**The Nigerian Second Generation at Work in Britain: Ethnoracial Exclusion and Adaptive Strategies**

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**Bio**

Onoso Imoagene is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests are International Migration and Immigrant Incorporation; interethnic relations; and Migration and Development. Her first book, titled *Beyond Expectations: Second Generation Nigerians in the United States and Britain* (University of California Press, 2017), examines the nature of incorporation of second generation Nigerian adults in the United States and Britain. Her current project examines the impact of US immigration policy, specifically the Diversity visa lottery, on West African DV immigrants pre-and post-migration and on people and communities in sending countries.

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**Abstract**

This article examines the workplace experiences of upwardly mobile second generation Nigerians in Britain. It uses data from semi-structured in-depth interviews with 73 second generation Nigerian adults. The analysis distinguishes between incidents of discrimination and stigmatization (assaults on worth) and finds that incidents of stigmatization were more common than incidents of racial discrimination among the Nigerian second generation. Contextual factors, specifically Britain's colonial history, national identity, and the cultural repertoire of the British class system shaped how individuals perceived, recognized, and interpreted incidents of ethnoracial exclusion. Strategies of non-response, social adaptability, and conciliation were used both to respond to these incidents of ethnoracial exclusion and facilitate economic mobility. The findings present a more complex story than one of simple racial discrimination for second generation Africans in British workplaces.

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Research on British ethnic minorities in the workplace consistently finds that British ethnic minorities fare less well than white Britons in the British labour market, though the degree of disadvantage varies by ethnoracial group membership and gender (Breach and Li, 2017; Catney and Sabater, 2010; Cheung and Heath, 2007; Heath and McMahon, 1996, 2005; Khattab, 2015; Modood and Khattab, 2015; Modood et al., 1997). Despite significant scholarship on this question, there are three significant gaps in the literature that require sociological investigation. First, most studies in the sub-field are quantitative and while these studies reveal important details about unequal outcomes and do not deny the salience of racism, they are limited in terms of explaining how people experience ethnoracial exclusion. Ethnoracial exclusion occurs when members of groups are excluded based on racial status, ethnicity, nation origin, and/or other ascribed characteristics (Lamont et al., 2016; Lee and Bean, 2010). More qualitative studies are needed to examine the forms and salience of ethnoracial exclusion ethnic minorities' face and how members of these ethnic minority groups recognize and interpret such incidents. We need more studies on ethnic minorities' response strategies and on how contextual macro- and mezzo-level factors shape both recognition and responses to these incidents. Third, most studies of Britain's black immigrants have focused largely on the Black-Caribbean experience; as a result, we don't know much about the Black-African experience, and especially so for the adult African second generation. This article seeks to fill these gaps in the literature.

This article is a phenomenological analysis of the reported experiences of upwardly mobile second generation Nigerians in the British workplace. Africans are the fastest growing black population in Britain. They overtook Black-Caribbeans as the largest black population in Britain at the beginning of the twenty-first century. However the Black-Caribbean labor market experience has received most of the attention, largely because Caribbeans have been in Britain for at least a

3

generation longer than Africans (Foner, 2011). I chose to study the Nigerian second generation because Nigerians are the largest African national group in Britain; approximately one out of every five Black-Africans in Britain is Nigerian (ONS, 2015). This is significant as Nigeria is one of forty-eight countries that make up sub-Saharan Africa.

I make a distinction between discrimination and incidents of stigmatization (also called assaults of worth) (Lamont et al., 2016). Following Lamont et al. (2016), discrimination occurs when individuals are prevented or given sub-standard access to opportunities and resources such as jobs, housing, access to public space, credit, etc. due to their race, ethnicity or nationality. Whereas, incidents of stigmatization refer to incidents where individuals experience 'disrespect and their dignity, honor, relative status, or sense of self was challenged' (Lamont et al., 2016, p. 6; Pager and Shepherd, 2008). Making this distinction is not to suggest that incidents of stigmatization are less serious than incidents of discrimination but, rather, to draw attention to commonplace occurrences such as being ignored (inattention). People experience disrespect in a myriad of ways that are often overlooked or hard to prove but, are noticed and interpreted as experiences of discrimination by the victims. As Lamont et al. (2016, p. 7) note, 'Discrimination….generally goes hand in hand with feeling stigmatized—although the reverse is not necessarily true.' Both are forms of ethnoracial exclusion, which signal to members of certain groups that they are seen as outsiders and vulnerable to differential treatment because of their race, ethnicity, nationality, and/or other ascribed characteristics.

