CHARACTERISTICS AND CHALLENGES OF HIGH-ACHIEVING SECOND-GENERATION NIGERIAN YOUTHS IN THE UNITED STATES

Patricia Ngozi Anekwe
Western Connecticut State University, Diewa@msn.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.wcsu.edu/educationdis

Part of the Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons, and the Educational Leadership Commons

Recommended Citation
Anekwe, Patricia Ngozi, "CHARACTERISTICS AND CHALLENGES OF HIGH-ACHIEVING SECOND-GENERATION NIGERIAN YOUTHS IN THE UNITED STATES" (2008). Education Dissertations. 50. https://repository.wcsu.edu/educationdis/50

This Dissertation is brought to you via free, open access by the Department of Education & Educational Psychology and by WestCollections: digitalcommons@wcsu, the institutional repository of Western Connecticut State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Education Dissertations by an authorized administrator of WestCollections: digitalcommons@wcsu. For more information, please contact ir@wcsu.edu.
CHARACTERISTICS AND CHALLENGES OF HIGH-ACHIEVING SECOND-GENERATION NIGERIAN YOUTHS IN THE UNITED STATES

Patricia Ngozi Anekwe

B.S., Sacred Heart University, CT, 1983
M.A., Fairfield University, CT, 1985
C.A.S., Fairfield University, CT, 1991
M.S., Southern Connecticut State University, CT, 2005

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership in the Department of Education and Educational Psychology at Western Connecticut State University

2008
CHARACTERISTICS AND CHALLENGES OF HIGH-ACHIEVING 
SECOND-GENERATION NIGERIAN YOUTH IN THE UNITED STATES 

Patricia Ngozi Anekwe, Ed.D. 
Western Connecticut State University 

Abstract 

This study investigated the characteristics and challenges of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths in the United States. An increasing number of youths in America’s schools are from immigrant backgrounds due to the flow of immigration from Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Given the local and national mandates to improve the academic achievement of all children, we cannot afford to leave any group behind. 

Although research on immigrant children from Asia and Latin America and their adaptation and schooling has increased in the last two decades, the educational experiences of Black immigrant children from Africa and the Caribbean have been understudied. The scant research on African immigrants lumps all Africans into a homogeneous group despite the different experiences and obvious diversity found within Africa and among African immigrants. Using theoretical triangulation from Educational Anthropology (cultural ecological theory), Sociology (Social capital), and Psychology (social cognitive theory), the researcher examined the role of parents, personal traits, and social contexts on the academic experiences of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths. 

The study used surveys, in-depth interviews of Nigerian youths and parents (mothers) and a focus group interview of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths to explore the academic experiences of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths to identify factors that determine their educational outcomes. It is anticipated that the results of this
study will contribute to the literature on immigrant, minority, and Black students’ education in the United States.

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths credited their parents, extended family, the Nigerian community, and their upbringing for their motivation and academic success. Nigerian parents were actively engaged with the education of their children, both in the traditional realms of school involvement and in the non-traditional school engagement. Although youths faced the challenges of peer teasing, underpreparation for college, and parental pressure, they devised coping strategies through code-switching, reevaluating their definition of academic success, and increasing determination and effort. They also were involved in several extracurricular activities that helped them to create social networks with peers and adults and to break social barriers.
Characteristics and Challenges of High Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths in the United States

Presented by

Patricia Anekwe

Edward Duncanson, EdD
Primary Advisor
Signature
Date

Joseph Aina, PhD
Secondary Advisor
Signature
Date

Dudley Orr, EdD
Secondary Advisor
Signature
Date

2008
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to several individuals without whom this dissertation would not have been possible. They provided the practical help, moral support, mentorship, and inspiration for me. My primary advisor, Dr. Edward Duncanson, spent countless hours guiding and reading several drafts of this dissertation. Dr. Marcia Delcourt was not only a professor but also a mentor and unofficial advisor. My secondary advisors, Dr. Joseph Aina, Dr. Chris Clouet, and Dr. Dudley Orr, were kind and enthusiastic enough to join my team. Their support was invaluable to me. Dr. Tom Cordy and the cohort one faculty and students were also supportive. My special thanks go to the study participants, for without them, this study would not have been possible. My friends and relatives were also very supportive, and they encouraged me to hang in there.

My husband Clem was my greatest cheerleader and supporter and he would not let me quit. He provided me with moral and practical support with plenty of encouragement along the way. His computer expertise and skills were invaluable for this project. My three children, Tobenna, Chika, and Amaka, were my greatest source of inspiration for the study, and I appreciate their kind words of encouragement with, “You go, mom,” and their help with typing the dissertation.

Finally, I thank my parents, Robert and Victoria Attah for providing me with the opportunity to be educated. They told me that I could attain any level of education I wanted if I worked hard for it. I learned from them to believe in my abilities and to dream of a better world with an education.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my aunt and hero, Patricia Mary-Carmel Attah, who by sending my father to school planted the seed of education in my family, and to my father-in-law, Didigwu Anekwe, who laid the foundation for the education of his children.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND IDENTIFICATION OF THE TOPIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rationale for the Study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief Definition of Key Terms</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief Review of the Literature</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief Overview of the Theoretical Frameworks</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief Overview of the Methodology</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background of Nigerian Immigrants in the US</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Frameworks Explaining the Achievement Patterns of Immigrant and Minority Students</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Ecological Theory</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Cognitive Theory</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Capital Theory</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Factors that Influence Educational Outcomes for Immigrant and Minority Students</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generational Status</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Self-Concept and Academic Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Factors that Influence Academic Outcomes for Immigrant and Minority Students</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Socioeconomic Background 35
Human Capital, Social Capital, and Cultural Capital 38
Parental Role 42
Parental Expectations 47
Race-Ethnic Identity 50
Cultural Socialization 53
School Factors that Influence The Educational Outcomes for Immigrant and Minority Students 55
Peer Relationship 55
Explanations for Asian-American Academic Achievement 58
Summary of the Review of the Literature 63

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS AND PROCEDURES 66
Re...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental Expectations</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Engagement</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonschool Parental Engagement</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Structure and Routines</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents Moral Support</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Socialization</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Motivation</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Characteristics of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with Peers</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with African-American Peers</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with Guidance Counselors</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with Teachers</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges of High Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Teasing</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Underpreparation for College</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Pressure</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of Racialization of Success</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping Strategies of High Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code-switching</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracurricular Involvement</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Determination and Effort</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Personal Characteristics of High-Achieving Second-Generation
Nigerian Youths 190
Home Characteristics of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths 191
School Characteristics of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths 192
Challenges of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths 193
Coping Strategies of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths 193

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS 196

Research Questions 196
Review of Findings Related to the Research Questions 196

Personal Characteristics of High-Achieving Second-Generation
Nigerian Youths 199

History of Academic Achievement 199
Youths’ Self-Perception and Identity 200
Motivation 202

Home Characteristics of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths 203
Parental Engagement 203
Home Structure and Routines 208

School Characteristics of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths 211

Challenges of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths 212
Coping Strategies of High-Achieving Second-Generation Youths 216
Implications of the Study 219
Limitations of the Study 222

Recommendations for Future Research 223
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND IDENTIFICATION OF THE TOPIC

Black immigrant youths are overrepresented at elite academic institutions and the overrepresentation is greatest in the most exclusive stratum. Massey et al., 2007

The United States is a nation of immigrants, and this has important ramifications for educational researchers, policy makers, and practitioners due to the number of first- and second-generation youths in America’s schools. The educational outcome of these children determines their future occupational and economic success in American society as well as their transition into adulthood (Sherrod, Haggerty, & Featherman, 1993). Yet, research on new immigrants often focuses on the first-generation adults, neglecting the second-generation youths who are highly visible in the schools and whose adaptation has dire consequences for our schools and society (Rumbaut, 1994a). Approximately 20% of school-age children in the US are from an immigrant family (Conchas, 2001; Zhou, 1997). Research focusing on the academic outcomes of second-generation immigrant children from Asia and Latin America has increased, whereas second-generation African youngsters have been understudied (Qin-Hillard, Feinauer, & Quiroz, 2001). The scant quantitative research that has been conducted on second-generation Africans concluded that they are performing well academically (Massey, Mooney, Torres, & Charles, 2007; Rong & Brown, 2001). This qualitative study focused on high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths to identify the factors that determine their academic outcomes.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, there were 53 million children in public and private schools in 2000; and 40% of the total public school population is
composed of minority students (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2000). By the year 2020, it is projected that the majority of the school population will be African-Americans, Asians, Hispanics, and Native Americans (Meece & Kurtz-Costes, 2001). Undoubtedly, immigrant children and second-generation youths from Africa will contribute to this demographic trend. In 1990, about 60% of Hispanic children and 90% of Asian American children were first- or second-generation (Zhou, 1997). The 2000 Census estimate indicates that 34% of youths ages 15-19 were from immigrant groups, and this number is projected to increase to 46% by 2025 (Kao & Thompson, 2003). Children with immigrant backgrounds represented one fifth of the United States student population (Noguera, 2004). It is projected that by the year 2010, “the population of first-generation and second-generation Black children will reach 4.3 million or about 12% of the total U.S. Black population” (Rong & Brown, 2001, p. 537).

While the number of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa nearly tripled in the 1990s, the number of Afro-Caribbean immigrants increased by more than 60% (Logan & Deane, 2003). Logan and Deane also noted that nearly 25% of the growth of the Black population in the United States between 1990 and 2000 was the result of immigration from Africa and the Caribbean. Yet, little research is available on the academic outcomes of children of African immigrants because research on Black immigrants is often linked to immigration studies rather than minority academic achievement (Massey et al., 2007).

Immigrant children generally face many challenges in school because they are not only dealing with a new environment but also are struggling to adapt to a new culture with a different educational system (Fuligni & Witkow, 2004; Rumbaut, 1994a; Zhou, 1997). Issues of race, identity, class, gender, legal status, and language barriers may compound such
problems for some immigrant children (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Racial prejudice toward Black immigrants is an additional burden that impacts the educational and socioeconomic aspirations of Black immigrant children. These youths are likely to encounter “discrimination, lower expectations, and less encouragement from teachers and others in positions of authority in schools and the community” (Hirschman, 2001, p. 331). Immigrant youths, including those born to African immigrants, are currently found in both urban and suburban schools, and their presence cannot be ignored (Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, and Central America may also have additional burdens due to their race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, all of which can negatively affect their children’s education (Rong & Brown, 2002).

Clearly, immigrants and their children “bring experiences and issues to schools that are unique and deserve close analysis and understanding” (Goodwin, 2002, p. 162). This study focused on three areas of concern. First, this study examined the academic experiences of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths. Secondly, the study looked at the effects of the family, school, community, and individual traits on the academic achievement of high-achieving second-generation Nigerians. Lastly, the study identified the challenges facing high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths and how these youth dealt with such challenges.

Rationale for the Study

A review of the literature reveals that most of the studies conducted on immigrant children were done on the children of immigrants from Asia and Latin America (Fernandez-Kelly & Schaufler, 1994; Gans, 1992; Goyette & Xie, 1999; Hirschman & Wong, 1986; Suarez-Orozco, 1987; Zhou, 1997). Such studies have yielded different results for different
groups and within the same group (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Kao, Tienda & Schneider, 1996). Despite the increased number of second-generation Black students in our schools, an extensive literature review revealed a dearth of research on second-generation youths from Africa.

Bryce-Laporte (1972) described the experience of Black immigrants in the United States as one of invisibility and inequality. Consistent with this earlier finding, Butcher (1994) noted that very little research was available on Black immigrant children and especially on African immigrants and their children. Three years later, Dodoo (1997) wrote that the experiences of Black immigrants have been under-researched compared to Asian and Hispanic immigrants. Although there has been little research interest on African immigrants in the United States, there have been debates about the highly visible representation of second-generation African youths in America’s elite colleges (Rimer & Arenson, 2004).

A recently published study indicated that while second-generation Africans and Afro-Caribbeans make up less than 1% of the U.S. population (Logan & Deane, 2003), they comprise over 43% of Blacks in selective colleges and universities in the United States (Massey et al., 2007). Massey et al. (2007) concluded that second-generation Black students in exclusive colleges exhibited the academic qualifications these colleges required for entrance, such as high grade-point averages and high standardized test scores. Yet, no research is available on what determines such educational outcomes for second-generation Blacks from Africa and on how these youths negotiate their academic experiences in the United States.

Rumbaut (1994b) indicated that the regions of Asia and Africa had a greater flow of immigrants to the United States in the 1980s than in any other time in U.S. history, and the
trend continues. Immigrants are changing the American landscape. In just a decade, the Asian population in the United States went from 1.5 million in 1970 to 3.5 million in 1980, (Hurh & Kim, 1989). The population of African immigrants in the US grew to 418,000 from 1820 to 1993 (Rong & Brown, 2002), but from 1990 to 2000, the population of African-born U.S. residents surged from 364,000 to more than 881,000, more than doubling in a decade (Grieco, 2004). Although 1.7 million sub-Saharan Africans reside in the United States (Roberts, 2005), there is a scarcity of research on the schooling experiences of their children.

This study investigated the factors that determine the educational outcomes of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths (children of Nigerian immigrants) living in the United States. It is important to examine this population to understand how they experience schooling in the United States. If schools are to provide adequate services to the children of African immigrants, studies of this population are needed to better understand their unique experiences as immigrant children and how to appropriately serve their needs. This investigation builds research on the backgrounds and the experiences of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian students and identifies services required for these students to succeed in their academic endeavors.

This investigation is necessary and timely given the academic achievement gap between Black and White students in American schools (Bali & Alvarez, 2004; Meece & Kurtz-Costes, 2001; Mickeleson, 2003). If this achievement gap is to be closed, it is important that we examine the educational experiences of all Black students, including the children of African immigrants. This research is also important in light of the No Child Left Behind mandate of 2001, which requires that all children are to be adequately educated. It is
important to understand the experiences of individuals as well as of the diverse groups of students found in our schools.

