

Social And Family Support And Bicultural Ethnic Identity Development: The Nigerian-Americans Experience In New York City

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Abstract: Early adulthood is a time when young adults struggle with accepting or rejecting their ancestral roots as they attempt to develop a positive sense of self. Nigerian-American adults, in particular, struggle with the integration of immensely different elements of Eastern and Western cultures while living in the United States. Despite the difficulties in cultural integration among Nigerian-American adults, few studies have been conducted about their bicultural ethnic identity development. Grounded in Phinney's stages of ethnic identity development and Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory, this study attempted to delineate the demographic and social factors that are correlated with development of a positive bicultural ethnic identity. Contrary to predictions, Nigerian-Americans with strong social support systems were more entrenched in their Nigerian identity. But, as predicted, Nigerian-Americans with strong family support systems developed more western identities. Contrary to expectations, older respondents were more entrenched in their Nigerian identity. Level of education, however, was not associated with development of a western identity. As expected, however, the longer Nigerian-Americans lived in the United States, the more western they became. Altogether, the findings of the study indicate that different sources of social support and demographic factors affect bicultural ethnic development in different ways. The findings also suggest that demographic factors may moderate the effect of social support on bicultural ethnic development. Thus, researchers should employ more complex research designs to assess the moderating effect of age and other demographic factors on the effects of social and psychological factors on bicultural ethnic identity development.

Keywords: Bicultural, Ethnic Identity, Development, Nigerian-American, New York

I. INTRODUCTION

During the 19th and the early 20th century, the development of industrial capitalism led to a massive migration of populations all around the world (Choy, 1979). The population movement started in Northern and Western Europe, then spread to Southern and Eastern Europe and to the world at large. The migration to the U.S. was part of a much larger world movement due to economic changes in many societies. In the 19th Century, immigrants provided the labor supply for the development of industrial capitalism in the United States (Choy, 1979).

The first wave of Nigerian emigration to the U.S. started in the 1902 (Choy, 1979). A second wave of Nigerian immigration took place when a limited number of wives and children followed husbands to the United State (Kim & Condon, 1975). In addition, Kim and Condon (1975) reported that the greatest Nigerian emigration to the U.S. occurred after the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act. The Nigerian government encouraged emigration as part of a new population control program, and as a means of maintaining socio-economic stability. A third and last wave of immigrants came to the U.S. in a quest for better employment, the pursuit of educational opportunities, or to reunite with their family members (Ogbu, 2003).

Many Nigerian-American adults who were born in the United States or who arrived in the United States when they were children are vulnerable to academic, social, and physical discrimination (Berry, Kim, Mind, & Monk, 1987). For instance, many Nigerian-American students experience academic pressure because they feel they have to counter the stereotype that Blacks do not perform well academically (Sodowsky & Lai, 1997). In addition, Nigerian community expectations of obedience and cooperation often run counter to the American expectations of independence and individualism. Discrimination and a clash of cultural expectations often lead to confusion and feelings of alienation (Blackwell & Hart, 1982). As a result, it is difficult for Nigerian-Americans to develop a positive bicultural ethnic identity (Phinney, 1998; 2000). In turn, this failure to develop a positive ethnic identity affects Nigerian-American's capacity to adjust psychologically to their socio-emotional environment (Kiang & Fuligni, 2008; Yasui, Dorham & Dishion, 2004).

The Immigration Reform Act of 1965 and the enactment of civil rights legislation marked the beginning of a new phase of emigration to the U.S. Immigrants of the post-1960s faced daunting challenges regarding the process of societal integration into American society, particularly in comparison to the European immigrants. The dominant American society initially defined Irish Catholics, Italians, and Eastern Europeans as different from, and inferior to, the Anglo-Saxon core of the country (Ogbu, 2003). Over time, European ethnic immigrants successfully integrated into the mainstream society by developing the notion of *whiteness* (Ogbu, 2003).

In contrast, non-European immigrants and their descendants were not allowed to integrate easily into mainstream society because of their skin color. Some observers considered Nigerian-Americans as ethnic-American, involving an ultimate harmonizing between ethnic and American, while others considered them as a racial minority, emphasizing the significance of race and the identity of the Nigerian-American (Kibria, 2002). Unlike European immigrants, Nigerian-Americans maintained a higher level of ethnicity in the western world (Hurh & Kim, 1984). While physical characteristics were most obvious, language patterns, foods, and customs also differed significantly with other American immigrant groups.

A critical strength of the Nigerian-American community is related to the strong family and social ties that buffer many individuals from the devastating consequences of life crisis (Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990). A basic function of families across human cultures is to nurture adaptive life skills and positive emotional attachments through the support of family members over the life span.

Culture is neither homogeneous nor static, but rather is tempered by familial socialization, attitudes, values, and behavior (Harrison et al., 1990; Lamborn & Felbab, 2003). Therefore, cultural schemas consist of familial perceptions and socialization of culture within a given historical time and are revised over a lifetime. In addition, family socialization is a reciprocal process flowing from older to younger family members, with younger family members also socializing with their elders. To a large extent, Nigerian-American ethnic self-identification results from a positive socialization process that is dependent upon parents, extended family members, the

presence or absence of other ethnic members in their ethnic group, and other ethnic groups including the majority group (Harrison et al., 1990).