The contributions of this article lie, first, in improving the analysis of cultural processes of ethnoracial exclusion and the responses such incidents provoke among ethnic minorities, and more specifically black people, in Britain, second, adding to our knowledge on the cultures of mobility (Neckerman et al., 1999) that exist within ethnic minority groups in Britain. This article aims to

show how contextual factors, particularly Britain's colonial history, national identity, cultural repertoires, and racial socialization, shape recognition and interpretation of incidents of ethnoracial exclusion. It also describes several mobility strategies employed by a middle class group of Britain's ethnic minorities to ensure survival and success at work in Britain. This discussion highlights ethnic minorities' agency, expanding the discussion about their experiences with racial discrimination beyond frames of victimhood (Aquino, 2016). This study presents a more complex story than one of simple racial discrimination in the workplace through its careful and thorough examination of the Nigerian second generation's experiences in the workplace.

**Literature Review**

Ethnic minorities in the British labour market

The recently released 2015 Equality and Human Rights Commission's five year report on equality and human right progress in England, Scotland, and Wales confirmed again what multiple studies have shown in Britain: Although there are some differences by ethnic, racial, or ethno-religious grouping and by geographical region, ethnic minorities fare worse than white Britons in terms of unemployment, labour market participation, hours worked, and earnings (Catney and Sabater, 2010; Carmichael and Woods, 2000; Cheung and Heath, 2007; Heath and McMahon, 1996, 2005; Modood and Khattab, 2015; Khattab, 2015; Khattab and Johnson, 2013; Modood et al., 1997).

The picture becomes more complicated once the data is disaggregated by gender. Breach and Li (2017) analyzing pay data from the 1990s to the 2010s find that even as a wage gap exists between most ethnic minorities and white Britons, ethnic minority women have seen an improvement in their wages both in their own terms and in comparison to men's incomes (both white British men and male ethnics). However, the observed progress in narrowing the gender

5

wage gap varies significantly by ethnic group. For instance, white Irish women have experienced the most progress while Black-African women have experienced the smallest. They conclude that as gender inequality intersects racial and ethnic inequalities, it creates 'complex inequalities for women in different socio-economic-cultural situations' in Britain (Breach and Li, 2017: 2).

Several studies claim that certain ethnic minority groups have used a strategy of self-employment to navigate the discriminatory British labor market and achieve upward social mobility (Modood et al., 1997; Modood and Khattab, 2015). Virdee (2006) disagrees, arguing that escape into self-employment is not a sign of upward mobility but, a manifestation of a changing labor market structure, defeat by racism, and entry into a growing working class. Employing a historical and contextual approach, Virdee (2006) argues that race still matters in understanding racialized minorities labor market position in Britain. He further argues that it was political action—first outside the workplace and largely in response to the 1980s race riots—which gave racialized minorities entry into non-manual government jobs and improved the labor market position of most other racialized groups in Britain.

It is clear that being black significantly affects black individuals' experiences in the British labour market. Black-Caribbeans and Africans suffer most all ethnic minorities (Modood and Khattab, 2015). Highly educated first generation African men suffered the worst among all ethnic minorities in the workplace. For example, those with university degrees were eight times more likely to be unemployed than white British men with university degrees (Cheung and Heath, 2007; Heath and McMahon, 2005).

Qualitative studies of ethnic minorities in the British labour market find similar evidence of racial discrimination. In middle class occupations Mahtani (2004) found that women of colour faculty in British academia experienced feelings of exclusion in their discipline. They said daily

interactions with colleagues and in other professional settings, 'ma[d]e them feel unwanted, unappreciated and unwelcome (93).' Oikelome (2007) found evidence of systematic racial discrimination that accounted for pay differentials and career advancement in the National Health Service (NHS) between white and black and Asian doctors and nurses. They were less likely to be invited for interviews, be selected after the interview process, and be promoted. Shields and Price (2002) found that nearly forty percent of ethnic minority nurses reported experiencing racial discrimination from work colleagues. Sixty-four percent reported being victims of racial discrimination from their clients which reduced their job satisfaction and increased intentions to quit their job. Twenty percent of ethnic minority nurses said they experienced discrimination in promotion or access to training opportunities. Shields and Price (2002) also found that Black African nurses were the most likely to have been racially harassed by work colleagues. Black Caribbean nurses were often channeled into non-career grades of unpopular specialties (Beishon et al., 1995). Black, Asian, and other ethnic minority nurses felt that their skills were not recognized, their competence was questioned (Withers and Snowball, 2003), and they had limited access to job training and poor career progression (Beishon et al., 1995; Kushnick, 1988). Likupe (2015) found that Black African nurses faced racism, discrimination, and unequal opportunities in the British National Health Service.