Statement of the Problem

In 1997, the foreign-born population of the United States numbered 26.8 million, or 10% of the total population, whereas the foreign-born population and their children numbered 54.7 million (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). As Suarez-Orozco (2001) noted, globalization contributes to the high rate of immigration to the United States. Portes and Rumbaut noted, “immigrant children and U.S.-born children of immigrants are the fastest-growing segment of the country’s total population of children under 18 years of age” (p. 19). The future of immigrants and their children will be shaped by their educational experiences in the United States. In 2002, the foreign-born population had reached 32.5 million, or 11.5% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). Many of the recent immigrants are from minority groups. From 1990 to 2000, the population of Asians in the U.S. grew by 44%; of Hispanics, by 61.4%; of Afro-Caribbeans, by 66.9%. Over the same period, the rate of immigration for Africans grew by 166%, making Africans the group with the fastest rate of immigration (Logan & Deane, 2003).

Despite the current demographic trends, there is a scarcity of research on the schooling experiences of immigrant children and second-generation children. The few available studies focus on the adjustment problems immigrant children face in learning a new language and culture (Phuntsog, 2000). This trend is being reversed with a growing scholarly interest in the stories of second-generation immigrants in the United States (Ramakrishnan, 2004) due to the post-1965 wave of immigration. Yet, the scholarly revival has not been extended to immigrant youths from Africa.
This has increased visibility of second-generation youths of Asian, Hispanic, Caribbean, and African continental background in American schools (Portes & MacLeod, 1999). The number of children in immigrant families in the United States grew by 47% from 1990 to 1997 (Qin-Hilliard, Feinauer, & Quiroz, 2001). Logan and Deane (2003) noted that the percentage of foreign-born population among Blacks is higher than that of the Asian foreign-born population. Although studies have examined the experiences of second-generation subgroups from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, there is a need for research on the schooling experiences of African immigrant children so their educators can understand the educational experiences of this particular group.

Researchers and educators often lump all Black students into one category, ignoring the different realities and cultural differences between African-Americans, Afro-Caribbean, and African immigrants (Slaughter-Defoe, Nakagawa, Takanishi, & Johnson, 1990). Though categorized as Black, these students “differ widely in national and class origins, phenotypes, languages, cultures, generation, immigration histories, and modes of incorporation in the United States” (Rumbaut, 1996, p. 120). African and Afro-Caribbean immigrants are classified as Black as if they all share a monolithic culture in America’s socioeconomic system (Bashi, & Zuberi, 1997). However, children of African immigrants have different experiences and cultural backgrounds that might impact how they experience the educational system in the United States. Although Rong and Brown (2001) found that second- and third-generation African youths had less educational attainment than their parents, “theoretical speculations, journalistic accounts and recent research” have found that the children of African immigrants have done well in U.S. schools (Rong & Brown, 2002, p. 251). Even among African immigrants and their children, the educational attainment of the groups varies
There is clearly a need for more empirical and ethnographic research on the academic experiences of second-generation Africans in the United States.

Although high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths are Black, they often come from families in which their parents are college-educated and speak English fluently, though with an accent. Black African immigrants have the highest educational attainment level of any immigrant group in the United States (Butcher, 1994). On average, they have completed 15.7 years of schooling, the equivalent of 3.7 years of college. A higher percentage (53.3%) of Black African immigrants are college graduates or have attended some college, which is more than any other group, including White natives and White immigrants. Some high-achieving second-generation youths, like other immigrant children from highly educated groups, such as immigrants from India, Korea, and Japan, attend schools in “high property wealth suburban districts” (Miller & Tanners, 1995, p. 675), whereas others might find themselves in poorly funded inner-city school districts despite their parents’ educational qualifications.

Immigrant youths and Blacks face issues that need to be identified in order to better educate them in our schools. Immigrant Blacks are not immune to racial barriers in American society because “race plays a significant part in children’s socialization and in their academic pursuits” (Rong & Brown, 2002, p. 252). This factor might affect the beliefs, attitudes, and behavior of immigrants and how they raise their children. Although racism and discrimination may present barriers to the academic progress of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths, they may also “serve as a spur for renewed determination to succeed” (Hirschman, 2001, p. 335), given a supportive family and community. This is irrespective of the fact that minority and immigrant status are often presented in research as a
liability to overcome rather than as an asset that such groups can tap into (Kao & Thompson, 2003). The increased diversity of the Black student population in our nation’s schools requires increased research to understand the varied experiences of each group.

Significance of the Study

This investigation sheds light on the unique backgrounds of high-achieving children of Nigerian immigrants as well as the issues they face as they experience the American educational system and delineates factors responsible for the successes of these youths. This study also adds to the body of literature available on multicultural education, which is needed as America is increasingly becoming more diverse (Kao & Thompson, 2003).

In addition, this study contributes to improving the quality of immigrant education as well as of urban education. Given local and national mandates to increase the educational achievement of students, there is an urgency to find ways to ensure that all students achieve. Given the “dearth of research” on successful Black students (Cooper & Thornton, 1999, p. 2), it is time to shift from deficit thinking about Black student academic achievement to understand why some students in schools perform well despite what might appear to be great odds. Research on Black students often focuses on the under-achieving ones, yet there are many Black students who have defied great odds to achieve academic excellence. There is also a need to pay attention to the economic, cultural, linguistic, and immigrant backgrounds of different minority groups given the increased number and diversity of today’s immigrants. More research is needed to better understand how various contexts affect the academic outcomes of different second-generation groups such as the Nigerians in this study.
Brief Definition of Key Terms

It is important to define some terms for the reader to better understand the issues and the approach that the researcher is taking in this study.

1. Academic achievement is used in this study to refer to teacher grades, grade-point average, honors and academic awards, class rank, college attendance, and standardized test scores such as the SAT (Johnson, 1992).

2. Co-ethnics refer to immigrants who share the same national or ethnic identity (Portes & MacLeod, 1999).

3. Cultural capital is defined here as the non-dominant culture that Nigerian parents might tap into to motivate their children and could be in the form of norms or fictive kinship with other Nigerian immigrants (Carter, 2003).

4. Data triangulation consists of the use of multiple and different sources of information to form themes and categories (Creswell & Miller, 2000) as a means of validating information collected from one source with another source (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

5. Educational aspiration is the future educational attainment level as well as the future career goal youths set for themselves. In other words, it is the levels of education students wish to attain (Harris, 2006).

6. Educational attainment refers to the number of honors and advanced placement (AP) courses taken in high school, “participation in extracurricular activities, post-secondary school choice” (Astone & McLanaham, 1991, p. 310), as well as the total number of years of schooling obtained in relation to age.
7. **Educational outcomes** refer to educational achievement, educational attainment, aspiration, achievement, motivation, attitudes, and behavior.

8. **Folk theory** refers to common-sense beliefs and intuitive decisions that ordinary people possess and that are shaped by their cultural and life experiences (Li, 2004).

9. **High achievement** is demonstrated through a grade point average of 3.0 or better out of 4.0; the difficulty level of high school classes; standardized test scores (SAT and ACT) of more than 1200 out of 1600 or more than 1750 out of 2400 or ACT score of 27 or higher out of 36; involvement in extracurricular activities; and awards and recognitions.

10. **Human capital** consists of parental education as measured by the number of years of schooling and linguistic and other skills (Portes & MacLeod, 1999).

11. **Motivation** is the process of initiating and sustaining self-directed goals (Schunk, 1990) as well as the type of academic choices students make and the effort and persistence they put into pursuing such choices (Wigfield, Eccles, & Rodriguez, 1998).

12. **Second-generation** refers to the children of immigrants (Zhou, 1997). These children are also known as *American-born children of foreign-born parents* (Kao & Tienda, 1995). For the purposes of this study, second-generation refers to children born in the United States to Nigerian immigrants and children born in Nigeria who emigrated before the age of five.

13. **Socioeconomic status** is used here to refer to the educational level, family size, and the occupation of the parents of second-generation Nigerian youths.
14. Social capital includes parental networks with co-ethnics, and family structure (Portes & MacLeod, 1999) as well as the bond between parents and children (Wenfan, 1999; Parcel & Dufur, 2001). Social capital also includes what educators commonly refer to as “parental involvement” (Pong, Hao, & Gardner, 2005) as well as networks the youths create by themselves (Chin & Phillips, 2004).

15. Thick descriptions are “deep and dense detailed accounts” (Denzin, 1989, p. 83) of the participants’ settings.

16. Voluntary immigrants refer to those who chose to migrate to the United States, whereas involuntary immigrants are those whose ancestors originally came to the United States as slaves or were incorporated into the United States through colonization or conquest (Ogbu, 1990).

Research Questions

1. What are the characteristics of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian immigrant youths in the United States?

2. What are the effects of personal, family, school, and community factors on the academic achievement of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths?

3. What challenges do high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths face in the schools and how do they deal with the challenges of being of Black, of immigrant origin, and high achieving?

Brief Review of the Literature

The influx of children of immigrants into U.S. public schools has led to increased quantitative research interest. Researchers (Fuligni, 1997; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Rong & Grant, 1992; White & Glick, 2000) have compared the school performance or attainment
level of children of immigrants from the first, second, and third-plus generations, whereas Hao and Bonstead-Bruns (1998) compared immigrant children of first- and second-generations to children with native-born parents. Researchers have also noted the complexities of understanding the academic outcomes of contemporary immigrant and second-generation youths. Such complexities are a result of race, class, and cultural diversity (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou, 1997) found among today’s immigrants and the resulting variability in the academic outcomes of the different groups (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Lee, 2002; Rong & Grant, 1992).

There is evidence that race and ethnicity affect the pattern of immigrant youths’ assimilation. The Asian group often performs better than other groups, including U.S.-born White children (Kao & Tienda, 1995). Even among Asian students, there are some ethnic variations. Chinese, Korean, and Southeast Asians perform better in reading and math than Pacific Islanders. Among Hispanic groups, Cuban youths perform better than other groups, and Mexican youths perform at a lower level than others (Hao & Bonstead-Brun, 1998; Hirschman, 2001; Koa & Tienda, 1995). There are also generational differences (Kim, 2002). Whereas Mexican, Nicaraguan, and Haitian-origin groups have lower academic performance than their native-born U.S. peers, Vietnamese and Chinese-origin youths tend to surpass their third-plus generation peers.

It is expected that high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths will exhibit some of the patterns observed in other groups with regards to class and cultural variability on academic outcomes, yet possess unique qualities. Slaughter-Defoe et al. (1990) noted that the academic experiences of Blacks are often framed within the cultural contexts that lead to
academic failures of Black students rather than emphasize a “supportive advantageous cultural context” within the Black community (p. 365).

Quantitative research that included second-generation Africans has yielded different outcomes on the academic outcomes of this group (Rong & Brown, 2001; Massey et al., 2007). Although the second-generation Africans in the Rong and Brown study experienced declining academic attainment from second to third generation, Massey et al. (year) found that second-generation Africans have competitive grades and SAT scores and are overrepresented in America’s most selective universities, including the Ivy League colleges.

Brief Overview of the Theoretical Frameworks

Although the study utilized the multidisciplinary theoretical approach, it was primarily framed in Bandura’s social cognitive theory (1977), Ogbu’s cultural-ecological theory (1987), and Coleman’s social capital theory (1988). Motivation and a feeling of competence can mediate students’ home and school contexts regarding achievement (Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991). This is especially important because there is empirical evidence that academic achievements of second-generation Blacks have been attributed to individual efforts, parenting styles, supports within the community, and networking in larger and smaller social contexts (Rong & Brown, 2001). Academic self-concept, defined as “a mixture of self-beliefs and self-feeling regarding general academic functioning,” is also a useful construct for understanding students’ academic achievement (Lent et al., 1997, p. 308).

Theoretical triangulation was utilized in this study to strengthen the credibility of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Due to the nature of the inquiry, which seeks to understand how personal, family, school, and community factors influence the academic
achievement of the participants, a multidisciplinary approach using theoretical triangulation (Krefting, 1991) partly from the fields of psychology (self-concepts theories), anthropology (cultural-ecology theory), education (social cognitive theory), and sociology (social capital theory) were undertaken for this study.

Brief Overview of the Methodology

This qualitative case study utilized a multidisciplinary approach (surveys, in-depth interviews of youths and mothers, as well as a focus group interview) with data triangulation from parents and youths aged 14 to 25 to examine the academic experiences of second-generation Nigerian youths. Eleven high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths were selected from the 106 youths who had earlier completed a survey about their demographic and academic backgrounds. Six college students participated in a focus group interview, and six parents (mothers) participated in an in-depth interview. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The qualitative software HyperRESEARCH was used for data analysis after coding. Data analysis was guided by the research questions.

The academic outcomes of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths can be influenced by their family experiences, their personal characteristics and efforts, and their ability to network with others. Psychosocial attributes can be a salient factor in understanding academic performance (Corbiere, Fraccaroli, Mbekou, & Perron, 2006). Academic self-concept also combines internal and external variables to explain why some students succeed in school while others fail (Corbiere et al., 2006).
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter focuses on the review of literature on the factors that determine the educational outcomes of immigrant and minority students. It contains four sections. Section one describes the background of Nigerian immigrants and their pattern of immigration in the last two decades. The theoretical frameworks explaining the achievement patterns of immigrant and minority students are explained in section two. In section three, the various personal factors (generational status, academic self-concept, academic self-efficacy), family factors (socioeconomic background, capital available, parental role, parental expectations, race-ethnic identity, cultural socialization), and school factor (peer relationships) that influence the educational outcomes of immigrant and minority students are discussed. Finally, section four is devoted to explanations for Asian-American academic achievement.

Background of Nigerian Immigrants in the United States

Nigerian immigrants are part of the new wave of immigrants that is increasingly coming from developing regions of the world (Rumbaut, 1994b). Like recent immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and Africa, they reflect diversity in terms of class, languages, cultures, migration histories, and modes of incorporation (Rumbaut, 1994a).

Nigeria is located in West Africa and has the largest population of any African country (Omoyibo, 2002). In 1980 and 1990, approximately a third of Black immigrants to the United States came from Nigeria (Djamba, 1999). In addition, most of the immigrants from Africa in the 1990s came from Nigeria (Lobo, 2001). As Africa’s largest oil producer, the drop in oil prices in the 1980s created economic hardships that propelled many Nigerians to migrate out of Nigeria, with an estimated 15 million residing overseas (Booker & Minter, 2002).
From 1990 to 2000, the population of African-born U.S. residents grew from 364,000 to more than 881,000, thus more than doubling in a decade (Grieco, 2004). A conservative estimate indicated that between 200,000 and 300,000 Nigerian immigrants and second-generation Nigerians (Booker & Minter, 2003) and approximately 1.7-million sub-Saharan Africans reside in the US (Roberts, 2005). In fact, Nigeria, a former British colony, sends more emigrants to the United States than any other African country (Massey et al., 2007).