Harrison et al. (1990) described two socialization goals that have generally been adopted by minority families. The first socialization goal is based upon a positive orientation toward an ethnic group, which ultimately promotes biculturalism and an acceptance of the orientations of the ancestral world. Accordingly, successful acceptance of ethnic background helps minority children relate to their heritage and promotes awareness of the racial barriers in the society in which they live. The second goal of socialization is interdependence, which promotes a connection to the extended family and the ancestral worldview of collectivism. Hence, parents encourage the development of personality traits that are consistent with interdependence, such as cooperation, obligation, and sharing (Harrison et al., 1990).

The purpose of this study was to explore which demographic and social factors affect the development of a bicultural ethnic identity in first and second generation Nigerian-American adults between 19 to 70 years old living in the New York City area. Through the use of three survey instruments, this study attempted to delineate the role that some demographic factors (i.e., age, number of years living in the United States, and level of education) and perceived social support from family and friends (Perceived Social Support-Friends PSS-FR) play in developing a positive bicultural ethnic identity.

II. ETHNICITY AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

Ethnicity can be defined in terms of one's ancestral heritage, specifically the culture or cultures of origin (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). Cultural groups that settle in a new context, as a result of immigration or other social and historical processes change over time and are influenced by the societies in which they are located. Nevertheless, ethnicity is associated with identifiable attributes in a given setting. Across a wide range of studies with different samples and a variety of methods, people from similar ethnic backgrounds have been found, on average, to show patterns in their values, beliefs, and behaviors that differentiate them from people of other ethnic or cultural groups (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999; Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000).

Hutchinson and Smith (1996, p.18) described ethnicity as "a membership in a sub-cultural group on the basis of country of origin, language, religion, or cultural tradition different from the dominant society". Isajiw (1990, p.35), however, proposed that ethnic groups give rise to "(a) social organization, an objective phenomenon that provides the structure for the ethnic community, and (b) identity, a subjective phenomenon that gives to individuals a sense of belonging and to the community a sense of openness and historical meaning". Ethnic identity was described by Isajiw as the "manner in which persons, on account of their ethnic origin, locate themselves psychologically in relation to one or more social systems, and in which they perceive others as locating them in relation to those systems" (Isajiw, 1990, p. 35).

Isajiw also distinguished between external and internal aspects of ethnic identity. External aspects of ethnic identity refer to observable behaviors, such as main training ethnic traditions, speaking ethnic language, participating in ethnic personal networks, institutional organizations, voluntary organizations (e.g., clubs and societies), as well as in functions sponsored by the ethnic community (e.g. dances, picnics and concerts). Internal aspects of ethnic identity refer to images, attitudes and feelings. Isajiw (1990) maintained that the internal factors were interconnected with external behavior, but that two components varied independently. Consequently, a person may retain a high degree of internal ethnic identity but not display visible ethnic behaviors and vice versa.

According to Phinney (2003), ethnic identity formation has been conceptualized in multiple ways. Ethnic identity has been defined as including positive attitudes about personal ethnicity, a sense of belonging to ethnic cultures and traditions that include voluntary and frequent association with other ethnic group members, and ethnic practices such as preferred music, food, language (Phinney, 2003; Phinney & Chavira, 1992, 1995).

III. ETHNIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

The multidimensional ethnic identity model by Sodowsky (1995, 1997) addresses the complex dynamics involved in the ethnic identity of minority individuals living in the U.S. who must face basic ethnic identity questions regarding ethnic identity and value. In this model the ethnic identity process is nonlinear in that one's ethnic identity orientation often varies over time and across different situations. This movement across different ethnic identity orientations is a consequence of "the ethnic individual's adaptive principle of flexibility and openness to possibilities, which has been conditioned through exposure to the effects of the White society and the ethnic society, both societies being necessary for the formation of an ethnic identity" (Sodowsky et al., 1995, p. 145).

IV. ROLE OF FAMILY IN NIGERIAN CULTURE

Nigerian enculturation and socialization is based upon the adoption of Confucianism, in which traditional Nigerian culture emphasizes human relationships. Within Confucian philosophy, human relationships have a central place, so that Nigerian culture can be viewed as a culture of relationship in which the fundamental principle is governing relationships among individuals, family, society and the world (Chung, 1970; S.J. Lee, 2002). According to Confucian precepts, individuals are not considered independent entities, but rather are linked to others in a web of interrelatedness.

Maday and Szalay's (1976) compared family relations in Nigerian culture and the self in the United States. The researchers conducted a study to examine the psychological connotation of *me* with a sample of Nigerian and American respondents. The results of the study resulted in four most important categorical Nigerian responses: (1) family, love; (2) ideas, happiness, freedom; (3) hope, ambitions, success; (4) money, materials, and goods. The four most frequent themes

for US respondents were: (1) person, individual; (2) other people; (3) tired, lonely, physical appearance; (4) good, friends and sociable.