Upon reviewing the vast literature on black people experiences in the labor market, it became clear that as Essed (1991, 2002) argues, incidents that are interpreted as discriminatory do not have to be only egregious ones. They can be routine and taken-for-granted practices and procedures in everyday life (Essed, 2002). However, because some of these practices don't rise to the level of preventing opportunities and resources, there needs to be a distinction drawn between these practices and the more provable incidents of discrimination. Such distinctions would allow

researchers examine the forms and salience of ethnoracial exclusion faced by stigmatized groups, which in turn would reveal societal dynamics, the degree of progress being made, and where more work needs to be done. Lamont et al. (2016) make this distinction. They identify two forms of ethnoracial exclusion—discrimination and incidents of stigmatization. They argue that discrimination can only be said to have occurred if there is definitive proof that an individual has been denied opportunities or access to resources such as being denied a job, housing, credit, and/or access to public places due to their race, ethnicity or nationality.

Incidents of stigmatization are 'incidents in which respondents experienced disrespect and their dignity, honor, relative status, or sense of self was challenged.' It occurs when one is insulted, receives poor services, is the victim of jokes, is subjected to double standards, is excluded from informal networks, (e.g. not invited to parties), is the victim of physical assault, or threatened physically (Lamont et al., 2016, p. 6). Both concepts defined here highlight power inequities between ethnic minorities and whites (when they are the dominant group). They emphasize subjectivity—how individuals interpret and define their reality. Understanding how individuals do this requires us to consider how macro- and mezzo-level contextual factors such as country history, cultural repertoires, and groupness shape individuals ability to interpret, recognize, and respond to incidents of ethnoracial exclusion.

I use the concept minority cultures of mobility by Neckerman et al. (1999) to analyze the workplace accounts of the Nigerian second generation in Britain. Neckerman et al. (1999, p. 946) argue that minority cultures of mobility are cultural elements that 'provide strategies for economic mobility in the context of discrimination and group disadvantage.' They are strategies used to 'respond to distinctive problems that usually accompany minority middle class status.' Middle class ethnic minorities have a problem that arises 'from contact with the white majority ...and the

minority culture of mobility provides interpretations of and strategies for managing' this problem (1999, p. 946). By employing the thesis of minority cultures of mobility to examine second generation Nigerians workplace experiences Neckerman et al. (1999) made a novel contribution because oftentimes blackness in Britain is seen as synonymous with a disadvantaged class experience exemplified in Modood (2004, p.102) statement that British blacks are 'stigmatized, and economically disadvantaged' and have a working class culture and non-goal oriented identities.' Consequently, this article increases our knowledge of the strategies being developed among middle class blacks as they pursue success in British society.

**Data and Methods**

The analyses that follow use qualitative data from semi-structured in-depth interviews with seventy-three second generation Nigerian adults in Britain. Respondents were asked a series of questions about how easy or how difficult they found it to establish themselves in their careers, how they found their job, whether or not they had experienced discrimination at work, and if yes, were asked to give concrete examples. I asked them why they felt these incidents had happened to them and how they responded. Respondents were factual and not overtly emotional when discussing their experiences of workplace discrimination. I began coding using a thematic approach, highlighting sections of interviews that covered workplace experiences and experiences of discrimination. Using lists of discriminatory incidents provided by Lamont et al. (2016) and Essed (1991) as a guide, I coded every mention of such incidents and any other that were in a similar vein as forms of ethnoracial exclusion. The coded sections were then recoded to specifically code as discrimination incidents where respondents were convinced and spoke of having evidence of being denied a promotion or earning lower wages than their white peer because

9

they were black. All respondents' interview transcripts were coded to capture their explanations for why they were successful at work/in their careers and their responses strategies. Their discussions of what it meant to be an immigrant and or black in Britain, more general discussions of discrimination, social class divisions, and their views of Britain's colonial past and present day relationship with people from its ex-colonies were coded to identify the contextual factors that shaped their recognition and interpretation of these incidents.

Individual accounts are an extremely valuable resource in understanding social dynamics of people's lives, their experiences of ethnoracial exclusion, and resilience to such events. Essed (1991) notes that individuals own accounts of ethnoracial exclusion should not be dismissed or seen as having limited legitimacy because research shows that individuals are competent to make sound and objective judgements about events affecting them, especially when recounting incidents of discrimination. 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 or being racist (Essed, 1991; Feagin and Sikes, 1994).