Black African immigrants, including Nigerians, have the highest educational attainment of any group in the US (Butcher, 1994; Massey et al., 2007), which is reflected in their migration history because many came to the US initially to acquire an education (Takougang, 1995). In recent years, Nigerians have emigrated to the US as a result of the U.S. Diversity Visa Program, which opened up immigration to regions of the world that formerly had been underrepresented in the immigration pool (Takyi, 2002). This initiative aimed to attract highly qualified, skilled, and professional immigrants to the US, and led to the high selectivity of the Nigerian immigrant pool (Massey et al., 2007).

African immigrants often arrive in the US with professional, managerial, and technical skills; 44% of African immigrants who declared an occupation fell into those categories compared with 34% of all immigrants (Lobo, 2001). Of the 5000 practicing physicians from Africa residing in the US, more than 79% of them came from South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, and Ethiopia in that order (Hagopian, Thompson, Fordyce, Johnson & Hart, 2004).

Nigerian immigrants, like other African immigrants in the United States, are a self-selected group of skilled and motivated people. They left Nigeria due to the economic and political changes, contributing to a brain drain in Nigeria (Lobo, 2001; Roberts, 2005;
Takougang, 1995). Like other African immigrant populations, Nigerian immigrants are geographically dispersed (Logan & Deane, 2003). Texas, New York, Maryland, California, and Georgia have the largest populations of Nigerian-born residents in the US; combined, they account for more than 50% of the total foreign-born population from Nigeria in the US (Grieco, 2004).

While some Nigerian immigrants, like any other highly educated immigrants from India, Korea, and Japan, live in “high property wealth suburban districts” affording their children the opportunity to attend good schools (Miller & Tanners, 1995), others might find themselves living in less desirable communities with potential implications for the educational outcomes of their children. A quarter of the African immigrant population is concentrated around the 10 largest metropolitan regions in the U.S., but they are likely to live in racially integrated neighborhoods (Massey et al., 2007). Although Nigerian immigrants have the highest educational attainment, their median household income trails that of the Asian and Caucasians based on the 2003 Census data. However, their median income is higher than the median income of African-Americans and Afro-Caribbean groups (Massey et al., 2007).

A review of the literature reveals that no single factor determines the academic outcomes of second-generation youths. Rather, personal, family, school, and other contextual factors interact with each other to influence the educational outcomes of youths from immigrant backgrounds (Okagaki, 2001; Szalacha, Marks, Lamarre, & Garcia-Coll, 2005). Hence, Okagaki’s (2001) triarchic model of academic achievement, which takes a holistic approach to focus on how school, family, and social identity influence children’s achievement, appears to be an appropriate lens through which to examine this group. The
experiences of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths could be impacted by the way these youths perceive themselves and their academic abilities. Although school and family indicators seem self-explanatory, social identity refers to the way children view themselves within our society in general and within academic settings in particular, which shapes the way children approach and perform in school (Okagaki, 2001). The academic outcomes of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian students cannot be attributed to a one-dimensional factor but to various factors (Alomar, 2006).

Theoretical Frameworks Explaining the Achievement Patterns of Immigrant and Minority Students

*Cultural Ecological Theory*

Theories of immigrant and minority education often focus on the cultural discontinuity/difference theory (Ogbu, 1982), also known as the *cultural deprivation theory* and the *cultural ecological theory* (Ogbu, 1987), but rarely on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001). Proponents of the cultural discontinuity theory believe that immigrant youths are at a disadvantage in their schooling experiences due to cultural, language, and interactional conflicts between the home and the school, resulting in poor academic outcomes for minority children (Jacob & Jordan, 1987). Those who subscribe to the cultural discontinuity theory also believe that the longer the duration of residence in the United States and the more acculturated or assimilated to American society and norm, the greater the educational attainment of the immigrant children. This is the also considered the straight-line assimilation (Gordon, 1964; Park, 1928) through which immigrants attain social and economic mobility across generations as they leave their ethnic enclaves for mainstream society.
The cultural difference perspective on minority education argues that minority groups’ sociolinguistic background, learning styles, expectations, communication patterns, authority structure, and social organization are at odds with the mainstream culture (Portes, P., 1996b). The argument is that since schools are unable to accommodate these differences, they account for the negative experience of minority children and that explains the subsequent poor academic outcomes of some minority children.

The cultural-ecological theory examines minority education from a macro perspective to understand how political, historical, economic, and social context affect different minority groups (Hayes, 1992). Ogbu (1993) identified two key factors for understanding the academic performance of minority youths in an urban society. The first is the type of cultural difference between the minority group and the majority group and whether the minority group has a voluntary (those who came to America freely) or involuntary (those who became Americans through slavery or conquest) immigrant status. Ogbu’s cultural ecological theory challenged the cultural deprivation or discontinuity framework that blames the academic underachievement of minority groups on the cultural deficits of the home and various deprivations in home, school, and community (Reis & Diaz, 1999).

According to Ogbu (1987), voluntary immigrants perceive opportunity in the United States and perceive education as the key to advancement, unlike involuntary immigrants with a long history of exclusion and hence mistrust for what education can offer to them. Involuntary minority groups on the other hand, have academic difficulties due to their response to their forced incorporation and treatment in society. Ogbu (1992) believed that involuntary minority groups develop oppositional identity, whereby such groups construct their identity in defiance of their subordination by the majority group. This has also been
referred to as the *blocked opportunities hypothesis* and *oppositional frame of reference* (Kao & Tienda, 1998). The blocked opportunities hypothesis states that some minority groups are motivated to work hard in school due to the perception that education leads to upward mobility, whereas some lack motivation for academic achievement due to the perception that hard work will do little for their future (Kao & Tienda). In an oppositional frame of reference, involuntary minority groups construct what is valued in their culture in opposition to what is valued in mainstream culture (Ogbu, 2004). For example, devaluing academic achievement because it is associated with mainstream White culture is one way that some minority group members show oppositional behavior.

Ogbu (1993) described primary cultural difference as the original pre-contact culture of the minority group, whereas secondary cultural difference is developed in response to treatment of the minority group after contact with the majority group. He concluded that voluntary minority groups have higher academic achievement irrespective of their primary cultural differences from the dominant group due to some reasons. First, voluntary immigrants perceive their immediate obstacles and barriers as temporary and therefore work towards overcoming them. Second, the voluntary immigrants’ frame of reference lies in their native country, where they were worse off than their current situation in the United States. This leads to an immigrant’s optimism that fosters a will to succeed among voluntary immigrants.

Conversely, Ainsworth-Darnell and Downy (1998) argued that differences in family and neighborhood characteristics rather than oppositional culture determine school behavior. Although residential pattern is salient in the academic outcomes of youths, Ainsworth (2002) found that negative effects of poor inner-city neighborhoods on academic outcomes could be
mediated through “collective socialization, social control, social capital, perception of opportunity and institutional characteristics” (p.117). Ogbu’s theory is useful in categorizing different minority groups and offers a general framework for the explanations of the variability in the academic achievements of voluntary and involuntary immigrant groups, but it fails to provide an explanation for the inter and intra variability of the various immigrant groups.

The educational attainment of immigrants is affected by multiple factors, including motivation for migration, perceptions of opportunities in the host country, and perceived reward for educational attainment (Ogbu, 1978; 1987; Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986). The cultural ecological perspective acknowledges the family as the primary agent of achievement socialization and development, but also acknowledges the nature of the interaction between the family and individuals in the school adaptation and achievement (Slaughter-Defoe et al., 1990). Although the cultural-ecological theory considers the broader political, social, and economic context in the explanation of minority and immigrant youths’ school performance (Trueba, 1991), it fails to recognize the role of “minority agency” (Foster, 2004, p. 371). Agency is used here to describe the ability of the minority to “make things happen by one’s actions” (Bandura, 2001, p. 2). For example, students from a poor background might be personally motivated to succeed in spite of the odds and might seek out opportunities that would increase their chance of academic success. Although challenges such as poverty can defeat some people, it can serve as a source of motivation to others.

Conversely, immigrant parents with a negative experience due to job discrimination may use the experience to steer their children to excel in academics. For example, Sue and Okazaki (1990) suggested that Asian immigrants emphasize science and math to their
children because of the belief that Asians may encounter less discrimination in those fields and due to the perceived objectivity in these fields. In addition, students raised in a family with a “home academic culture” will likely derive a sense of educational meaning likely to lead to academic achievement (Bowen & Bowen, 1998). Bowen and Bowen defined *home academic culture* as the degree to which parents demonstrate agreement with and an emphasis on the values of the school setting by discussing school courses and activities, study topics, attendance, homework, and future plans with their children (p. 46).

**Social Cognitive Theory**

Although cultural and historical factors are salient in the adaptations of various immigrant groups, “so [is] each groups’ agency” (Portes, P., 1999, p. 492). According to Bandura (2001), “agency embodies the endowment, belief system, self-regulatory capabilities and distributed structures and functions through which personal influence is exercised, rather than residing as a discrete entity in a particular place” (p. 2). Social cognitive theory offers an “agentic” perspective to human development, adaptation, and change (Bandura). The agentic perspective of social cognitive theory as applied to this study utilized the constructs of self-efficacy, specifically academic self-concept and academic self-efficacy. When used in combination with the cultural-ecological theory and social capital theory, they could enrich our understanding of immigrant and minority education such as the case of the high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths.

Students can be empowered with a sense of self-efficacy to draw upon as coping strategies when faced with problems in their various social contexts. Social cognitive theory recognizes that humans have the ability to transcend their situations in life. Families, including immigrant ones when faced with difficulties, might devote material and
nonmaterial resources to create a home atmosphere that fosters academic skills, motivation, and orientation (Teachman, 1987). Immigrant and minority youths often do not have control over the context under which they live in the United States, but they can be taught self- and group-enhancing and coping strategies for optimal achievement (Trueba, 1991). How well these youths adapt and succeed in school depends not only on their cognitive ability and individual motivation but also on the “economic and social resources available to them through their families” (Zhou, 1997, p. 79) as well as on how they were socialized to react and respond to their experiences.

In addition to attempting to identify what motivates high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths, a goal of this research is to examine how high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths respond to difficulties in terms of academic and social relations with their peers in school settings. Therefore, it is important to examine the role of self-efficacy beliefs in their academic outcomes. Students with self-efficacy use “cognitive and metacognitive strategies to their understanding” when the difficulty of the task on hand increases (Walker, 2003, p. 174).

In other words, students will increase efforts dispensed and possibly seek help rather than give in when faced with challenges. One might also argue that such students have self-determination and resiliency. Meece and Kurtz-Costes (2001) stated, “despite the formidable economic and social barriers faced by ethnic minority families, a number of resources have enabled many ethnic minority children to excel in schools” (p. 4). Such resources can be in the form of cultural beliefs and ethos of the groups. It is time researchers focus on why some minority groups succeed against some odds. “The beliefs that students create, develop, and hold to be true about themselves are vital in their success and failure in school” (Pajares,
Such beliefs could be rooted in the capital students bring from the home and community.

**Social Capital Theory**

A social capital framework is useful for the study of minority and immigrant students’ academic outcomes (Hao & Brunstead-Bruns, 1998; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Bankston, Caldas, and Zhou (1997) proposed that social capital could accrue from an immigrant group’s ethnicity in the relationships found within each immigrant group. Bankston, (2004), Zhou & Bankston, (1998), and Zhou (1997) argued that immigrant parents may have ethnic and cultural forms of social capital in the absence of social capital as often conceptualized for middle-class Americans. They noted that ethnic communities have unique social capital that needs to be tapped in the research on minority children.

Kao (2004) indicated that social capital could accrue to individuals through obligations and obligations between individuals. As immigrants are often isolated from Whites, they have less social capital. But immigrants from the same ethnic group could create social capital by sharing information through informal groups. Kao (2004) noted that immigrant groups could share information on how to navigate the educational system in the United States.

Social capital can also reside at school in the form of community ties and can include bonds between parents and schools. It can also reside at home (Parcel & Dufur, 2001). Kao & Rutherford (2007) noted that although researchers have examined how social capital can affect the academic outcomes of youths, few have examined the effects on the children of immigrants. Social capital, like financial and human capital, has the potential to benefit people who have it and could be conceptualized as residing within the family or outside the
family (Kao & Rutherford, 2007). Whereas within family social capital primarily involves interactions between parents and children, social capital outside the family includes cultural norms and value systems as well as the friendship networks.

Academic achievement is a complex phenomenon, and it is not determined solely by socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender, culture, immigrant status, or any other single variable; rather, it is a result of the interaction between family, school, and community context, and the characteristics of the child (Okagaki, 2001; Szalacha et al., 2005). As Bandura (1993) noted, one cannot predict students’ academic performance based on ability or skills. A combination of factors, including the availability of social capital, cultural origin, history, socioeducational milieu together with socioeconomic status, and individual agency influence academic outcomes for second-generation youths (Portes, A. 1999). Since the sociocognitive framework acknowledges that individuals can be proactive and self-regulating as opposed to reactive to environmental and biological forces (Pajares, 2003), this perspective could help shed light on what high-achieving second-generation Nigerians and their parents do to overcome the barriers they face in the schooling of youths. The remainder of this chapter discusses the various factors as gleaned from the literature that influence the academic achievement of minority students and students from immigrant families.

Factors that determine the educational outcomes of high-achieving second-generation youths are discussed under four broad categories deemed pertinent to understanding the experiences of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths. The categories are:

1. Personal factors (generational status, academic self-concept, and academic self-efficacy);
2. Family factors (parental socioeconomic status, social capital, parental role, parental expectation, ethnic identity, racial-ethnic socialization, and cultural socialization);

3. School factor (peer relationships); and

4. Explanation for Asian-American academic achievement.

Personal Factors that Influence Educational Outcomes for Immigrant and Minority Students

*Generational Status*

Several researchers have determined that immigrant generation (first, second, third, or higher) plays a crucial role in the educational attainment and school performance of immigrant youths (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Rong & Grant, 1992). These researchers have concluded that second-generation youths perform better academically than first-generation or native-born youths. Additionally, they noted that first generation youths that migrated at a young age performed as well as second-generation youths born in the United States.