Maday and Szalay (1976) concluded that the American conception of *me* focused more on the individual self than family or community. The responses indicated that Americans were detached from their family members and more surrounded by strangers. The authors commented that Nigerian and Americans appeared to have a different set of cultural identities. For Nigerians, the family occupies the central place. Individual family members are contributors to family happiness and material success. On the other hand, Americans need to prove their worth to strangers (Maday & Szalay, 1976).

Kibria (2002) stated that another message of immigrant families to their children would focus on school achievement. Immigrant Nigerian parents urge their children to compensate for the disadvantage of their racial identity by being *twice as good*, outdistancing their peers by their achievements. Park (2004) noted that doing better than white classmates at school was interpreted as an effective way to achieve socioeconomic status and to overcome racial barriers. Many immigrants' Nigerian parents contribute to the racial socialization of their children by constructing a social ecology for their children. They select an ethnically oriented neighborhood for the family home, and emphasize to their children that to have ethnic pride and do well in school is a strategy to deal with racism in the U.S.

Song and Song (2004) noted that second generation immigrant parents make enormous sacrifices to provide the best education possible for their children, and most second generation immigrant children try to live up to their parents' expectations. As a result, second generation immigrant children study hard and excel in school. For second generation immigrant American families, educational success is not an individual matter but is also a family issue. Huang & Waxman's (1995) study also supported previous studies that second generation immigrant Americans' academic achievement was due to their greater pride in class work and a strong desire to do well in school. A similar study by Locke (1998) found that second generation Nigerian students were staying in school longer than any other ethnic group, including Chinese, Japanese and Caucasian groups.

V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Based on Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory and on research by Phinney et al. (2000), to better understand the bicultural ethnic identity development and acculturation process of first and second generation Nigerian American adults living in New York City, the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1. What is the relationship between perception of *social support* as measured by the PSS-FR instrument (questions 1-20) and *ethnic identity* as measured by the SL-NIGERIA among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants?

H01. There is no statistically significant relationship between perception of *social support* as measured by the PSS-

FR instrument (questions 1-20) and *ethnic identity* as measured by the SL-NIGERIA among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants.

HA1. There is a positive and statistically significant relationship between perception of *social support* as measured by the PSS-FR instrument (questions 1-20) and *ethnic identity* as measured by the SL-NIGERIA among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants.

RQ2. What is the relationship between perception of *family support* as measured by the PSS-FR instrument (questions 21-30) and *ethnic identity* as measured by the SL-NIGERIA among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants?

HO2. There is no statistically significant relationship between perception of *family support* as measured by the PSS-FR instrument (questions 21-30) and *ethnic identity* as measured by the SL-NIGERIA among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants.

HA2. There is a positive and statistically significant relationship between perception of *family support* as measured by the PSS-FR instrument (questions 21-30) and *ethnic identity* as measured by the SL-NIGERIA among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants.

RQ3. What is the relationship between selected demographic variables (e.g., age, education level, years living in the U.S.) and perception of *ethnic identity* as measured by the SL-NIGERIA among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants? HO3a. There is no statistically significant relationship between *age* and perception of *ethnic identity* as measured by the SL-NIGERIA among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants.

HA3a. There is a positive and statistically significant relationship between *age* and perception of *ethnic identity* as measured by the SL-NIGERIA among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants will be statistically significant.

HO3b. There is no statistically significant relationship between *education level* and perception of *ethnic identity* as measured by the SL-NIGERIA among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants.

HA3b. There is a positive and statistically significant relationship between *education level* and perception of *ethnic identity* as measured by the SL-NIGERIA among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants.

HO3c. There is no statistically significant relationship between *years living in the U.S.* and perception of *ethnic identity* as measured by the SL-NIGERIA among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants.

HA3c. There is a positive and statistically significant relationship between *years living in the U.S.* and perception of *ethnic identity* as measured by the SL-NIGERIA among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants will be statistically significant.

VI. RESEARCH DESIGN

A quantitative design, the survey method, was used to collect data for the study. Two surveys, the Suinn-Lew Nigerian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (SL-Nigeria) and

the Perceived Social Support-Friends (PSS-FR), was used to measure the perceptions of Nigerian-Americans' bicultural ethnic identity as well as the processes of family and social support. Further, a demographic survey (created by the researcher) was used to measure the variables of age, number of years in the United States, and level of education.

The use of the survey method was appropriate for several reasons. First, the purpose of this study was to test hypotheses and not to generate hypotheses. Thus, the use of a quantitative method such as a survey (versus that of a qualitative method) was appropriate. Second, the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about Nigerian-Americans' social support systems were measured. Thoughts, feelings, and beliefs cannot be observed but can be measured through questions. Therefore, use of the survey method was most appropriate. Third, perceptions and beliefs about ethnic identity development were assessed. Ethnic identity development cannot be measured in a controlled experimental setting; as such conducting an experiment was not feasible (Leedy & Omrod, 2005).

