phone interview, 9/13/2009)

Dara felt that white people were preferred over black people for executive positions in many companies in the United States. In addition, they have better social and professional networks that provide timely job-related information about career opportunities.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings in this paper reveal several limitations of segmented assimilation theory's thesis on the black second-generation. This qualitative study of the experiences of the Nigerian second-generation show that not all the adult black second-generation are found in the bottom strata of classes as theorized by segmented assimilation theory. Nor do they respond to racial prejudice and anti-black discrimination with a reactive black ethnicity which the authors (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001) associate with self-destructive attitudes and behaviors that retard positive socio-economic outcomes and a smooth entrance into the middle class and/or mainstream American society. This group of upwardly mobile second-generation black adults employ several adaptive strategies to navigate middle class professional spaces in the American mainstream. Their experiences challenge segmented assimilation theory's conceptualization of the black second-generation as lacking resilience and adaptive strategies that help them navigate around racial barriers and strive in discriminatory environments. These are findings sporadically discussed in the literature on children of post-1965 black immigrants (the black second-generation) in the United States. These results align with Neckerman et al.'s (1999) claim that upwardly mobile minorities develop strategies to help them negotiate discriminatory environments and achieve economic mobility because of structural realities of race in the United States that work to privilege whites over non-white ethnic minorities in the mainstream.

The qualitative nature of this study allows us to see intra-black racial dynamics that are often overlooked in the discussion of workplace experiences of racial and ethnic minorities in the United States. The experiences of the Nigerian second-generation reveal that the dominant group, in this case whites, perceive certain Black groups differently in terms of ethnicity, culture, etc., and that many of the Nigerian second-generation are aware of this and even when critical, at times strategically emphasized identity markers to make them more "ethnic" or "African" or "Nigerian" to expand their opportunities. There were times when respondents had to downplay their ethnic identity or "Africanness" by using different names or emphasizing their English language skills. This shows how race intersects with ethnicity for black people and the contingent nature of the ethnic capital enjoyed by the black second-generation. These dynamics were not considered in segmented assimilation theory's prediction of downward integration for the black second-generation and different pathways available for the adult black second-generation.

Furthermore, the experiences of several respondents reveal that for some black immigrants and their children, racial discrimination is suffered not only at the hands of whites but also African American blacks. The qualitative design of this study also allows us to understand the importance of a racially and ethnically diverse workforce in an organization and the role it plays in assisting ethnic minorities negotiate racial discrimination and achieve economic mobility. Quantitative studies cannot speak to the ways ethnic minorities help other ethnic minorities navigate roadblocks to their upward mobility in organizations. This study helps reveal the limits of Alba and Nee's (2003) conceptualization of the mainstream as a space where ethno racial status holds less significance. In doing this, it reveals important information that is missing from quantitative studies of second-generation ethnic minorities' labor market experiences in the United States.

In conclusion, the totality of the experiences narrated by the second-generation of Nigerian/African ancestry reveals heterogeneity in the black experience in the United States. Their experiences show how complicated it is to be black and ethnic in the United States, revealing the continued significance of race and interplay of race and ethnicity for black immigrants and their children pointing to signs of continuity and change for new entrants into the black racial category in the United States.

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