Available research on children with immigrant backgrounds also revealed that the academic performance of students from immigrant families varies according to ethnicity, with Asian students from immigrant families generally outperforming students from immigrant families from Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Rumbaut, 1995).

Zsembik and Llanes (1996) examined the relation between generation of U.S. residence and educational attainment for Latinos, Asians, and Caucasians. They found that educational attainment varies. Among Mexican-Americans, educational attainment level increased between immigrants and second-generation youths but leveled off in the third generation. This follows the classic assimilation (Gans, 1992) model that suggests that with increased acculturation, educational achievement increases as a result of the amount of
resources available to children in their families. Among Caucasians, educational attainment increased in the second generation and declined in the third generation. For the Asian group, educational attainment increased between the immigrant and second generations but leveled off in the third generation.

In addition, Kao and Tienda (1995) found that whereas foreign-born youths are slightly disadvantaged due to limited English skills, the second-generation youth are often in a better position to achieve academically. They attributed the academic success of second-generation youths to immigrant optimism that immigrant parents pass on to their children. This finding supports the assimilation theory, which argues that second-generation youths often perform better academically than first-generation youths with the acquisition of English-language fluency and other skills necessary for social mobility (Hirschman, 2001).

Studies examining immigrant generations as a single category blur the differences between immigrant groups from the same region and those from within the same race. As an example, Asian students of Chinese and Filipino backgrounds have academic performance levels that are higher than Asian students from Cambodia who often also have a high poverty rate (Portes & MacLeod, 1999). These researchers noted that such differences highlight the need to examine the unique experiences of immigrant groups in order to understand why some groups achieved more than others.

In a study that combined the effects of immigrant generation and ethnicity on the schooling of African and Caribbean Black immigrants and European Whites, Rong and Brown (2001) found that among Caribbean Black youths in the United States, the second-generation group outperformed the first and third plus generations, whereas among African Black youths, the educational achievement declined with each successive generation. The
study used data from the Census Population Bureau to study youths 15-24 who were living at home and concluded that the educational attainment of immigrant youths from Africa, Caribbean, and European background varies with race and pan-nationality as well as the generation of residence.

Being a second-generation rather than a first-generation immigrant is positively associated with educational attainment for Europeans and Caribbeans, but not for Africans. In the African group, educational attainment was the same between the first and second generations but declined in the third generation. Rong and Brown (2001) attributed the decline in educational attainment of African youths from second to third-generation to the lack of African ethnic communities or ethnic enclaves with the potential social capital to reinforce the value of academic achievement.

In addition, Rong and Brown (2001) found that all three groups indicated lower educational attainment for the third-plus generation than for the second-generation. Among second-generation youths, Caribbean Blacks attained as much education as European Whites, and both attained more education than African Blacks. But in the first and third-plus generations, both Caribbean Blacks and African Blacks attained less education than European Whites, especially in the third-plus generations.

Using census data may not always distinguish between African Blacks and American Blacks as some African Blacks claim to be Africa-American as their race on the census form. This might explain why the sample for the African group (121,676) was much higher than the Caribbean group (2,388), even though there are more Caribbean Blacks in the US than African Blacks (Bryce-Laporte, 1994; McKenzie, 1986; Mitchell, 2005). As of 2001, there
were 8.4 million Blacks of Caribbean descent compared to 1.7 million Africans (Mitchell, 2005).

Although the national origins of the Afro Caribbean groups were identified in the Rong and Brown (2001) study, the Africans were lumped into one group. There is a need to disaggregate the Africans according to their national origins to better understand their educational experiences. Lumping all African immigrants into one category fails to account for the differences, diversity, and the pre-immigration backgrounds of immigrants from Africa. Nigerian immigrants from an English-speaking country might have an entirely different experience than refugees from a French-speaking or Portuguese-speaking African nation.

It is important to note that immigrant generational status is not the sole determinant of academic achievement of immigrant youths (Glick & White, 2003). Glick and White found that socioeconomic status, ethnicity, age, and family structure influenced whether immigrant youths performed well in school. Although the generational status of the immigrant is important, it is not the primary determinant of academic performance. Rather, it is the opportunity structures available to immigrants that determine whether or not they succeed (Glick & White, 2003).

Some researchers have attributed the academic achievement of second-generation youths to immigrant optimism (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Schneider & Lee, 1990) and parental expectations, which immigrants in return transfer to their children, leading to high academic achievement (Fuligni, 1997; Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998). However, these factors alone cannot explain the academic achievement of the children of immigrants given the variability of the academic outcomes of the different immigrant groups as previously cited. Research on
parents’ aspirations indicated that it affects students differently (Cheng & Starks, 2002; Louie, 2001). For example, Cheng and Starks found that whereas minority students, except Hispanics, perceive educational aspiration from close relations (family members), Asian and Caucasian children often perceive higher aspirations from teachers. They concluded that such differences in the source of aspirations could be attributed to a response to racial discrimination that some minority groups encounter in schools, thus forcing them to look toward family members as a source of support.

Researchers often paint a bleak academic prospect for Black students (Slaughter-Defoe et al., 1990), with regard to “grades, graduation rates, success on standardized tests, and dropout numbers” without delineating among the diverse population found among Blacks in the United States (Kaplan & Maehr, 1999, p. 24). Yet, in a recent study, Rong and Brown (2002) found that second-generation Caribbean and African immigrants have performed well in U.S. schools irrespective of the difficulties they had experienced as a result of their immigrant status and race.

Second-generation Blacks make up less than 1% of the population in the United States (Logan & Deane, 2003). A recent study on the academic achievement of second-generation Blacks confirmed the findings of Rong and Brown (2002) regarding the academic achievement of Black students born to African and Afro Caribbean immigrants (Massey et al., 2007). They used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen to study Black immigrants and Black natives attending American selective colleges and universities from 1999-2003. Their findings revealed that second-generation Blacks from Africa and the Caribbean are overrepresented in those colleges—especially in the Ivy League universities—in comparison to their number in the general population. Although second-generation
Africans and Afro Caribbean youths make up approximately 13% of the Black population in the United States, the two groups make up 43.1% of all Blacks in selective colleges and universities (Massey et al., 2007).

An important finding of Massey et al. (2007) is that second-generation Blacks in their sample possessed objectively measurable characteristics that college admission officers seek out in college applicants: high GPA, high standardized test scores, and rigorous high school curriculum. In the breakdown of the national origins of the second-generation Blacks in their study, Nigerian second-generation students had the second highest percent (17.3%) of representation, after Jamaican second-generation students (20.5%) in American selective colleges and universities. The researchers attributed such outcomes to the high selectivity of the Black immigrants, among other factors. They also found that parents of second-generation Blacks are generally more likely to be college-educated, have a higher median income, and live in integrated neighborhoods in contract to native Black parents. In addition, second-generation Black youths are more likely to live in two-parent homes than their peers with native-born parents.

*Academic Self-Concept and Academic Self-Efficacy*

The focus of this section of the literature review is on academic self-concept and academic self-efficacy. The personality characteristics often used to examine academic achievement are “self-concept, locus of control, achievement motivation, and self-perceived ability” (Johnson, 1992, p. 116). According to Johnson, these constructs are derived from self and motivation theory, and they are developed as children interact with people in their home, school environments, and other settings. Bandura (1993) stated, “students’ beliefs in their efficacy to regulate their learning and to master academic activities determine their
aspirations, level of motivation and academic accomplishments” (p. 117). In addition, Graham (1994) noted that self-efficacy is a crucial factor in the study of motivation, yet it has been underutilized in the study of why some minority group students succeed and others fail irrespective of their background differences.

*Academic self-concept* and *academic self-efficacy* refer to students’ perception of their over all academic ability (Harter, 1990). Both constructs, which are derived from self-concept and self-efficacy theories, are related to motivation and can predict academic outcomes (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). Bong and Skaalvik defined academic self-concept and academic self-efficacy as “individuals’ beliefs that are formed specifically toward academic distinguished from nonacademic, general, social, emotional, or physical domains” (p. 6). Self-concept beliefs include judgments of self-worth, which is often measured at a “domain-specific” level, and self-efficacy, which is often measured at a “skills-or task-specific level” (Pajares, 2003, p. 147).

Academic self-concept and academic self-efficacy beliefs are related to various aspects of educational outcomes. For example, research has linked help-seeking attributes (Ames, 1983), intrinsic motivation (Harter, 1982; Gottfried, 1990), and achievement (Marsh, 1992; Marsh & Yeung, 1997; Shavelson & Bolus, 1982) to the constructs. Academic self-efficacy also affects the choice of activity one is willing to engage in and the effort expenditure and task persistence (Schunk, 1989), as well as being related to cognitive strategy and self-regulation (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). Researchers such as Spencer, Cole, Dupree, Glymph, and Pierre (1993) have found that academic self-efficacy was an important predictor of academic achievement for Black adolescents. Academic self-efficacy beliefs are also related to academic aspirations and grade goals students set for themselves (Bandura et
Yet, there is still limited research on the effect of academic self-efficacy on the academic outcomes of Black students (Johnson-Reid et al., 2005).

Research that examined the relationship between self-esteem and self-efficacy and academic self-efficacy and achievement among Black students found that academic self-efficacy predicts academic achievement more than self-esteem (Davis et al., 2002; Davis et al., 2003; Witherspoon et al., 1997). A more recent study also found that academic self-efficacy is likely to yield more positive academic outcomes for Black students than racial identity and self-esteem (Johnson-Reid et al., 2005). The researchers concluded that though self-esteem is important, efforts that focus on increasing academic efficacy among Black youths would likely yield more academic gains than focusing on self-esteem. Their findings support earlier studies suggesting that academic self-efficacy can predict academic outcomes.

Although Skaalvik and Hagvet (1990) found that academic achievement predicts self-concept, others have found that academic self-concept has reciprocal effects on academic achievement in a bi-directional manner (Guay et al., 2003; Marsh & Yeung, 1997; Marsh et al., 2005). Researchers such as Bong (1997; 2001; 2004) found evidence supporting a positive relation between self-efficacy and academic outcomes.

In a meta-analytic investigation of the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and academic achievement, Multon et al. (1991) found a positive relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and academic performance and persistence on difficult tasks. Self-efficacy beliefs accounted for approximately 14% of the variance in students’ academic performance and 12% of the variance in the academic persistence of students in their sample.

In addition, there is evidence from empirical research that academic self-concept and its effects on achievement are subject-specific or domain-specific (Choi, 2005; Finney &
Schraw, 2003; Marsh, 1990). In other words, peoples’ achievement in a particular task or subject reflects their self-concept in that area. What can be ascertained from research is that academic self-concept and academic self-efficacy can influence academic outcomes.

Self-efficacy theory is rarely applied to the study of immigrant and minority education despite some evidence that self-efficacy belief is one of the most powerful perceptions that can predict academic performance (Jinks, 2003). Jinks noted that emerging research on social cognition indicates that students’ perceptions of the learning context are a key element of academic performance. Self-efficacy beliefs are likely to influence the academic achievement of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths because students who have self-efficacy are likely to work hard, persist in a difficult task, and seek help to complete a difficult task to enable them to achieve their goals (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). Self-efficacy beliefs can “generalize across multiple subject-matter area, despite their context-specific nature” (Bong, 2004, p. 288).

Family Factors that Influence Academic Outcomes for Immigrant and Minority Students

Socioeconomic Background

Contrary to conventional beliefs, socioeconomic status does not predict academic achievement for all groups. Among immigrants from lower economic strata, Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore. (1991) found that students in their study were successful in school despite economic backgrounds and despite being refugees from war-torn countries. This finding supports an earlier meta-analysis of more than 200 students in which White (1982) found that social class accounted for only 5% of the differences in the academic performance of the students in his study. What can be ascertained from such findings is that socioeconomic status alone does not explain why some groups of students achieve in school. In a study that
investigated the effects of socioeconomic status, family structure, and race on academic outcomes, Epps (1995) noted, “Socioeconomic status, family structure, and race and ethnicity are assumed to influence educational outcome” (p. 597). However, the relationship between family background (as indicated by occupation, education, income, and family) varies in strengths for different racial and ethnic groups. In other words, these variables do not yield equal educational outcomes for all racial and ethnic groups.

Although Rumberger (1995) noted that family background plays a significant role in the academic success of children, his study indicated that socioeconomic status predicted dropout rates for Caucasians and Latinos, but not for African-Americans, although high absenteeism predicted drop out rates for all groups. His conclusion lends support to the fact that socioeconomic status alone does not explain the racial differences in academic achievement and that its effects on groups vary. It does not explain why some students from low socioeconomic status groups succeed while some students from high socioeconomic status groups fail in academics.

In a study that examined the academic achievements of adolescents from immigrant families, Fuligni (1997) revealed that strong parental emphasis on education and peer support was a better predictor of academic achievement than the socio-economic background of the students he studied. Fuligni also found that regardless of their national origin, youths from immigrant families placed a higher value on education than their native born counterparts. He concluded that family background, parental encouragement, peer support, and students’ attitudes are the possible factors contributing to the academic success of youths from immigrant families.
Adams and Singh, (1998) noted that research on the determinants of academic achievement of minority children has historically focused on their background characteristics such as family socioeconomic, race, and gender, as well as ascribed characteristics such as self-esteem and motivation, thereby obscuring the fact that academic achievement is a “function of schools, parents, and students” interacting to influence each other and in different manners for each group (p. 50). As Adams and Singh posited, although socioeconomic status is an important factor that can predict academic outcomes for minority students, it offers a partial explanation.

Roscigno (1998) examined race and its influences on academic achievement and found that race differences in family socioeconomic status and structure influence educational outcomes partially through their influence on teacher expectations and track placement of students. In addition, family background has ramifications for the race in that the socioeconomic context of the school a student attends can correspond to the level of educational resources available to the student at school. Roscigno concluded that stratification and segregation of students, teacher expectations, and allocation of resources are salient factors that can influence educational achievement, not race alone. Socioeconomic status does not determine academic outcomes, but it influences “parental practices and schooling opportunities, which in turn favor advantaged students” (Kao & Thompson, 2003, p. 419).