The sample was collected in two ways. First, respondents were sampled from visitors at the Nigerian Embassy in London. A screening questionnaire was utilized to identify individuals who were second generation adults. I define the second generation as children born in the receiving country of at least one foreign-born parent. I include as part of the second generation the 1.75 and 1. 5 generation, who are defined as persons born in a foreign country of at least one foreign-born parent but who arrived in Britain between the ages of 0-5 years or between the ages of 6-13 years, respectively (Rumbaut, 2004). Those who indicated a willingness to be interviewed were contacted and interviewed. Some I spoke with over the phone, while others welcomed me into their homes or met with me in coffee shops and cafes or their places of work. Thirty-nine respondents were

interviewed in person and thirty-four respondents were interviewed over the phone. I obtained 62

percent of my respondents from the Nigerian embassy in London. After the embassy as a site was

exhausted, snowball sampling was used. I used three different points of entry; churches, Nigerian

organizations, and key informants in the Nigerian community. I took care not to oversample from

any one social network. This is not a randomly selected sample and as such the findings cannot be

generalized to the wider population with any degree of statistical confidence, but my goal was to

design a study that would illuminate the experiences and challenges of being black, ethnic

Nigerian, and British.

Ninety-one percent of respondents had at least a bachelor's degree and 84 per cent were

professionals. Using education as my indicator of class (Massey, 2007; Putnam, 2015), with

individuals with at least a bachelor's degree categorized as middle class, the greater majority of

respondents were middle class. Fifty-six percent (N=40) of the sample are female, 44 percent

(N=33) are male. I conducted all the interviews myself. The average length of an interview was an

hour. I chose to use both counts of incidents of ethnoracial exclusion and analyses of respondents'

narratives, not to pursue quantification of qualitative analysis (Denzin, 2017) but, to present more

information to the reader.


**Perceptions of Ethnoracial Exclusion in the Workplace**

Fifty-six percent of respondents (N=42) said they had experienced anti-black

discrimination in the workplace. This count was derived from an affirmative response to the

question: Have you experienced racial discrimination at work? Of the forty-two respondents, 16

of them (38 percent) described personal workplace experiences that I classified as racial

discrimination.  These included being convinced that they had been passed over for promotion (69

percent), denied a job (31 percent), and not received a wage increase even though they suspected their white colleagues had (19 percent). One of my respondents, an electrician, told me that he did not get a contract he bid for, 'Because they prefer to give it to a white person.' A female respondent in her early thirties who worked as a university administrator was convinced that she had been passed over for promotion. 'I know at least five times that this has happened to me and it is one hundred percent because of my color.' Another respondent, a paralegal in a law firm in London, said 'Recently, opportunities to expand on my income were thwarted while the other girls [who were white] who have fewer skills than me and are so obviously less qualified than me get the opportunities.'

Most of these forty-two respondents explicitly described the British labour market as one where discrimination manifested or increased as a black person climbed up the career ladder. Some of them commented that all black people are completely blocked from reaching the top. I call this hitting an 'ebony ceiling,' a term akin to the glass ceiling that affects women in the workplace. Some respondents had personally experienced the ebony ceiling while others had not. These respondents had heard or read about the discrimination black people faced because of their race in British workplaces. A respondent shared a story with me about her friend who was passed over for promotion.

> [My friend] works for a newspaper, gets along very well with her boss, and has deputized for him. She had been told she was excellent and all the rest of it. When it came down to it, he didn't tell her there was a vacancy for a deputy, and he brought someone in over her head completely and installed him and literally told her on Friday 'You're getting a new boss on Monday.' 'What new boss?' 'My new deputy,' her boss told her. And she said to me, 'Look, at the end of the day, this particular newspaper just isn't ready for a black person

in that particular role, so they will use me to do all the work but they won't give me that title.'

A female respondent who was a nurse said 'I was thinking as a nurse you won't get discriminated against but I was reading an article from the nursing service and read that black people are not getting to the top and that was a shock to me.' Hearing stories about black people being discriminated against at work because of their race, and more specifically being blocked from rising to the pinnacle of their careers, informed the Nigerian second generation's view on what black people should expect in British society and labour market and shaped their recognition of incidents of ethnoracial exclusion when it then happened to them.