VII. SAMPLING DESIGN

A non-probability purposive sample was used in this study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Only first and second generation Nigerian Americans between the ages of 19 and 70 years who regularly visit certain locations (i.e., various churches and restaurants) were included in the sampling frame. First generation participants were from families where both parents and children were born in Nigeria. Second generation participants were from families where the parents were born in Nigeria but the children were born in the United States. Only first and second generation Nigerian Americans (and not third and fourth generation immigrants) were included because adults from these generations are caught between the old Nigerian way of life and the more Western American way of life.

All adults who arrived in the last two years were excluded from the sampling frame; due to their recent arrival in the United States, it would be difficult to accurately measure their perceptions about bicultural development (Suinn et al., 1987).

Given that the relationship of only two variables was to be assessed in succeeding statistical tests, given an alpha of .05, and assuming a medium effect size of .1 (Cohen, 1977), a final sample of 100 participants was needed to attain statistical power of .85 (Judd & McClelland, 1989). Assuming a conservative 50% response rate, 200 Nigerian Americans were recruited from the various sites indicated above. Pastors of the churches, imams of the mosques, directors of agencies, and owners of the restaurants were contacted and were asked to encourage their followers or employees to participate in the study. Only the researcher, however, handed out the surveys.

VIII. INSTRUMENTATION

The survey instruments used in this study were the Suinn-Lew Nigerian Self-identity Acculturation Scale (SL-NIGERIA) and the Perceived Social Support-Friends (PSS-FR). In addition, basic demographic information (i.e., age,

gender, number of years living in the United States, and generation) was also collected. Permission for the SL-NIGERIA instrument was received from Suinn and his colleagues (1987). Permission for the Perceived Social Support-Friends (PSS-FR) instrument was received from Procidano and Heller (1983).

PSS-FR INSTRUMENT

The PSS-FR is a 20-item scale; items are scored on a three-point scale (from 0 to 2). Scores thus ranged from 0, indicating no perceived social support, to 20, indicating maximum perceived support. This 20-item scale has been shown to have alphas ranging from .84 to .90 (Procidano & Heller, 1983). In addition to the 20 items, a 10-statement section was added for African American adults; items are scored on a two-point scale. This 10-statement section was designed to improve content validity of the instrument (Procidano & Heller, 1983).

SL-NIGERIA INSTRUMENT

The Suinn-Lee Nigerian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale allows subjects to be classified according to their ethnic identity: (a) Nigerian; (b) American; or (c) bicultural (Nigerian-American). The instrument consists of 26 questions where the respondent is asked to indicate one of five possible choices. The first 21 comprise the original scale; the reliability and validity of this set of items has already been ascertained. Suinn and his colleagues, however, included five more items (i.e., items 22 to 26) to help researchers further classify participants. The reliability and validity of this new set of items, however, has not yet been tested. Consequently, only the first 21 items will be used in the study.

The final acculturation score can range from one (i.e., low acculturation) to five (i.e., high acculturation). Accordingly, low scores would reflect high Nigerian identification while high scores would reflect high Western identification (Suinn et al., 1987). In a previous study, Suinn and his colleagues (1987) reported that the coefficient alpha for the first 21 items was high at .88. It thus appears that this measure is reliable.

IX. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to explore which demographic and social factors affect the development of a bicultural ethnic identity in first and second generation Nigerian-American adults between 19 to 70 years old living in the New York City area. Through the use of three survey instruments, this study attempted to delineate the role that some demographic factors (i.e., age, number of years living in the United States, and level of education) and perceived social support from family and friends (Perceived Social Support-Friends PSS-FR, Procidano & Heller, 1983) play in developing a positive bicultural ethnic identity (Suinn-Lew Nigerian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale SL-NIGERIAN; Suinn-Lew, 1987).

Survey distribution and collection required approximately four months and 199 completed surveys were received

following informed consent agreement. In this chapter, preliminary analyses will first be presented. Following this section, the demographic profile of participants and the descriptive statistics of the study variables will be detailed. In the last section, inferential statistical analysis and hypothesis testing will be described.

X. PRELIMINARY ANALYSES

OUTLIER CHECKS

The reliability of the three measures was assessed via Cronbach's alpha. Items with low item-total correlations were dropped from consequent analyses. The following items had low item-total correlations and were not used to create the composite variables: SL-Nigeria item 2, Family Support items 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 9.

Three composite variables were then created: an ethnic identity variable (the mean of the SL-Nigeria items), a perceived social support variable (the sum of the PSS-FR items), and a perceived family support variable (the sum of the PSS-Family Support items). Cases whose composite standardized scores exceeded three were deleted from subsequent analyses. The following cases were identified as outliers: 76, 136, 138, 158, and 189.

RELIABILITY OF SCALES

The reliability of the three measures was assessed again (without the five outliers) via Cronbach's alpha. The alphas for the three measures are presented in Table 1. According to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), a scale is deemed internally consistent when its alpha is .70. The alpha for the SL-Nigeria scale was unacceptable at .68; item 2 had a low item-total correlation and was deleted from the SL-Nigeria scale. Alpha improved thereafter (i.e., $\alpha = .74$). Alpha for the PSS-Social Support measure was acceptable at .83. Alpha for the PSS-Family Support measure was very low ($\alpha = .22$). Items that had negative item-total correlations were deleted (i.e., items 4 and 6); alpha was still low. Thus, other items were deleted (1, 3, 5, 7, and 9). Alpha improved but was still unacceptable at .50.