As Fuligni and Witkow (2004) noted, socioeconomic factors cannot explain the academic success of students from immigrant families. They attributed the academic success of children from immigrant homes to the value placed on the future occupational and economic benefit of education.
Schmid (2001) examined the factors that contribute to the uneven variability in the absorption and educational achievement of the new second-generation students (i.e. post-1965 wave of immigrants) and found that children of immigrants who are bicultural (retained parents’ cultures) and are fluent in ethnic languages and English often have higher academic performance than third generation students who are “English dominant” (p. 82). This finding suggests that immigrant families possess cultural capital, which they can utilize to positively influence the academic outcomes of their children.

*Human Capital, Social Capital, and Cultural Capital*

Although the three types of capital are related to class, non-middle-class and immigrant groups lacking middle-class status can create their own capital within their own social contexts. All three types of capital are deemed important in understanding the academic outcomes of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths, but the primary focus was on social capital. Astone and McLanahan (1991) noted that social capital in the form of the relation established between parents and children is critical because “it determines whether or not a child can take advantage of whatever financial and human capital the parent possesses” (p. 319). Human capital refers to the educational and skill qualifications as well as the English language proficiency of immigrants, whereas social capital refers to the parental networks and family structure of immigrants (Portes and MacLeod, 1999). Human capital also includes the characteristics that individuals can turn into resources (Orr, 2003).

Cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is relevant to understanding the academic outcomes of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths. Often defined using Bourdieu’s dominant cultural capital framework (for example, attendance at middle-class cultural events
such as a symphony and museum visits), *cultural capital* as used here refers to cultural norms that immigrant groups might rely on to motivate their children to succeed in school. Carter (2003) referred to such capital as the “non-dominant cultural capital” (p. 138) that lower status groups use to negotiate and access their various social contexts, and it manifests itself in the form of code-switching of accents or fashion to meet the demands of various social contexts.

Social capital has been referred to as *ethnic capital* and has been used to explain the sociocultural practices immigrant groups use to gain social mobility (Zhou & Bankston, 1994). Social capital also refers to the “social networks and the relation between parents and children” (Wenfan, 1999, p. 6) and includes social networks youths establish by themselves (Datnow & Cooper, 1997). High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths were raised in this country and are therefore more versatile with the American cultural milieu, which therefore enables them to establish their own social networks. Orr (2003) argued that financial wealth can be converted to social or cultural capital to influence academic achievement, and since Blacks generally lack financial wealth, they lack other types of wealth, which explains the lack of achievement among Black students. Although social capital can influence educational outcomes, “there is relatively little research on how social capital differences affect the educational achievement and attainment of race, ethnic, and immigrant groups” (Kao & Thompson, 2003, p. 418).

Bilingualism, which was often seen as an educational impediment to the academic success of children from immigrant homes, is now viewed as a form of capital that can influence the academic achievement of immigrant children (Portes, A., 1996a). In a study that examined the effects of socioeconomic and sociocultural factors on the educational
achievement of Mexican-American language-minority students, Rumberger and Larson (1998) determined that bilingual Mexican-American students who are English proficient had better grades and were on target for graduation by the end of ninth grade more than other Mexican-American students who had limited English proficiency or from English-only backgrounds. Their finding suggests that English language proficiency, though important and necessary for academic achievement, is not sufficient as an explanation for Latino students’ failure to achieve in school.

However, in a longitudinal study that investigated the effects of bilingualism on the academic achievement of first- and second-generation Asian American students, Mouw and Xie (1999), found no direct evidence supporting positive effects of bilingualism on academic achievement. Rather, they found that it had a temporary effect when parents lacked English proficiency. They concluded that the academic significance of bilingualism was “transitional” rather than cognitive and was beneficial as it allowed immigrant children to access the social capital of their family and community.

Portes and MacLeod (1999) examined the effects of human and social capital and the modes of incorporation on the academic achievement of second-generation youths. Their findings revealed that the parents of the Asian groups (Chinese, Filipino, and Korean) have higher educational levels and that their children outperformed the other groups (Mexican, Native White, and other second-generation groups). In addition, school success for the Asian groups did not depend on parental control or parental involvement. Portes and MacLeod also found that high status, non-minority, and private school attendance greatly improved the academic achievement of second-generation youths regardless of their individual and family characteristics. Portes and MacLeod concluded that whether the children of immigrants
succeed or fail in schools depends on the overall experiences of the immigrant group as well as on the human and social capital of the parents.

In a study that examined how cultural and structural factors explain ethnic differences in academic achievement of second-generation Vietnamese and Cambodian youths, Kim (2002) found that structural variables, such as parents’ socioeconomic status, participants’ school setting, and parents’ community ties were better predictors of academic achievement than cultural differences were. Kim also found that such structural variables were likely to reduce ethnic differences in achievement than cultural differences were. In addition, Kim found that structural and cultural variables were better predictors of reading achievement than math achievement for the two groups studied.

Using the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, Kao and Rutherford (2007) examined the determinants of social capital and its effects on school achievement for minority and immigrant students. They examined two measures of social capital intergenerational closure and parent-school involvement among 8th and 12th-grade students and the degree to which minority and children of immigrants are disadvantaged by their inability to access social capital compared to their native-born White counterparts.

The findings indicated that first-generation Asians, all Hispanics, and third-generation Blacks had parental school involvement. Additional findings included that first-generation Asians and Hispanics are less affected by social capital than their second- and third-generation counterparts, whereas the opposite was true for Black students. Reportedly, parents of Black and White students in the study reported higher levels of school involvement than Asian and Hispanic parents did, possibly due to language barriers. Also, intergenerational closure was higher in the 12th grade than it was in the 8th grade as parents
became more comfortable with American norms. Also, immigrant first- and second-
generation children had less social capital than their third-generation counterparts.

Kao and Rutherford (2007) found that “parent-school social capital and
intergenerational closure in eighth grade have consistently positive effects on students’
eighth-grade GPA and standardized test scores” (p. 39). They concluded that family was a
significant predictor of social capital, academic grades, and test scores as students with
higher socioeconomic status were more likely to have higher levels of parent-school
involvement and intergenerational closure in both the 8th- and 12th-grade years. The
researchers attributed the lower levels of social capital of first and second-generation students
to the cultural gap between immigrant families and the schools.

Parental Role

Another factor related to academic achievement is parental role. Parental role
includes what is often termed in the literature as parental involvement (Grolnick &
Slowiaczek, 1994). It is a popular assumption that parental involvement is a key determinant
of academic success. Grolnick and Slowiaczek defined parental involvement as parents
spending resources on their children in the form of behavior (participation in school-related
activities), cognitive-intellectual (engagement of their children in intellectually stimulating
activities), and personal (knowing what is going on at the child’s school). Grolnick, Benjet,
and Apostoleris (1997) also noted that parental involvement is often associated with positive
schooling outcomes. Parental involvement can range from “parenting behavior to discussion
with children about homework to attendance at parent-teacher meetings” (Feuerstein, 2000,
p. 29). As Hill (2001) noted, parental involvement in school can be parent- or teacher-
initiated.
Researchers have established that the children of immigrants achieve in school due to factors such as parental emphasis on respect for authority, family cohesiveness, voluntary immigrant status, and a positive outlook that perceives education as a tool for social mobility (Kao & Thompson, 2003; Zhou, 1997). Therefore, parental involvement includes emotional, and personal aspects in addition to school-enhancing activities (Grolnick et al., 1997) that parents might utilize to support their children’s educational outcomes. As Grolnick et al., (1997) noted, there is a need to broaden the definition of parental involvement to include the non-public ways that non-middle-class and minority parents choose to involve themselves in the education of their children. What works as parental involvement for one group or race/ethnicity might not hold true for other groups. This might explain why parental practices and returns vary according to race, ethnicity, and family income (Desimone, 1999).

Slaughter and Epps (1987) noted that research dealing with “natural variation in the patterns of parental involvement among Black and other minority families are only just emerging” (p. 18). Some immigrant parents stay engaged with the schooling of their children despite language barriers, lack of social capital, and the social networks that are required to gain access to equal participation in the schooling of their children, given the barriers they face in the schools (Delpit, 1988).

In a study of the relationship between parental involvement, race, and income, Desimone (1999) found that although volunteering or fundraising was found to be insignificant for Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics, it was significant for Caucasians. The study also indicated that checking homework was not significant for any group and that social capital predicted achievement for students from high socioeconomic status background and for Caucasians but not for Asian, Black, and Hispanic students. This led Desimone to
conclude that “race, ethnicity and other background variables can mediate the effects and the
types of parental actions and behaviors have on students achievement” (p.13). In other words,what works to produce academic success for one group might not work for another group.

Lopez (2001) suggested that parental involvement be expanded to include how
minority, immigrant, and migrant groups perceive and define parental involvement in their
particular contexts. In a qualitative in-depth study of five immigrant and migrant families,
Lopez found that teaching children about the work ethic using real-life lessons provided
another frame of reference, which was an effective and motivating strategy to encourage
academic achievement among the children of this immigrant group. These immigrant migrant
families took their children to the farm to not only show them how difficult life can be
without an education but also to teach them to appreciate and value education. Lopez found
that the children’s working as migrant laborers fostered a strong sense of work ethic and
persistence rather than defeat or failure (optimism). These parents, Lopez concluded, taught
their children the value of working hard whether in the field or at school using the tools
available to them in their social context.

Lopez (2001) noted that parental involvement is often defined in the literature as
having a public, outward presence in school and engaging in bake sales, fundraisers (in or
outside of school), joining Parents/Teachers/Students/Organizations (PTSO) attending back-
to-school nights, volunteering in schools, attending parent advisory councils or school
boards—all of which require a certain level of education and skills. Defining parental
involvement this way denies some groups the opportunity to participate and become involved
in their children’s education. As a result, such parents have devised ways to participate in
their children’s education in ways specific to their context as in the case of the migrant families he studied.

Although research on parental involvement abounds, there is limited research on parental involvement in the context of immigrant groups (Ramirez, 2003). Yet, there is evidence that parental involvement as currently conceptualized in academic research may not apply to the immigrant family whose conception of parental involvement may be different from the typical middle-class norms as often depicted in research. As Ramirez stated, “parental involvement is more than the government, or a school, implementing a program to include more parents in the life of the school” (p. 93). He elaborated that parental involvement strategies should recognize the diversity of the student and their community.

Pong, Hao, and Gardner. (2005) studied the role of parenting styles and social capital (measured by parental involvement, intergenerational closure, expectations, and trust for accounting for school achievement) among three generations of Hispanic, Asian, and White students. They found not only significant differences by race/ethnicity and generational status in parenting styles but also in forms of social capital. Yet, parenting styles and forms of social capital do not affect ethnic generational differences in academic achievement. For example, they found the achievement of immigrant Asian students is unrelated to family backgrounds, parenting styles, or social capital. In other words, some Asian students of immigrant background achieve academic success irrespective of their family background, parenting style of their parents, and social capital available to them.

In light of the emerging research on this topic, Carreon, Drake, and Bartonet (2005) offered a new conceptualization of parental involvement that went beyond the specific school activities that parents conducted inside/outside the school walls to include parents’
orientation to the world and how those orientations frame the things they do. They argued that parental involvement was more than individual participation in an event, that it included the context under which individuals participate, the relationship with other individuals, the history of the event, and the available resources to the individual and those who designed the event.

Hence, the researchers preferred parental engagement to parental involvement when looking at how parents help their children to succeed academically. Carreon et al. (2005) found that the immigrant parents they studied chose a variety of strategies to stay engaged in the education of their children. Such engagement strategies were in the role of a questioner, strategic helper, and listener. The parents who engaged as strategic helpers helped in the classroom, whereas the questioner bridged the gap between the home and school and subsequently changed the schooling experiences of their children. The parents who engaged as listeners did so by being good listeners to their children and by learning from the children how to better engage with the school.

Although the parents in the study chose various methods to involve themselves in their children’s education, the result was that their children’s education was positively affected by their involvement. This led Carreon et al. (2005) to suggest that schools can foster parental engagement by allowing “parents’ life experiences and cultural capital to inform schools’ cultural worlds” (p. 494). In addition, Szalacha et al. (2005) noted that the factors that determined the academic success of students vary by culture. For example, among the Portuguese children in their study, parental engagement in ethnic activities corresponded to positive academic aspirations and academic achievement for their children.
Parental Expectations

A salient family factor that is linked to the academic achievement of youth is parental expectation. There is empirical evidence supporting the connection between parental expectations and academic outcomes of youths (Hirschman & Wong, 1986; Peng & Wright, 1994; Schneider & Lee, 1990; Sue & Okazaki, 1990) and in particular of youths with immigrant parents (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Fuligni, 1997).

Using open-ended interviews of seven families and their adolescent children, Li (2004) investigated parental expectations of recent Chinese immigrant families in Canada to determine how parents form their expectations from their cultural and immigrant experiences and how their children subsequently perceive and negotiate those parental expectations. Li found that Chinese parents in the study viewed academic achievement as key to the future and therefore stressed both the importance and value of school achievement and science-related career aspirations. This was due to the Chinese immigrants’ understanding of the Canadian labor market, their fear of racism, and their perceived minority disadvantages.

Their push for careers in science was a means of coping with the perceived disadvantages of being a member of a minority group in Canada, but they also expected their children to integrate into the Canadian society to increase their chance of success. Moreover, Chinese parents valued moral character in their children, which together with academic performance and cultural integration, was perceived as key to the future of their children in Canada. Although Chinese children understood their parents’ expectations and the reasons for them, they felt pressured and struggled to negotiate the bicultural worlds they were expected to live in.
Even though some youths accepted their parent’s high academic expectations and
career aspirations, some youths expressed a desire for their parents to understand and
sympathize with their dilemmas as immigrant children navigating between Chinese and
Canadian cultures. Li (2004) recommended a need to help immigrant children to “develop a
healthy bicultural identity that retains their Chinese heritage and incorporates western
cultural codes” (p. 180). Li noted that participants reflected the well-educated immigrant
group from Mainland China rather than a broad range of socioeconomic status or families
with poor academic achievers.

Urdan, Solek, and Schoenfelder (2007) investigated family influence on student
motivation and achievement. Urdan et al. (2007) noted that family influence on student
achievement can primarily occur through parental expectations in the form of parental beliefs
and cognitive support, and second, through parental involvement or behavior. In a summary
of research on parental behaviors (e.g. parental involvement, level of involvement, amount of
structure provided, and autonomy supportiveness), they concluded that “parents who are
willing and able to provide support for their children but do not become coercive or
controlling in their influence, produce academically motivated children” (Urdan et al., p. 8).
Under parental beliefs, Urdan et al. concluded, “parents who value academic achievement
often have children who value academic achievement as well” (p. 9).