The remaining 26 respondents (62 percent) reported incidents that I classified as incidents of stigmatization. I found that all 16 respondents that reported experiencing racial discrimination also reported incidents of stigmatization at work. From coding respondents' accounts of their workplace experiences, I found one respondent who had experienced incidents of stigmatization even though he had answered in the negative when asked if he had experienced racial discrimination at work. The stigmatizing incidents described include being ignored or overlooked in the workplace, being the victim of racial jokes, being seen as incompetent especially by older white clients, and for male respondents, being viewed as aggressive and overly loud.

The most common incident of stigmatization among those who reported incidents of stigmatization at work was being ignored and overlooked. Thirty-five percent of them had been ignored/overlooked, especially by white colleagues, at work. Thirty percent had been made to feel as outsiders (e.g. not invited to join colleagues at the pub or to get-togethers). Twenty-six percent said people were surprised at their presence and/or professional position at work. A male respondent who was a partner in a law firm said 'I haven't met any overt racism. Yes, you do get

the odd eyebrow raised when you walk into a meeting and they do realize that this guy is actually black but nothing overt.' Nineteen percent had been the victim of racial jokes at work. A female engineer recalls being told by a white British male colleague that she '"got some ghetto friends coming to Aberdeen"' when she told him and other colleagues that she was expecting visitors. She felt that her colleague basically assumed that 'because I'm black, they must be ghetto,' revealing that he thought all black people in Britain were poor blacks from the ghetto. Other examples of assaults of worth include being seen as incompetent (16 percent), being demeaned (16 percent), being seen as aggressive (14 percent), being treated as exotic (12 percent), and white people being irritated at your presence in their midst (9 percent).

Assaults on worth were gendered. The commonest stigmatizing incident mentioned by female respondents was being ignored by white subordinates. A female respondent who worked as an administrative staff in a large company said;

> I'm coming one-on-one to ask you something and you just ignore me. So I would go away, and, then, I would see somebody else come to her [a white female receptionist] and she would be polite and say good morning, and if I said good morning, she wouldn't answer me. You're just ignoring me because I am black.

Men did not mention being ignored; rather, they were sometimes viewed as aggressive.

> You raise your voice and they [white people] get intimidated. You might get into a conversation with them and the conversation gets a little bit heated and you raise your voice, the volume of your voice goes up, and they get afraid. And they try to get you into trouble for it saying, 'Oh, he is being aggressive.'

Respondents learned from interaction with other black people that many incidents they had initially not interpreted/recognized as incidents of stigmatization actually were. A female

respondent said 'there were a few times where I got completely ignored. And a person that I went to the university with, who always lived in east London, she started working there and she said that they are just being racist.' She had initially attributed her being ignored to having an accent that possibly made it difficult for her white colleague to understand her but, she came to learn, particularly from her friend who was more versed in recognizing examples of ethnoracial exclusion, that this was example of a stigmatizing incident.

**Contextual Factors that Shaped Recognition and Interpretation of Incidents of Ethnoracial Exclusion**

Britain colonial history, hostile reception to immigrants from its non-white ex-colonies, and view that these immigrants are not part of their preferred imagined national community (Anderson, 1993) were the most important macro-political factors that shaped the Nigerian second generation subjective understandings and recognition of incidents of ethnoracial exclusion. Gilroy (2005) argues that immigrants from Britain's non-white ex-colonies in Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa are not welcomed in Britain and that the legacies of white supremacy work alongside the legacy that understands immigration 'as being akin to war and invasion (p. 102). It is in this national context that non-white Britons struggle to form identities that balance being British and non-white (Modood et al., 1997). Studies show that the second generation blacks are seeking ways to balance being black, ethnic, and British (Imoagene 2017; Back, 1996; Foner, 2011).

The Nigerian second generation have picked up on these tensions. Many told me that black immigrants and their children are not welcome in Britain despite the growth in non-white racial and ethnic populations in Britain. This knowledge informed how they identified, perceived, and interpreted incidents of ethnoracial exclusion. A male respondent told me;

Historically [Britain] has not welcomed people from other nations openly, except they have a particular service in mind…The British state and its institutions have put certain blockades in the way for a particular progression for people that they have previously dominated. So, once you have come over, [they say,] 'Okay this is your job, this is the job that we want you to do. So, if you stay here and do your job, everything will be okay.' But that job – there is no opportunity there for growth and development.