Measure	Case N	Item N	Alpha
Original SL-Nigeria	194	21	.68
Revised SL-Nigeria	194	20	.74
PSS-Social Support	192	20	.83
Original PSS- Family Support	193	10	.22
Revised PSS-Family Support	193	3	.50

Table 1: Coefficient Alphas for the Study Measures

ASSUMPTION TESTS

To test for normality, the skewness and kurtosis of the composite measures were assessed. According to Kline (2005), variables are non-normal when their skew indices (i.e., skew statistic/SE) are above three or when their kurtosis indices (i.e., kurtosis statistic/SE) are above 20. The skewness and kurtosis values for the study variables are displayed in Table 2.

Because the skew index of number of years in the United States and perceptions of social support was higher than three (all kurtosis indices were below 20), these variables were transformed. Number of years in the United States was normalized via a square root transformation while the perception of social support variable was normalized via a power transformation. The skew indices for these transformed variables were close to or less than three. Accordingly, these transformed variables were used in consequent analyses.

Variable	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE
Age	.05	.18	-.69	.35
Number of years in U.S.	.78	.18	-.32	.35
Ethnic identity (SL-Nigeria)	-1.33	.18	1.15	.35
Social support (PSS-FR)	.50	.18	-.61	.35
Family support (PSS-Family)				

Table 2: Skewness and Kurtosis Statistics for the Measures of the Study (N = 194)

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

As can be gleaned from Table 3, there was a nearly equal distribution of males (47.7%) and females (52.3%). Respondents were between 19 and 70 years old. The mean age was 41.27 (SD = 11.69). The majority of participants were not born in the U.S. (93.5%); only 6.5% of the respondents were born in the U.S. The minimum number of years respondents spent living in the United States was one while the maximum was 40; the mean number of years spent in the United States was 12.90 (SD = 8.64).

Slightly more than half of the sample consisted of students (52.6%). Around a third of the respondents were pursuing an undergraduate degree (35.6%) while the other third had an undergraduate or post graduate degree (30.2%). Majority of the respondents (76.1%) were employed.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	102	52.6
Female	92	47.4
Level of education		
Some high school	3	1.5
High school graduate	7	3.6
Some college	31	16.0
College graduate	80	41.2
Some graduate school	12	6.2
Masters/doctorate	61	31.4
Born in the United States		
Yes	12	6.2
No	181	93.3

Table 3: Frequencies and Percentages for Demographic Variables (N = 194)

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR STUDY VARIABLES

The descriptive statistics for the study variables are shown in Table 4. The theoretical range of the SL-Nigeria scores was one through five, with one indicating a Nigerian ethnic identity and five indicating a more Western ethnic identity. SL-Nigeria scores for the current sample ranged from 1.60 to 3.85; the mean score was 2.63 (SD = .41). It thus appears that

the current sample of respondents had a bicultural ethnic identity.

The theoretical range of the PSS-FR scale was from zero to 40, with zero indicating no perceived social support and 40 indicating maximum perceived social support. Social support scores for the current sample ranged from 10 to 38; the mean score was 30.38 (SD = 6.29). Thus, the current sample of respondents generally felt supported by their relatives.

The theoretical range of the PFF-Family Support scale was from three to six, with three indicating minimal family support and six indicating maximum family support. Family support scores for the current sample ranged from three to six; the mean score was 4.05 (SD = .96). Thus, the current sample of respondents felt some support from their families.

Variable	Range	Mean	SD
Ethnic identity (SL-Nigeria)	1.60 to 3.85	2.63	.41
Social support (PSS-FR)	10.00 to 38.00	30.38	6.29
Family support (PSS-Family)	2.00 to 6.00	4.05	4.05

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for the Study Measures (N = 194)

INFERENTIAL ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS TESTING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL SUPPORT AND ETHNIC IDENTITY (RQ1)

The first research question asked what the relationship between perception of social support as measured by the PSS-FR instrument (questions 1-20) and ethnic identity as measured by the SL-NIGERIA among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants would be.

It was hypothesized that there would be a positive and statistically significant relationship between perceptions of social support and ethnic identity among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants. Thus, as social support increased, Nigerian-Americans would develop more Western identities.