Urdan et al. (2007) interviewed a sample of high school seniors of Vietnamese,
Chinese, Latin American (mostly Mexican), Filipino, and Caucasian backgrounds and of
diverse gender, achievement level, and generational status to explore the various ways they
perceived family influences on their academic motivation. They identified various forms of
family influence on student motivation, including foremost parental influence and others
such as siblings, aunts and uncles, cousins and grandparents, and critical incidents such as a death in the family.

Family socioeconomic factors also influenced motivation. For example, cultural expectations relating to ethnicity or heritage, poverty or financial hardship, and level of academic success of other family members as role models also influenced the academic motivation of the youths. In describing the various influences of family on their academic achievement, students used “grateful to resentful, from burdened by oppressive expectations and responsibilities to free from all parental pressure, and from warm to hostile” (Urdan et al., 2007, p. 17). In addition, they identified five patterns of family influence on the motivation of the youths as:

1. Family pleasing (to make the family proud through academic achievement);
2. Family obligation (to pay through academic achievement for the sacrifices the family made);
3. Family support (high academic expectations and nurturing support of parents);
4. Aversive influence (negative role models and a desire to disprove low expectations of family members); and
5. Lack of influence (family had little or no influence on academic motivation).

Urdan et al. (2007) concluded that parents who were involved in their children’s education and had high expectations but who were not over controlling had children who valued school, possessed strong academic self-concepts, expected to do well in school, and often performed at high levels in school.
Race-Ethnic Identity

Researchers have investigated the possible relationship between race-ethnic identity and academic achievement among students from minority groups (Lopez & Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Zarate et al., 2005) and ethnic identity and academic efficacy (Oyserman et al., 2001). Earlier researchers posit that high-achieving African-American students adopt a “raceless” identity by adopting behaviors and attitudes that distance them from their cultural identity (Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Yet other researchers have found a positive relationship between race-ethnic socialization and academic outcomes (Bennett, 2006; Oyserman et al., 2001; Sanders, 1997). Ethnic identity may offer a positive protection against low academic efficacy because efficacy is a motivational factor, and belonging to a minority group can be “deflating and stigmatizing” (Oyserman et al., p. 384). Ethnic identity is a construct related to racial-ethnic socialization and often researched as an outcome of parents’ racial-ethnic socialization (Hughes et al., 2006) and portrayed as a result of racial socialization (Bennett, 2006).

Recent immigrants are more likely to socialize their children about their race, ethnicity, native language, and traditions than their counterparts of the same ethnicity or racial group who are non-recent immigrants (Rumbaut, 1994a; Waters, 1990). Recent immigrants are also more likely to discuss discrimination with their children (Knight, Bernal, Garza et al., 1993). Such socializations include exposure to historical figures, talk about historical figures, exposure to culturally relevant books, and exposure to ethnic music, artifacts, arts, stories, cultural holidays, ethnic foods and language. Racial-ethnic socialization includes parents modeling values, norms, and beliefs for their children (Miller,
1999) and teaching cultural pride, history, and heritage, as well as preparing children for bias and racism (Hughes, Rodrigues, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson, & Spicer, 2006).

Sanders (1997) studied African-American middle school students in an urban setting and found that the students with a high awareness of racial discrimination were more likely to experience academic success than their peers. He noted that positive racial socialization (awareness of the accomplishments and the challenges of racism facing African-Americans as well the knowledge of coping strategies) was a key factor in the positive academic outcome of the youths in the study. He concluded that some minority youths could respond in more than one way to racism and discrimination. Some people may exert more effort in their academic pursuit to counter the effects of racism and discrimination.

In a study of African-American middle school students from an urban school, Oyserman, Harrison, and Bybee (2001) investigated gender-specific relationship between racial identity and academic efficacy. They examined the relationship between racial identity and academic efficacy in three areas: “in-group identification, awareness of negative out-group perceptions, and viewing academic achievement as part of one’s racial identity” (p. 380). They noted that by themselves alone, the first two areas are not necessarily related to academic efficacy. However, racial identity is relevant to understanding group identity and academic efficacy. Oyserman et al. (2001) stated: “By defining academic achievement as an in-group-defining trait or value this component of racial identity serves to reduce possible tensions between achievement and minority racial group membership” (p. 380). The presence of an in-group perception of academic achievers can help motivate youths and foster academic efficacy, thereby making “achievement a function of in-group membership” (p. 380).
Oyserman et al. (2001) found that an analysis done in the fall showed that participants’ belief that achievement is part of being African-American “bolstered” academic efficacy for both genders. Although the awareness of racism had positive relation to academic efficacy for boys, it had a negative effect for girls. Spring analysis indicated that racial identity is a significant predictor of academic efficacy. They found that academic efficacy declined from fall to spring of the year of the study and that “gender-specific content of African-American racial identity moderated this effect” (p. 384). Among female participants, a feeling of connectedness and being a part of a group viewed negatively by others was detrimental to academic efficacy only when one did not define achievement as part of one’s in-group identity. For boys, when school grades and fall efficacy were controlled, there was no significant effect between connectedness and academic efficacy.

The researchers concluded that racial identity and its impact had differential effects on boys and girls and on how race and gender interacts in the study of racial identity in adolescence. Given the presence of stereotypical image of minority group in our society, cultural differences and unequal opportunities, youths of color must “create a sense of self that includes a positive sense of shared social identity with others of their own group” (Oyserman et al., 2001, p. 384).

Using data collected from a 15-year-old longitudinal investigation, Zarate, Bhimji, anad Reese (2005) used open-ended interviews to examine the relationship between ethnic identity and academic achievements among Latino adolescents. They found that students with a bicultural identity who had a positive view of their non-American ethnic identity performed better in middle school standardized Reading and Math tests than their peers. In addition, the mean standard percentile scores of the students were tested. Zarate et al. (2005)
cautioned that no causal relationship should be implied between bicultural identity and academic achievement. They hypothesized that bicultural identity could be considered a type of cultural capital, serving as a protective factor to help minority children “negotiate dominant structures and institutional systems” (Zarate et al., p. 112). They concluded that having a positive view of home culture helps counter the negative mainstream constructions of minority students’ home culture and language. This conclusion supported earlier research (Arriaza, 2003) that found that racialized youths build social capital when they learn to negotiate their status in society. According to Arriaza, such knowledge involves the development of a nurturing self that embraces one’s own racial identity and an understanding of the identity of others to be able to live in the mainstream culture.

Bennet (2006) investigated the influence of racial socialization and ethnic identity on the school engagement of African-American youths. Using structural equation modeling, he found that although there was no statistically significant relationship between racial socialization and academic engagement, there was a significant relationship between racial socialization and ethnic identity, thus proving an indirect link. He concluded that children with bicultural competency and a positive ethnic identity are more likely to engage in school and perform well.

*Cultural Socialization*

Another parental factor that influences academic achievement was cultural socialization. Parents play a significant role in the early schooling of children, thereby shaping the future academic trajectory of their children as agents of academic socialization (Thompson et al., 1988). Cultural socialization is a concept that is linked to the broader racial and ethnic socialization (Thornton et al., 1990). *Racial-ethnic socialization* refers to the
process parents use to transmit information about race and ethnicity to their children (Thornton et al.).

The academic achievement of some minority groups has been attributed to their cultural socialization. Socialization can be viewed as a cultural explanation for academic achievement that examines how “patterns and institutional practices within a culture can aid, be irrelevant to, or hinder educational pursuits” (Sue & Okazaki, 1990, p. 916). Socialization is defined as beliefs, cultural values, cultural practices, and beliefs about child rearing practices and education to which parents from different groups subscribe (Okagaki & Steinberg, 1993; Sue & Okazaki, 1990). Socialization also includes how children internalize the values and beliefs of significant others such as peers, parents, and teachers (Slaughter-Defoe, 1995). Exposure to certain cultural norms is not sufficient to spur academic achievement, because the children would need to internalize such norms before they can materialize any positive results (Slaughter-Defoe).

Socialization also includes the way students perceive the meaning of education. Bowen and Bowen (1998) indicated that students “who defined education as meaningful are invested in the learning process and find school a stimulating and rewarding environment” (p. 45). They also found that parents who established a home academic culture would likely see their children succeed in school. The pair defined home academic culture as the “degree to which parents demonstrated agreement by discussing school activities, study topics, and future plans with the child” (p. 45). Also included in the definition are parental attitudes, values, parenting behavior, and parent-child interactions on academic performance. Their study concluded that home academic culture had an indirect effect on academic achievement and it was mediated by students’ sense of educational meaning gained through discussing
school-related topics with their parents. As Szalacha et al. (2005) succinctly stated, the
determinant of childrens’ attitudes and success in school is family academic socialization.
This suggests that children raised in homes where the parents emphasized the importance of
education and held a home culture of high academic expectations for the children would
likely see their children do well in school.

Ogbu and Matute-Bianchi (1986) suggested that folk theories of success could explain why some minority groups achieve in school whereas others perform poorly. The folk theory stems from people’s beliefs about whether education will improve their lives or not. As Sue and Okazaki (1990) noted, the factors that influence folk theories include: cultural values, past experiences (with successes and failures), discrimination, beliefs, self-efficacy, and availability of successful role models.

School Factors that Influence the Educational Outcomes for Immigrant and Minority Students

Peer Relationships

Research has established that there is a relationship between peers and academic achievement (Epstein, 1983). School factors that can influence students’ academic outcomes include type and location of school, quality of teachers, peer and teacher relationships, tracking, and the number of minority students in attendance. Peer affiliation is important to youths and probably more important to minority students, especially to high-achieving Black students due to the popular view of Black students as poor students (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992).

Researchers (Portes, A., 1995; Portes & Zhou, 1993) have noted that Black immigrant and Mexican immigrant youths are more susceptible to peer pressure because of their
historical ties to groups who were incorporated into America involuntarily. A sense of not belonging has been shown to contribute to the poor academic achievement of Black students (Ford et al., 1993; Fordham, 1988). For high achieving Black students, managing peer relations can be a challenging and arduous task because they must balance their need for achievement and their need for affiliation (Ford & Harris, 1996). Peers are important for students, especially for the academic success of students from immigrant background, as their parents may not be familiar with the American educational structure, thus making peers a great source of support (Fuligni, 1997). Not only can peer group culture impact academic outcomes but “it can have a powerful effect on students’ academic identities; indeed, peer groups often define what counts as success” (Datnow & Cooper, 1997, p. 59).

Researchers have determined that peers are important to children’s academic experiences and have offered the peer group ideology of school resistance as an explanation for the academic underachievement of some minority groups (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; MacLeod, 1987; Ogbu, 2003). These researchers provided some insights into how peer group culture can impact the academic experiences of youths. MacLeod (1987) found that peer affiliations could mediate students’ aspirations and academic identities. Black students develop oppositional identity, which often leads to poor academic achievement since these students avoid academic engagement for fear of being labeled as “acting White” by their peers (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). The acting White theory gives the impression that all Black students choose this response when faced with the problem of peer teasing and the illusion that peer teasing of academically talented students is unique to Black students. In addition, acting White may not be related to academic achievement but to other symbols associated with White culture in terms of dressing and speech patterns (Bergin & Cooks, 1992).
Datnow and Cooper (1997) found that in a group of Black students attending White elite independent schools, these students struggled with being accepted by their Black peers outside school and their White peers in the school. In response, the Black students developed strong bonds with each other and established “formal and informal peer networks to reaffirm their racial identities and seek refuge from what could otherwise be difficult places for them to fit in” (Datnow & Cooper, p. 69). Although this finding supports Fordham and Ogbu’s (1986) finding that peers make the life of academically talented Black students difficult, it shows that all Black students do not succumb to such pressure.

Tyson, Darity, and Castellino (2005) studied the “burden of acting White” among high-achieving students. They found that both Black and White high-achieving students suffer stigma and name calling by their peers. Tyson et al. (2005) also found that some Black students avoided academic challenges (e.g. enrollment in advanced courses) for fear of not doing well and to maintain a certain grade point average, rather than due to the fear of acting White. Students’ beliefs about their academic abilities are formed in the classroom through peer interaction, so the relationships that children form with peers are important for their academic achievement (Flook, Repetti, & Ullman, 2005). Flook et al. also noted that children who failed to form relationships with their peers might develop negative attitudes about school, which could affect their self-concept, mental health, motivation, and subsequent academic achievement.

For minority students, the ability to cross cultural boundaries and systems and the ability to overcome obstacles through supportive individuals at home, school, and in the community might be the key to their optimal educational outcomes (Phelan et al., 1993). Regardless of their socioeconomic background and capital resources (social, human, and
cultural), if minority youths cannot navigate the multiple social contexts they are bound to encounter in their schooling career, they might not experience positive academic outcomes. As Mullis et al. (2003) noted, academic performance is determined by individual characteristics and social influences and “deficiencies in some areas can be countered by strengths in other areas” (p. 546).

Explanations for Asian-American Academic Achievement

A section of the literature review was devoted to Asian-American academic achievement because it is particularly relevant to this study. There are parallels between some Asian-American immigrants and Nigerian immigrants because both groups have a history of selective immigration and a subsequent high educational attainment level (Wong & Hirschman, 1983). Existing research supports the notion that Asian-Americans typically have attained high academic achievement (Sue & Okazaki, 1990); and their success is often attributed to hard work and to cultures that value education (Lee, 1994). Asian-American students generally have a history of academic achievement that is higher than that of other minority groups in the United States; and the Asian group has been extensively researched (Peng & Wright, 1994). Like some Asian groups, the sample in this study has been defined as high achievers.

Although earlier researchers (Hsu, 1971; Kitano, 1969) attributed the academic success of Asian-Americans to a culture that emphasizes and values education, Hirschman and Wong (1986) attributed the high educational attainment of Asian-American students to selective immigration. Hirschman and Wong (1986) argued that all Asians do not share a monolithic culture and that there are some parallels between what is considered Asian culture and middle-class American culture (e.g. strong work ethic), yet Asian students outperform
White students academically. Therefore, the researchers concluded that restrictive immigration favored self-selected Asian immigrants who often have higher educational qualifications than native-born citizens, which then translates into an educational advantage for their children. Other researchers have attributed the academic success of Asian students to parental expectations and to Eastern culture, rooted especially in Chinese culture and beliefs in the Confucian philosophy of respect and value for education, hard work, family obligation, and deferred gratification (Chen & Uttal, 1988; Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998).