Undergirding all these factors that shaped their perception and interpretation of incidents of ethnoracial exclusion was a black racial identity. Even though the Nigerian second generation articulated ethnic differences between themselves and Black-Caribbeans, all recognized their blackness and held a black racial identity. I narrowly conceptualize *black racial identity* to emphasize two key points: the power of assignment into the black racial category and the implications of said assignment. The Nigerian second generation in Britain recognized that they had been assigned into the black racial category and understood the implications of this ascribed racial group membership and its low placement on the racial hierarchy of black people in Black Britain. In their narratives of experiences of ethnoracial exclusion, they explicitly referred to experiences in Britain that affected both African and Caribbean blacks. Thus, the Nigerian second generation came to learn that a main reason why they experienced ethnoracial exclusion was their blackness.

Respondents drew on a British class system cultural repertoire to interpret incidents of stigmatization and racial discrimination. Even though research shows that the British class system allows for similar levels of mobility across the social classes as the United States, there is an old and widespread belief that Britain has a less open class system than the United States (Devine, 1997). Respondents felt that members of the 'old boys network' served as gatekeepers who decided

who would be allowed entry or excluded from the acme of professional occupations in Britain. The 'old boys network' is comprised of older white British men. A respondent who was a barrister told me 'you need to know the right people who would put in a word for you. There is definitely an old boy's network in operation and the door is not open to the top in any profession in this country.' The old boys network privileges white people who have the 'right background'—who went to the right schools such as 'Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard…. that sort of thing'—placing them in upper management positions. According to respondents, the introduction of such class considerations further disadvantages most black people because most did not attend the 'right schools' but, rather have 'a state education which wasn't really all that great.' As a result, while 'there is definitely a glass ceiling [or what I call an ebony ceiling], it is not double glazed…so it is not completely impenetrable.'

**Response Strategies to Ethnoracial Exclusion**

The consensus among respondents was that taking notice of incidents of ethnoracial exclusion in the workplace was not to one's advantage. It was self-defeating and only made one bitter. Respondents told me 'You move on.' 'You can't stand there and say "you're racist!" You ignore it and move on.' And another;

> If I [have experienced incidents of ethnoracial exclusion], I probably wouldn't care about it too much because it just holds you back and changes you and the way you think, thinking "Are they all racist?" I don't have time for that. It doesn't add any value.

Few respondents (4 out of 42) chose to respond to the stigmatizer in the moment. These respondents wanted to call the stigmatizer out in front of work colleagues. One respondent told me she asked her white colleague 'why are you ignoring me?' She did this to 'make other people aware of what was going on…..So that she [the white colleague] would be embarrassed. That was

my way of getting back at her.' A few respondents told me they had decided or felt they had to work harder in response to being stigmatized or discriminated at work because of their race. Three respondents had in response to experiencing racial discrimination changed careers. They left jobs that required extensive face-to-face interaction with white clients, whom they felt discriminated against them because of their race, to jobs that did not require as much personal interaction with clients. The majority sought self-validation outside work. They drew on their religious faith to see them through the tough times and counted themselves fortunate to have good jobs that helped provide for their families.

**Response Strategies to Ensure Economic Mobility**

I found that both set of respondents, those who felt they had and had not experienced ethnoracial exclusion, utilized two key strategies to ensure economic mobility in their workplaces. These were the strategies of social adaptability and conciliation. Some respondents who said they had not experienced racial discrimination in their workplaces attributed it to their skillful deployment of these strategies.

Strategy of social adaptability

The strategy of social adaptability involved learning the behaviors that would help you fit in with your colleagues in the workplace. It involves knowing how to behave with members of other social and racial groups to ensure trouble-free interaction and to achieve your objective. For example, if one learns that white people like people being polite when interacting with them, one says please and thank you as often as needed. It means following the rules and not butting up against the system and its conventions. An objective of this strategy is to increase white colleagues comfort with the individual.

The strategy of social adaptability is akin to Moss and Tilly's (1996) concept of 'soft' or social skills. They defined soft skills as 'skills, abilities, and traits that pertain to personality, attitude and behavior rather than to formal or technological knowledge (Moss and Tilly, 1996, p. 253). Employers felt two clusters of social skills were important. The first was interaction which 'involved the ability to interact with customers, coworkers, and supervisors….it included friendliness, teamwork, ability to fit in, appropriate affect, grooming and attire. (Moss and Tilly, 1996, p. 256).' The second cluster was motivation which included 'characteristics such as enthusiasm, positive work attitude, commitment, dependably and willingness to learn Moss and Tilly, 1996, p. 256-7).' They found that employers rated black men as being deficient in both clusters of soft skills which negatively impacted their economic mobility. In a similar vein, but from the perspective of an employee and speaking more to skills in the interaction cluster, respondents viewed being socially adaptable as important for economic mobility.