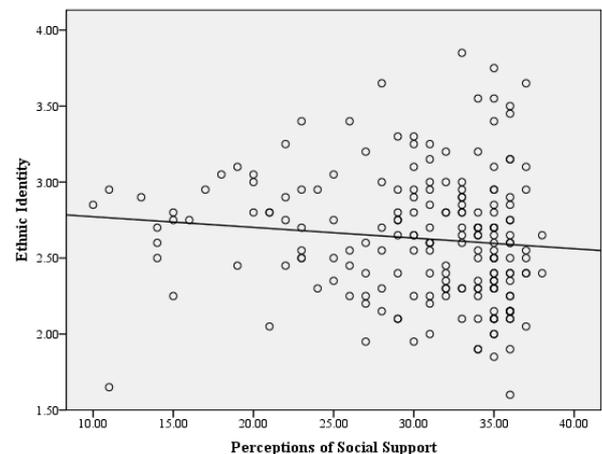


Figure 1: Scatterplot depicting the relationship between perceptions of social support and ethnic identity

A Pearson correlation procedure was conducted to test this hypothesis. The relationship between the two variables is depicted in Figure 1. The Pearson correlation findings in Table 5 reveal that the association between perceptions of social support and ethnic identity was negative and statistically significant ($r = -.18, p = .01$). Although the correlation coefficient was statistically significant, the coefficient was

negative, moderately strong, and not in the predicted direction. Thus, the null hypothesis could not be rejected. Instead, despite significant social support, first and second generation Nigerian-Americans preserved a significant degree of their primary Nigerian cultural identity.

Variable	r with Ethnic Identity	Sig.
Perceptions of social support	-.12	.043
Perceptions of family support	.14	.023
Age (in years)	-.14	.026
Number of years living in the U.S.	.36	.000

Table 5: Pearson Correlations between the Study Variables (N = 194)

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEPTION OF FAMILY SUPPORT AND ETHNIC IDENTITY (RQ2)

The second research question asked what the relationship between perception of family support as measured by the PSS-FR instrument (questions 21-30) and ethnic identity as measured by the SL-NIGERIA among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants would be.

It was hypothesized that there would be a positive and statistically significant relationship between perceptions of family support and ethnic identity among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants. Thus, as family support increased, Nigerian-Americans would develop more Western identities.

A Pearson correlation procedure was conducted to test this hypothesis. The relationship between the two variables is depicted in Figure 2. The findings in Table 5 reveal that the association between perceptions of family support and ethnic identity was positive, moderately strong, and statistically significant ($r = .36, p < .01$). Thus, the null hypothesis could be rejected. As family support increased, first and second generation Nigerian-Americans developed more Western identities.

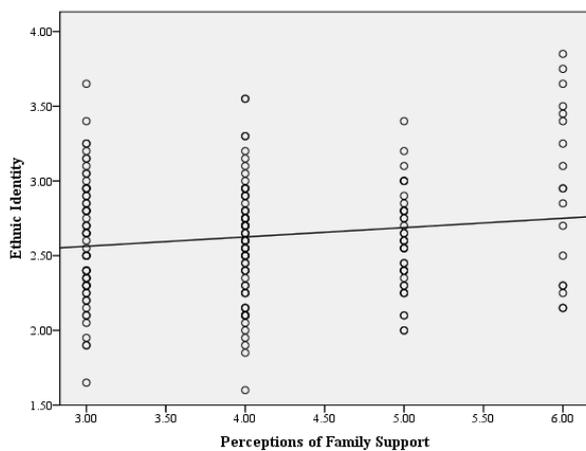


Figure 2: Scatterplot depicting the relationship between perceptions of family support and ethnic identity

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND ETHNIC IDENTITY (RQ3)

The third research question asked what the relationship between selected demographic variables (e.g., age, education level, years living in the U.S.) and perception of ethnic identity

as measured by the SL-NIGERIA among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants would be.

AGE AND ETHNIC IDENTITY: It was hypothesized that there would be a positive and statistically significant relationship between age and ethnic identity among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants. Thus, older respondents would develop more western identities than younger respondents.

A Pearson correlation procedure was conducted to test this hypothesis. The relationship between the two variables is depicted in Figure 3. The findings in Table 5 reveal that the association between age and ethnic identity was negative, moderately strong, and statistically significant ($r = -.17, p = .02$). Thus, the null hypothesis could not be rejected. Instead, younger respondents developed more western identities than the older respondents.

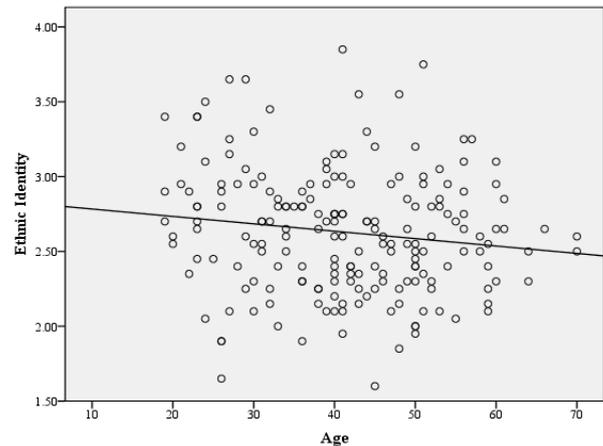


Figure 3: Scatterplot depicting the relationship between age and ethnic identity

LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND ETHNIC IDENTITY: It was hypothesized that there would be a positive and statistically significant relationship between education level and ethnic identity among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants. As education level increased, ethnic identity (more American) would also increase.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test this hypothesis. The means and standard deviations for ethnic identity scores across levels of education are presented in Table 6. The findings indicate that ethnic identity scores did not differ significantly across levels of education ($F(5,188) = .34, p = .885$). Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Level of Education	Mean	SD
Some high school	2.67	.53
High school graduate	2.57	.38
Some college	2.69	.35
College graduate	2.60	.40
Some graduate school	2.71	.52
Masters/doctorate	2.62	.45