A popular reason to support the general academic achievement of Asian-Americans is the family socialization that values and promotes educational achievement. It is also believed that Asian parents demand and expect academic achievement from their children and use guilt about parental sacrifices to get compliance from their children. Additionally, Asian parents emphasize family obligations and respect for education and use social comparisons with other academically successful Asian students to motivate their children to succeed in school (Sue & Okazaki, 1990). According to Lee (1994), Asian-American students are often portrayed as models for academic success among minority groups and their success has often been attributed to hard work in addition to Asian cultures that value education. Yet, Fuligni (1997) has determined that Asian-American academic achievement varies according to the subject. He found that students from Asian immigrant families often performed well on the math section of standardized tests and achieve high class grades in reading and English, but have more difficulty with standardized tests of reading and English.

Using a historical cultural perspective, Suzuki (1980) became one of the first researchers to counter the cultural explanation for Asian-American academic achievement and argued that the academic achievement of Asian-Americans could be explained as a
reaction to social stratification in the United States that excluded Asians from social participation. This in turn forced Asian parents to steer their children to education as a means of overcoming social barriers.

As all Asian students do not exhibit similar academic outcomes nor share a monolithic culture, Sue and Okazaki (1990) offered the relative functionalism explanation for the academic achievement of some Asian-Americans. They argue that due to discrimination against Asian-Americans in other fields (e.g. sports, entertainment, and politics) unrelated to education, education has assumed a great importance to Asian-Americans and that explains the Asian academic success; not cultural values. Although Sue and Okazaki acknowledged that cultural differences exist in parenting styles between the groups in their study, they argued that those differences fail to explain the observed differences in academic achievement seen among the different groups. Hence, they concluded that although culture is an important factor in predicting achievement, proximal values such as the importance of study and hard work rather than distal values such as socialization practices, may be important predictors of achievement. They added that a history of educational success among Asian-Americans has produced a number of positive role models, which might also contribute to the academic performance of Asian-American students.

Another explanation for the academic achievement of Asian Americans is the parenting style, which is more authoritarian than authoritative (Baumrind, 1972); but Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, and Fraleigh, (1987), and Sternberg, Dornbush, and Brown (1992) have countered such explanations. They argue that the cultural explanation is not supported by research that shows that the cultural parenting beliefs and values associated with Asian culture (authoritarian and permissive) are the least likely to yield academic
achievement (Dornbusch et al., 1987). Moreover, in a study of ethnic differences in achievement of minority and Caucasian students within different ecologies, Steinberg et al., (1992) found that the best predictor of academic achievement is authoritative parenting with high peer support. Asian-American students in the study, though lacking authoritative parents, succeeded due to a high level of peer group support. In addition, lack of supportive peers offset the benefits of authoritative home upbringing for some groups such as African-Americans. They concluded that a “warm, firm, and democratic” parenting style coupled with a supportive peer group was a better predictor of academic achievement (p. 728).

In a study that compared immigrant parents and native-born Anglo Americans regarding parenting styles and conceptualization of intelligence, Okagaki and Steinberg (1993) found that immigrants in the study (Asians) favored children’s conforming to external standards (e.g. obeying adults) more than the development of autonomous behavior. Immigrant parents also rated non-cognitive characteristics (e.g. motivation, social skills, and practical school skills such as hard work) as important as, or more important than, cognitive skills (e.g. problem solving) in how they conceptualized intelligence for first graders.

Using the base-year Survey from the national Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, Pen and Wright (1994) determined that Asian-American students were more likely to live in two-parent families and attend after-school lessons, and spend more time on homework, and that Asian parents had higher educational expectations of their children than other parents in the study. Although Asian parents did not directly help with homework, Pena and Wright (1994) attributed the academic achievement of Asian-Americans to differences in the home environment and to the educational activities Asian students were engaged in (for example, visiting the public library and the museum).
Other researchers such as Hao and Bonstead-Bruns (1998) found that some minority groups, such as Asian-Americans, value education more than others and therefore emphasize the value of education to their children as well as pass high educational expectations to their children. Schneider and Lee (1990) and Kao and Tienda (1995) have found that not only do Asian-American parents value education, but also they are more likely than White parents to devote their resources and time to support the education of their children. The assumption underlining this finding is that when parents value education, their children will do well in school; yet, this may not be the case for all groups.

Black parents place a premium on academic achievement and expect their children to strive for academic performance and success (Hilliard, 1979; Massey et al., 1975). There is also empirical evidence suggesting that African-American parents and youths value education, and have positive attitudes toward school; yet African-American children do not generally perform well in school (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Mickelson, 1990). Additionally, in a qualitative study of the development of oppositional schooling identity among Black elementary school children, Tyson (2002) found that these children started school with high achievement-orientation and engagement, but these positive school attributes diminished as the children got older, an indication that schools might contribute to the negative school attitudes of some Black students.

Researchers have also attributed the academic achievement of Asian-Americans to parental expectation (Chen & Stevenson, 1995; Goyette & Xie, 1998). Using data from the National Longitudinal Study, Xie and Goyette (1998) examined differences in educational expectations among Asian American ethnic groups (Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Southeast Asian, other Asian) and Caucasians. Data collected were from students and their
parents, teachers, and school principals. The analysis was based on a sample of educational expectations in 1990 (N=13,112), and on variables such as children’s expectations, race-ethnicity, immigrant generation, socioeconomic status and other background factors, and academic ability. The results showed that “the parents of Asian American students reported higher educational expectations than their White counterparts” (Goyette & Xie, 1999, p. 29). They also found that although all Asian ethnic groups have higher educational expectations than Whites, the educational expectations of Asian groups that are well assimilated into U.S. society are largely influenced by socioeconomic demographic factors.

Although background factors such as socioeconomic status and family structure explained the differences between the educational expectations of the Filipinos, Japanese, South Asians, and Whites, ability explains the Asian-White gap for all the ethnic groups except for South Asian youths’ expectations for finishing college.

Summary of the Review of the Literature

Research on the academic outcomes of children from immigrant families predicts both positive and negative results for various immigrant groups due to the diversity and the variability found among the contemporary immigrant population (Gans, 1992; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Kao & Thompson, 2003; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rumbaut, 1994a; Zhou, 1997). Although class primarily influenced the fate of European immigrants and their children in the 1800s, the diversity of recent immigrants is reflected in color, class, and the national origins Rumbaut (1994a). For example, today’s immigrants include some of the most educated groups (Asian Indians, Taiwanese); and some of the least educated groups (Mexicans, Salvadorians); as well as those with the least poverty (Filipinos) and those with the highest poverty rate (Laotians and Cambodians).
Although research has established that immigrant parents have higher academic aspirations and expectations for their children than their native counterparts (Fuligni, 1997; Kao & Tienda, 1995), this research still offers no explanation for the inter- and intragroup variability found in the academic achievement of immigrant youths (Hao & Bonstead-Brun, 1998; Hirschman, 2001; Kao, 1995; Portes & MacLeod, 1999; Rumbaut, 1995).

In a qualitative study of Punjabi Sikh immigrant students in a California high school, Gibson (1988) found that Sikh parents encouraged their children to adopt middle class American values that promoted upward mobility but with the preservation of their ethnic culture. She concluded that students from immigrant families who practiced accommodation without assimilation of the mainstream culture, retaining the culture of their parents, were likely to succeed in school.

Gans (1992) rejected the straight-line assimilation model by arguing that it does not reflect the experiences of contemporary immigrants of the post-1965 group. Segmented assimilation (Gans) seems to better explain the academic achievement of youths from immigrant backgrounds, because youths who acculturated are less likely to perform well in school (Fuligni, 1997; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Immigrant youths who practiced acculturation without assimilation or the accommodation of American culture where they adapted the American culture while preserving some of their parents’ native culture seemed to have performed better in school than their peers who did not (Gibson, 1988; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Zhou & Bankston, 1994).

It is evident that no single factor or pattern can explain the determinants of school success for youths with immigrant backgrounds; rather, it is as a result of the interaction
between the family, the school, and the community in the form of opportunity structure available to the youths and their families (Fuligni, 1997; Glick & White, 2003).

The various forms of capital (human, social, and cultural) that immigrant groups possess interact with the school contexts to maximize the academic outcomes of children from immigrant homes. Culture, socioeconomic status, parental expectations, generational status, peer association, or academic self-efficacy alone cannot explain the complexities of academic outcomes of these youths (Massey et al., 2003; Szalacha et al., 2005).
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter describes the research methods and procedures for the study. It also describes the researcher’s background, a general description of the participants and the settings, research design and sampling procedures, data collection procedures, description of the data analysis, a restatement of the research questions, an ethics statement, and the limitations of the study.

Researcher’s Biography

Several factors and experiences of the researcher precipitated this study. It is important for readers to gain insight into the world of the researcher to better understand the background of a study, as the researcher is part of the lens through which to view qualitative research (Li, 2004). Some of the pertinent information regarding this researcher is below.

The researcher is a Nigerian immigrant who has resided in the United States for more than 27 years. She has taught in an urban high school for over two decades. As an educator, she has witnessed a tremendous growth in the population of second-generation Africans and especially Nigerian youths in the public school where she is employed. Twenty years ago, it was rare to come across second-generation Nigerian youths in her school. Lately, it is not uncommon to have them in her classes. As a result, she has had the opportunity to teach both high-achieving and low-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths. She has observed some of them thrive, whereas some strive and yet fail to succeed academically. The original intent of the research was to study both the high-achieving and under-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths to better understand their academic trajectories, but it became
impossible to recruit youths who were under-achieving in school. Hence, the focus shifted to the high-achieving youths.

As a Nigerian immigrant, the researcher belongs to several Nigerian groups. Being a Nigerian, an educator, and a mother of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths provided access to many Nigerian parents and youths at different locations and events. In fact, some parents were so excited about the study that they volunteered their children for it. Due to logistical problems, study criteria, and time limitations, some youths were not able to participate. Being an in-group member eased the way to getting the high-achieving youths to participate in the study, but it could have been a deterrence for the underachievers. Having high-achieving second-generation Nigerian children who have attended Ivy League colleges was helpful in recruiting youths for the study.

The researcher has BS and MS degrees in sociology and a sixth-year diploma in special education. She has conducted an ethnographic study of the childbearing patterns of Nigerian women in the United States as part of the requirements for a master’s degree in sociology. She is also from one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Igbo, and that explains why the majority of the participants, both youths and mothers, were from the Igbo group. The Igbo group is one of the groups in Nigeria that is known to be achievement oriented (LeVine, 1966).

As a Nigerian immigrant and a parent who has raised three grown children in the United States, she is privy to certain mores and have insights into the Nigerian culture that she brought to the study. On the other hand, she might have some biases that she could have introduced into the study. To overcome such biases, she was transparent in the sample
selection, data collection, and analysis procedures. The use of triangulation of data sources and methods were designed to minimize the insider effects and biases on this study.

Description of the Participants and the Settings

Eleven high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths between the ages of 14 and 25 years participated in the in-depth interviews. All of the participants were born to Nigerian-born immigrant mothers and fathers, thus forming what is termed as the second-generation Americans. Nine of the youths were born in the United States, whereas two were born in the United Kingdom and migrated to the United States before the age of six. Seven youth participants were from the Igbo ethnic group, and four were from the Yoruba group. There were three males and eight females.

Five participants were in high school, and five were college students. One participant was a graduate student. Two of the high school participants were seniors at the time of the interview and have been accepted into elite colleges. One senior, who graduated as the valedictorian of her senior class after the interview, enrolled at an Ivy League college upon her graduation. Three other participants were valedictorians of their high school senior classes. The oldest participant, who also graduated as the valedictorian of her high school, had recently received a graduate degree in management from an Ivy League college. Four of the college students were attending an Ivy League college, and three of them were siblings. The other youth was enrolled in a competitive non-Ivy league private elite college in New England. The siblings were the oldest of seven children. Including multiple siblings from this family enabled the researcher to examine how youths from a large family and from the same family experience education. Additionally, this was done to establish confirmability of the findings.
Three of the high school students attended an urban magnet high school, while the other two started out in the same setting but later attended a suburban high school because their parents bought homes in the suburbs. Four of the college-age participants lived in an urban area, and one lived in a suburban town and attended a public high school. Four of the college-aged participants attended a Catholic high school. The lone graduate student attended an elite Catholic high school. All of the participants grew up in two-parent homes. Nine participants grew up in New England. One grew up in a mid-Atlantic state, and one grew up on the West Coast. Youth participants chose a pseudonym for the study or were assigned one according to the researchers’ discretion and based on the interview transcriptions.

Six Nigerian mothers participated in the parent interview. All of them have resided in the United States for 10 years or longer, while three of them have resided here for more than 28 years. Four parents were of the Igbo ethnic group, and the other two were from the Yoruba group. Parent participants were college graduates and working mothers with the exception of one, who is a stay at home mom of five children and is working on an MBA. One mother has a master’s degree and has completed all the requirements for a doctoral degree except the dissertation. A total of six mothers were interviewed. Every mother interviewed had a child who participated in the in-depth interview study. With the exception of two youths, all youth participants’ mothers were interviewed. All the parent participants resided in the New England area. Distance did not permit for the inclusion of the other two parents. Parents were identified and linked to their children (Table 7).

The focus group participants, two males and four females, were students from an Ivy League college. They ranged in age from 18 to 23. They grew up in New England, the Mid-Atlantic, Midwest and West Coast regions. The entire focus group participants were born in
the United States to Nigerian parents with the exception of one who had a Nigerian father and a Caucasian mother. The two males were seniors in college and the females ranged in age from being college freshmen to juniors. Two of the females were of the Yoruba ethnic group, whereas the other two remaining students were of the Igbo ethnic group.

All focus group participants completed their schooling in the United States except for one who spent a year abroad with his parent during his middle school years. One participant spent his early childhood in Nigeria but returned to the United States at the age of six. The males were the last in the birth order, while the females were first.