A forty-three-year-old female solicitor, who works for the local government, employs the strategy of adaptability and because of it claims that she 'has not been discriminated against personally.' She told me, 'I haven't had too much difficulty. I have never found it difficult to get any job that I want to do because I have been *adaptable.'* I asked her why she felt that being adaptable had protected her from being racially discriminated at work and ensured that she prospered and she said, 'I am adaptable to any culture. I change my accent' to fit in with my clients from different classes. A male forty-three-year-old lawyer is another good example of how being adaptable via participating in the cultural/social norms of the workplace ensure mobility. He too said he had never been racially discriminated against at work. 'I have not been denied any opportunities. Maybe, I am one of the lucky few who hasn't. I have worked in the city now for 22 years. I have progressed. This is my fourth city law firm. I am a partner in this one, and was a

partner in the last one too. I haven't discerned that my race has played any part either in my advancing or me not advancing.' When asked why he thought he had never been denied any opportunities, he said, 'I can be quite chameleon-like without being consciously aware of it.' He knows how to make his white colleagues 'comfortable with him.' He hangs out with them, goes for drinks with them. He is skilled in the performances he needs to engage as he interacts with different people.

According to respondents, being socially adaptable involves learning the right behaviors that will take you to the top. It involves having the right accent and learning the activities and behaviors that improve your fit with your white colleagues. This was especially true for respondents who held upper management positions at work, or felt they had a good chance of being promoted into these positions. These respondents had learned different skills needed to become more like their senior white colleagues. Learning these skills were prerequisites for moving up corporate ladders to the apex of their careers. In this way, the class system in Britain became intertwined with subjective experiences on the job. Respondents felt that employing this strategy helped raise them into upper management positions, which typically have few blacks and other ethnic minorities. The fact that ethnic minorities in Britain need to be socially adaptable and learn the skills valorized by the white upper class in order to reach the apex of their careers speaks to the gatekeeping power held by whites, the old boys' network in the upper echelons of the British labour market, and power inequities between whites and ethnic minorities in Britain.

The strategy of conciliation

The strategy of conciliation is primarily concerned with ensuring that one succeeds in the workplace over trying to assert or achieve the central objectives of antiracism. Bonnett (2000, p.

4) defines anti-racism as 'forms of thought and/or practice that seek to confront, eradicate and/or ameliorate racism' and as 'ideologies and practices that affirm and seek to enable the equality of races and ethnic groups (Bonnett, 2006, p. 1099).' The strategy of conciliation involves ignoring and/or forgiving racial slights or racial comments made by white colleagues. It involves excusing these colleagues of being ignorant or not knowing better. A twenty-eight-year-old female respondent who works in a stock brokerage office, employed this strategy in order to survive as one of the few black people in her workplace. She described her workplace as 'a stock broking firm that has got a very old male white demographic. There are only two black professionals in the firm. There are not many black people.' She allows people to make jokes and does not take any racial slights seriously.

> It is fine. You just have to realize that nobody there is very much like you. They say a lot of ignorant things. I am quite fortunate because I work with a lot of people that are very old school, very much gentlemanly. Even though they are going to say silly things they don't mean it harmfully. They truly are just ignorant. I would not say it impacts me negatively but it is sometimes funny to see how different I really am.

Even though she acknowledges that many things they say, which are often said jocularly, are stigmatizing incidents, she excuses their action, stating that her white colleagues are 'are very much open to learning but they have no exposure to that kind of life or any Afro-Caribbeans or Africans at all really.' Oftentimes in social events held jointly with other investment companies, where she is the client, 'I am often ignored.'

In summation, most respondents who reported personal experiences of ethnoracial exclusion in the workplace chose to ignore it. A tiny minority either confronted the offender or felt they had to work harder. But for most, their response strategies included strategies of mobility