Table 6: Means and Standard Deviations for Ethnic Identity Scores across Levels of Education

NUMBER OF YEARS IN THE UNITED STATES AND ETHNIC IDENTITY: It was hypothesized that there would be a positive and statistically significant relationship between the number of years living in the U.S. and ethnic identity among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants.

Thus, the longer Nigerian-Americans lived in the United States, the more westernized they would become.

A Pearson correlation procedure was conducted to test this hypothesis. The relationship between the two variables is depicted in Figure 5. The findings in Table 5 indicate that the association between number of years living in the U.S. and ethnic identity was positive, moderately strong, and statistically significant ($r = .33, p < .01$). Thus, the null hypothesis could be rejected. Therefore, the longer Nigerian-Americans lived in the United States, the more westernized they became.

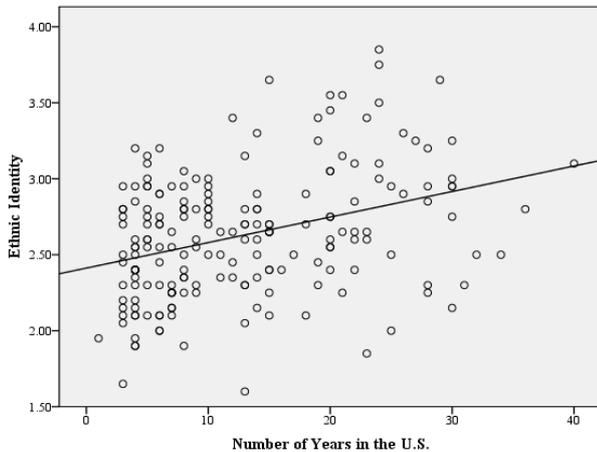


Figure 4: Scatterplot depicting the relationship between the number of years spent in the United States and ethnic identity

XI. SUMMARY

The findings are summarized in Table 7. The findings indicate that, contrary to predictions, Nigerian-Americans with strong social support systems were more entrenched in their Nigerian identity. But, as predicted, Nigerian-Americans with strong family support systems developed more western identities. Contrary to expectations, older respondents were more entrenched in their Nigerian identity. Level of education, however, was not associated with development of a western identity. But, as expected, the longer Nigerian-Americans lived in the United States, the more western they became.

Hypothesis	Relationship	Finding
1	Perceptions of social support and ethnic identity	Not supported
2		Supported
3a	Perceptions of family support and ethnic identity	Not supported
3b		Not supported
3c	Age and ethnic identity	Supported
	Level of education and ethnic identity	
	Number of years in U.S. and ethnic identity	

Table 7: Summary of Hypotheses Tests

XII. FINDING

SOCIAL SUPPORT: Social support from relatives was negatively associated with ethnic identity among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants. As social support from friends increased, first and second generation

Nigerian-Americans preserved a significant degree of their primary Nigerian cultural identity.

FAMILY SUPPORT: Support from family was positively associated with ethnic identity among first and second generation Nigerian-American immigrants. As social support from family members increased, first and second generation Nigerian-Americans developed more Western identities.

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS: Age was negatively correlated with ethnic identity among first and second generation Nigerian-Americans. The younger the respondents, the greater were their tendencies to develop a more Western identity. The number of years living in the United States was also positively associated with ethnic identity among first-and second Nigerian-Americans. The longer the respondents lived in the United States, the more westernized they became. Level of education, however, did not have much of an effect on ethnic identity.

XIII. INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

SOCIAL FACTORS

The two major findings of the study were that strong social support from relatives led respondents to develop more Nigerian identities but that strong familial support led respondents to develop more western identities. In interpreting these seemingly contradictory findings, it should be noted that the sample consisted of primarily first-generation Nigerian Americans who were not born in the United States. Further, the mean age of the sample of respondents was 41, thus indicating that the sample consisted primarily of middle-aged adults.

SOCIAL SUPPORT. Previous findings (i.e., Kibria, 2002) indicate that the support of parents, peers, teachers, and community members enables minority students to develop beliefs and attitudes about their likelihood of success, and social integration and mobility. Given these findings, it was predicted that strong social support would lead to development of a bicultural ethnic identity. The findings of the current study show otherwise and that strong social support led instead to development of a Nigerian identity.

There are three possible explanations for this contradictory finding. First, social support was defined operationally in terms of social support from relatives. It is possible that social support from peers, teachers, and community members who have primarily western identities may enable minority students to develop bicultural or western identities but that social support from relatives who are less westernized and more Nigerian may lead minority students to develop more ethnic and Nigerian identities. Given that the sample consisted of mostly first-generation Nigerian Americans who were not born in the United States, it is possible that the respondents were surrounded by relatives with a predominantly Nigerian ethnic identity. As such, social support from these relatives led the respondents to become more Nigerian as well. Second, and contingent on the first, because the sample consisted primarily of first-generation Nigerian Americans, the sample of respondents had collectivistic values. As such, the respondents were more likely to rely on both their immediate and extended families

and thus become more collectivist and Nigerian as well. Indeed, Oyserman and Sakamoto (1997) revealed that African-American students with a more collectivist perspective felt more positive about their ethnic/racial group and were more likely to view themselves as part of the African-American community. Third, it is possible that social support from relatives was associated with development of a Nigerian ethnic identity because the sample consisted of middle-aged Nigerian Americans. Additional analyses reveal that, within a sub-sample of respondents aged 36 and below, the relationship between perceptions of social support and development of an ethnic identity was not statistically significant ($r = -.03, p = .395$). On the other hand, within a sub-sample of respondents aged 48 and older, the relationship between perceptions of social support and development of an ethnic identity was marginally significant ($r = -.17, p = .090$). Thus, it appears that age moderated the relationship between perceptions of social support and development of an ethnic identity.

FAMILY SUPPORT. The findings reveal that, as predicted, family support was associated with development of an American identity. It should be noted that the definition of family support was very specific as only three items (i.e., talking freely like most Americans, knowing more about American culture; encouragement to become more American) were retained to measure this particular construct. Nevertheless, this finding indirectly corroborates what previous studies have documented: that when parents do not have similar experiences as their children and are unable to understand the various pressures associated with adjusting to a Western culture, the children feel more pressure to conform to traditional family expectations (Constantine and Chen, 1997; Fugligni, 1997; Fugligni, et al., 1999; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Kibria, 2002). Corollary to this is that when parents understand that their children are caught between two worlds and encourage their children to openly explore the western world, children will learn to adopt a more western identity as well. Clearly, as Oyserman and Sakamoto (1997) point out, the experience of family interaction at home is the foundation for each young adult's sense of self.

XIV. DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

In addition to the two major findings discussed above, this study documented that age was negatively associated with development of a western identity but that number of years living in the United States was positively associated with development of a western identity. Level of education, however, was not related to development of an ethnic identity.

AGE. Since it was assumed that development of a bicultural identity parallels other life span changes associated with age, it was hypothesized that age would be positively associated with development of a western identity. Contrary to expectations, however, age was negatively associated with development of a western identity; the younger the respondent, the greater the tendency towards developing a western identity. Since the relationship established between age and development of a bicultural ethnic identity was only correlational, it is likely that this relationship can be explained

by other variables. As perceptions of social support was negatively associated with age and with development of an ethnic identity, it is possible that perceptions of social support was responsible for the correlation between age and ethnic identity. Because only a few variables were measured in the study, it is not clear what other third variables were responsible for the association between age and development of a bicultural ethnic identity. Future studies should be designed so that the effects of other correlates of age (such as individualist vs. collectivist orientation, openness to new experiences, and influence of peer group) on development of a bicultural ethnic identity can be controlled or assessed.

NUMBER OF YEARS LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES. As predicted, the longer Nigerian Americans lived in the United States, the greater was their tendency to develop western identities. This relationship between number of years spent in a western culture and development of a more western identity can be explained in terms of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Taifel & Turner, 1979; Taifel & Turner, 1986). According to Tajfel (1978), social identity is part of an individual's self-concept and is derived from knowledge of his membership in a social group, with the values and emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel, 1978). An individual's social identity can only be defined through the effects of social categorization segmenting an individual's social environment into his or her own group, and others. If adequate conditions for the preservation of a positive social identity are not offered by a group, then an individual will leave this group psychologically, objectively, or both. It is possible to surmise that the longer Nigerian Americans were immersed in western culture, the less positive their social ethnic identity became; as such, these Nigerian Americans decided to adopt a more western social identity. After all, a social identity with a group only remains when one positively values its distinctiveness from other groups in society (Taifel & Turner, 1979; Taifel & Turner, 1986).

XV. CONCLUSION

Early adulthood is a time when young adults struggle with accepting or rejecting their ancestral roots as they attempt to develop a positive sense of self. Nigerian-American adults, in particular, struggle with the integration of immensely different elements of Eastern and Western cultures while living in the United States. Despite the difficulties in cultural integration among Nigerian-American adults, few studies have been conducted about their bicultural ethnic identity development. This study attempted to delineate the role that some demographic factors (i.e., age, number of years living in the United States, and level of education) and perceived social support from family and friends (Perceived Social Support-Friends PSS-FR, Procidiano & Heller, 1983) play in developing a positive bicultural ethnic identity (Suinn-Lew Nigerian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale SL-NIGERIAN; Suinn-Lew, 1987). The findings reveal that social and familial support was significantly associated with ethnic identity development. Age and number of years spent living in the United States were also significantly correlated with ethnic

identity development. Level of education, however, was not related to ethnic identity development.

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