aimed squarely at achieving economic mobility. These mobility strategies are not mutually exclusive as respondents often times used a combination of both to respond to incidents of ethnoracial exclusion, navigate their discriminatory work environments, and their relations with their white colleagues. These strategies were largely individually devised strategies. Some respondents had settled on a given strategy or combination of strategies after some discussion with family and friends. But I found no evidence of systematic, organized and or community-wide coordination on these response strategies. Because of the study's sample size and the fact that its findings are not generalizable to the entire population, I am cautious in making any claims that definitive patterns exist based on respondents gender, age, and or industry they worked in. I would rather stress the agency the Nigerian second generation show in developing these response strategies as they negotiate their workplace environments.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The examination of upwardly mobile second generation Nigerians/Africans workplace experiences in Britain reveal complexity. It is not a simple story of racial discrimination but one of experiencing incidents of stigmatization and racial discrimination, a predominant strategy of non-response to these incidents, and developing and deploying mobility strategies that facilitate success. The study found that incidents of stigmatization were more common than incidents of racial discrimination among the Nigerian second generation at work in Britain. Gender dynamics were also in play, as men and women experienced different types of stigmatizing incidents. Even though the focus of this article was examining the cultural processes of ethnoracial exclusion and adaptive strategies, it must be noted again that over forty percent of the Nigerian second generation Nigerians interviewed in this study said they had not experienced ethnoracial exclusion in the

workplace. Anti-discrimination laws have made it difficult for overt forms of racial discrimination to exist, and Britain's commitment to multiculturalism (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010) has made many Britons welcoming and tolerant of difference.

The finding of high salience of stigmatizing incidents among the Nigerian second generation at work in Britain adds on to the literature on stigma, stigmatization, and microaggressions by detailing the prominence of incidents of stigmatization such as being overlooked, ignored, and perceived as incompetent as examples of ethnoracial exclusion in the British context. As Lamont et al. (2016, p. 7) note, incidents of being ignored or overlooked are often undertheorized and unnoticed when experiences of ethnoracial exclusion and stigmatization are discussed. But these incidents are deeply felt by ethnic minorities and are proffered as examples of racial discrimination when they are asked to tell their stories about living as ethnic minorities in white dominant countries. We see this in the Lamont et al. (2016) study of stigmatized populations in the United States, Brazil, and Israel. And I show it in this study of the adult Nigerian second generation in Britain. Thus, incidents of stigmatization signal the importance of stigmatization 'in the symbolic ordering of ethnoracial inequality' (Lamont et al., 2016, p. 8). And they are worthy of investigation, notice, and documentation because as multicultural societies become increasingly concerned with recognition as a significant component of equity and social justice (Bonnett, 2000; Hage, 2016; Lamont et al., 2016; Paradies, 2016), the high frequency of stigmatizing incidents suggest that more work needs to be done in these societies.

The article advances our understanding of the cultural processes of ethnoracial exclusion experienced by ethnic minorities in Britain by incorporating the role macro- and mezzo-level contextual factors play in shaping how members of ethnic minority groups come to perceive, recognize, and interpret these incidents. The Nigerian second generation have become racialized

and have taken on a black racial identity. This along with Britain's colonial history, national identity, and the role of immigrants in its racial project and imagined national community are the three most important macropolitical factors that shaped how they came to recognize and interpret incidents of ethnoracial exclusion and understand their positioning in British society. At the mezzo level, the cultural repertoire of Britain's class system shapes how they understand black people's ethnoracial exclusion in the British labour market. The article makes novel contributions to our understanding of ethnoracial exclusion in Britain by connecting micro-level phenomena to larger mezzo- and macro-level explanations in addition to its systematic examination of the types and salience of different forms of ethnoracial exclusion experienced by a growing ethnic minority population in Britain.

The article makes another novel contribution by extending the discussion to include an examination of the range of response strategies deployed by middle class second generation Nigerians in Britain. It found three main response strategies. A non-response strategy to incidents of ethnoracial exclusion, and mobility strategies of social adaptability and conciliation to advance their economic mobility. Of the two minority cultures of mobility (Neckerman et al., 1999), the strategy of social adaptability is a more active strategy that involves learning and performing the behaviors and activities that are valued in the workplace and by one's bosses. The strategy of conciliation is more passive and involves deflecting, excusing, and/or ignoring racial slights and incidents. The adage see no evil, hear no evil is particularly apt in describing this strategy. This finding complicates the view that individual responses would lead to collective action that brings about social transformation which should reduce racism (Bonnett, 2006; Hage, 2016; Lamont et al., 2016; Paradies, 2016).

24

Finally, this article increases our knowledge on the black middle class in Britain. Often black immigrants and their children (the black second generation) are viewed as lacking adaptive strategies that facilitate upward social mobility (Modood, 2004; Shah et al., 2004). This study shows that minority cultures of mobility exist within black communities in Britain. Even as the workplace experiences of the Nigerian second generation reveal that many have experienced incidents of ethnoracial exclusion while almost as many have not, they have agency and have formulated strategies to navigate discriminatory environments as they pursue success in Britain.

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