Research Design and Sampling Procedures

Few in-depth studies have been done on the adaptation of immigrant youth (Rumbaut, 1994a), and none have been done on the educational experiences of high achieving second-generation Nigerian youths. Consequently, this was an exploratory study given the dearth of research on the academic experiences of Black immigrant youths and second-generation youths from Africa (Butcher, 1994; Rong & Brown, 2001). Research on immigrant education is dominated by a cross-sectional paradigm using primarily a quantitative analysis (Pong, 2003), although there are some qualitative studies of a single immigrant group (Gibson, 1991). In light of the fact that the few cross-sectional research studies that included second-generation Africans utilized quantitative analysis (Massey et al., 2007; Rong & Brown, 2001:), there is clearly a need to examine a single group from Africa using a qualitative paradigm.

Qualitative study allows for a deeper examination and understanding of the experiences of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths and allows a researcher to gain insight into how they “feel, act, and think,” which quantitative data cannot divulge
(Feagin & Sikes, 1995, p. 91). Additionally, a qualitative method such as the case study utilizes a “culturally sensitive research framework” that helps to capture the successes as well as the struggles of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths (Tillman, 2002, p. 3). The culturally sensitive research perspective acknowledges the various aspects of the research subjects’ culture and their various historical and contemporary experiences (Tillman). The qualitative method is best for examining lived experiences and social interaction between people and provides the participants with the opportunity to express their views on issues relevant to them (Sale, Lohfeld, & Brazil, 2002).

In addition, a qualitative method allows for multiple realities (Isaac & Michael, 1995, p. 218) due to differences in the development and interpretation of human perceptions. As a result of the diversity found in American schools today, educational researchers need to focus on what works for each group given their unique contexts. This could enable practitioners to create programs to help all students reach their full potential. Qualitative studies of single ethnic groups would move educational research toward educational equity for all children (Portes, 1999). Case study methodology also enables the researcher to study a phenomenon in a real world context (Yin, 1989).

The interactional nature allowed the researcher to explore not only what was happening but also to explore why it was happening. It is not sufficient to determine that second-generation Nigerian youths were doing well in school without an understanding of why they did well as well as the challenges they overcame along the path. Qualitative research can access data regarding people’s experiences that quantitative data are unable to tap into (Harris, 2006). To understand why second-generation Nigerian students achieve in
school, we need to have in-depth conversations with youths both individually and in a focus group.

Purposeful sampling was utilized in this study to include a wider range of cases reflecting the diversity of high achieving second-generation Nigerian youths, Nigerian parents, and their multiple realities to gain access to information-rich cases (Isaac & Michael, 1995, p. 223). The survey, conducted in a preliminary pilot study was used to select purposeful sample cases for the in-depth interviews. The initial sample size for this study consisted of 21 cases selected from the (N=106) participants who completed a preliminary survey asking for demographic information, family background, school experiences, motivation, and cultural identity. Eleven of the 21 participants were interviewed, and each interview lasted from 45 minutes to more than 3 hours, for an average length of 85 minutes each. The interviewee’s responses dictated the number of interviews conducted for this study. The interviews were ended when the interviewer believed that data saturation was reached due to the repetitiveness of the interviewee responses. Six parents were interviewed, and there was a focus group interview of six college-age second-generation Nigerian youths. The focus group interview was conducted at an Ivy Leagues college. Four of the participants were females and two were males. All focus group participants had Nigerian-born parents except one with a Nigerian-born father and an American mother.

As a pilot study, a preliminary survey was conducted to explore the reliability and validity of the survey questions using 10 second-generation youths ages 14 to 25. Students who participated in the pilot were excluded from this study. The pilot study yielded useful feedback regarding the clarity and bias in the language used in the survey. The survey used for this study reflected the feedback from the pilot study participants (see Appendix C).
Youth participants for the survey were required to have been born to at least one Nigerian parent, be at least 14 years of age, and have completed all of their elementary school through sophomore year of high school in the United States. The selected cases for the in-depth interviews were required to have two Nigerian-born parents. This was necessary to be able to investigate how high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths construct their identity since identity can be a factor in the academic achievement of Black immigrants (Waters, 1994). Therefore, interviewing youths with two Nigerian-born parents served as a control as research has shown that children from households where both parents are native-born have higher levels of educational attainment than children from households in which both parents were foreign-born (Ramakrishnan, 2004).

Parent participants must have resided in the United States for more than 10 years and had children who have gone through elementary and high schools in the United States. This increased the possibility that participants would have garnered the type of experiences sought by the researcher. Mothers of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths were preferred to the father for the parental interview because research indicates mothers are the most involved in the schooling of their children (Stevenson & Baker, 1987) and are more likely to be the contact person between home and school (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). Parent interviews helped to shed light on strategies Nigerian immigrants used to negotiate their children’s education in a foreign country. All the parents interviewed had a college degree; some had advanced degrees.
Research Questions

1. What are the characteristics of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian immigrant youths in the United States?

2. What are the effects of personal, family, school, and community factors on the academic achievement of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths?

3. What challenges do high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths face in school, and how do they deal with the challenges of being of Black, of immigrant origin, and high-achieving?

Data Collection Procedures

This researcher explored how high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths experience education in the United States through multiple data sources. Data for this study were generated from surveys and multiple, individual in-depth interviews of high-achieving second-generation Nigerians, Nigerian immigrant parents and a focus group interview of college-age second-generation Nigerian youths, and observations of participants during the interview. The use of multiple data sources for data triangulation created trustworthiness in the findings of the research. Data triangulations of sources were used to establish the confirmability of the findings (Krefting, 1991).

Utilizing individual in-depth interviews, focus group, and parent interviews served to gain multiple views and to foster prolonged engagement with the target population to corroborate and detect and correct possible distortions which might have crept into the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Documentation of the research process has been provided in an audit to validate the consistency of the findings (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 2003). In-depth, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted face to face. All
interviewees were asked the same questions, but the interviewer asked follow-up questions to responses to shed more light on emerging issues or for further clarifications. The questions were about the youths’ experiences regarding schooling, beliefs, and motivation for academic achievement. To solicit participants, a letter explaining the research project and the need for the study was given to second-generation Nigerian youths to appeal for their participation and help (see Appendix A). Participants and their parents were required to sign the consent form before completing the second-generation Nigerian youth survey (see Appendices B & C).

The initial sampling process started with the preliminary second-generation Nigerian youth surveys that were completed by 106 youths, which was useful in collecting demographic information about second-generation Nigerian youths. As there is no large ethnic community of any immigrant group from Africa in the United States (Rong & Brown, 2001), the surveys were distributed and collected at conferences organized by and for second-generation Nigerians, adult conferences in different states, social gatherings of Nigerians such as parties, church services, picnics, and ethnic and state-of-origin-based cultural conventions that often rotate from state to state across the United States. The Internet was also used to distribute and to collect the surveys.

The demographic survey conducted in a preliminary study was used to generate descriptive information about background characteristics, practices, and attitudes (Isaac & Michael, 1995) from the pool of possible subjects. It is important to collect data on the family demographics of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths because research indicates that the experiences and adaptations of immigrants determine the outcomes of the second-generation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).
In addition, demographic information was useful for the identification of the high-achieving students who were invited for inclusion in the study sample. Questions on the survey were based on what research has found to be the factors that determine the educational outcomes of immigrant and minority students. The survey asked questions about parents’ educational attainment and occupation, residence in a suburban or urban area, and youths’ attendance at a public or private school, family size, educational achievement and aspiration, and cultural identity. Survey responses were used to generate interview guides with open-ended questions for the in-depth interviews. Questions on the interview guide asked about students’ perceptions of the role of parents, teachers, peers, and community (both Nigerian and American community in the form of extracurricular activities) in their academic experiences (see Appendix D).

Youths were also asked about their academic self-perception, achievement ideology, attribution of success and failure, and the obstacles and challenges they faced and how they resolved them. Questions about individual and group identity and career aspirations were included. The in-depth interviews were semistructured in that participants were asked a standard set of open-ended questions from an interview guide, but the researcher had the discretion to ask follow-up questions when necessary.

The survey was also a useful tool for selecting a variety of participants based on gender, family background, residence in an urban or suburban community, private or public school attendance, and those who are available for the subsequent in-depth interview sessions. Based on the self-reported biographical responses on the survey, a subset of the respondents was asked to participate in the study. This was an attempt to include a representative sample of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths with diverse
backgrounds and experiences in the study. Cases for in-depth interviews were selected because they have demonstrated that they were high achievers based on the following self-reported criteria:

1. High school cumulative grade point average of 3.5 or higher;
2. High school class rank in the top 10%;
3. High school AP courses undertaken (three or more) where available;
4. Extracurricular activities (high school and/or college);
5. High standardized test scores (1200 or higher out of 1600 on the old SAT, 1750 or higher on the new SAT, or 27 or higher on the ACT);
6. College attendance and type of college;
7. Awards and honors (high school and/or college); and
8. College and career aspirations.

Although these are some of the characteristics of high-achieving students, all the criteria didn’t need to be present for a youth to be invited to participate in the in-depth interviews, but the greater the number of variables that were present the more likely a youth was to be invited to participate in the study. Youths invited for the in-depth interview had to meet a minimum of four of the criteria. Youths with unusual circumstances (one-parent household, attendance at an urban public high school) who scored below the stated guidelines were included to broaden the sample and the experiences of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths in the study. Therefore, samples selected for the study reflect not only a history of achievement as evidenced from their self-report on the surveys but also incorporated the potential for academic success based on their unique circumstances as evidenced from the survey responses. Cases with a diverse background and experience
increased the possibility of formulating a comprehensive understanding and possible theory of high achievement for second-generation Nigerian youths.

All the youths invited for the in-depth interview described themselves as high academic achievers and ranked themselves in the top 10% of their high school class. Other than self-reports from the surveys, evidence of academic achievement was not verified for high school students in the study. Youths attending or who had attended elite and Ivy League colleges were deemed as achievers because entrance to such colleges was deemed as sufficient evidence of academic achievement. That was also true of the focus group interview conducted among high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths attending an Ivy League college. Participants in this study volunteered and made themselves available for interviews.

It is particularly important to include a diverse sample of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths because no single factor is attributed to the academic achievement of second-generation youths. The inclusion of multiple cases with diverse youths also helped to establish credibility in the findings of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Second-generation Nigerian youths (N = 21) were invited to participate in the in-depth interview, consisting of males (N = 4) and females (N = 17). Eleven youths (eight females and three males) consented to an in-depth interview. An interview guide was used to interview those who responded to calls and email requests for an in-depth interview (see Appendix E). Youths were interviewed in various locations, including in their homes and schools and during a summer gathering.

Parents of high-achieving second-generation youths were interviewed to determine how they perceive the education of their children and to explore their experiences with
schools regarding the education of their children and to compare their experiences to that of the youths. Parental interviews were used to shed light on how Nigerian immigrants negotiate the education of their children as immigrants. When parents of youth participants were included in the parent interview, the youth and the parent were interviewed separately to ensure confidentiality for both of them and to enable the youths to speak freely about their experiences. Questions on the parental interview addressed their reasons for migration to the United States, educational attainment, educational experiences, role in their children’s education, identity, cultural affiliation and activities, intergenerational closure (knowledge of their children’s’ friends), and experiences and perceptions of academic success of Nigerian immigrants in the United States (see Appendix F). Parents were also interviewed in various locations including in their homes, at a social gathering, and at a diner.

A focus group interview of high achieving college-age second-generation Nigerian youths (N=6) was conducted to determine how the participants viewed their experiences as a group. One of the focus group participants had been interviewed individually earlier. She volunteered to find other second-generation students to participate in the study. The interview was conducted on a private Ivy League college in the Northeast region of the United States. The questions posed to the focus group participants were similar to those posed to the individual participants but with a view toward how the students perceive themselves as a group. The questions on the focus group interview guide specifically explored issues of group and individual identity of the participants as well as their beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and their schooling experiences with a focus on the role of parents, peers and school contexts (Appendix F).
The focus group interview was used to reveal consensus on any of the issues from individual interviews and to gain multiple views on different concepts within a group context. The focus group also served as a validity check and a method of triangulation (Morgan, 1988). Youths did not need to be among the in-depth interview cases to participate in the focus group. Participants in the focus group were required to complete the second-generation Nigerian youth survey before participating in the focus group. This enabled the researcher to determine how many youths met the high achieving criteria as defined in this study and to check how they compared with the individual cases in the study.

Before the interviews began, participants were informed that their responses were confidential, that they had the right to withdraw from the study any time without penalty, and that they did not have to respond to any question about which they felt uncomfortable. If they agreed to participate, they signed the consent form. The researcher read the questions from an interview schedule to participants. Each interview lasted a minimum of 45 minutes. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed and sent back to interviewees to verify the accuracy of the transcriptions. Interviewees who detected errors were asked to correct the transcription and return it to the interviewer via email. Most of the corrections were minor errors and were corrected as requested by participants. One parent requested that a comment about her relationship with her children that she made after the interview officially ended be taken out and the researcher obliged.

Because these youths came from a highly educated (Logan & Deane, 2003) and voluntary immigrant group (Ogbu, 1991), the researcher expected that high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths would follow the patterns of similar groups like other immigrant groups.
Description of the Analysis

Data analysis was initiated with the completion of the first interview and was ongoing throughout the duration of the study. As interviews were transcribed, the researcher noted her interpretation of the responses in parenthesis as codes so that respondents could verify the interpretations when they received the transcriptions for member checking and verification. The initial observations were part of the field notes generated after each interview.

Participants were interviewed face to face at least once, and as many participants as possible were interviewed until data saturation was reached. Data saturation occurs when the information from participants had become redundant and has not yielded any new additional reinforcement of previous data or new insight to the phenomena under study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Again, this ensured that a representative sample of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths was obtained in the study. To insure reliability and validity of the data collection and transcription, the researcher sent transcriptions of each interview back to the interviewee via email to check for misrepresentations and errors. This member check (Krefting, 1991) helped to guard against researcher bias and errors. Subsequent follow-up interviews for clarifications were conducted by phone or email.

Transcriptions of in-depth interviews were coded by themes, patterns emerging from the data, and the review of the literature. The researcher used the “code-recode” method in the process of data analysis whereby coded data were re-analyzed after two weeks to see if the coding remained the same (Krefting, 1991, p. 180). This technique was used to ensure that the findings were consistent with the data collected. Interpretations were sent back to the participants as a second lens (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 125) to check that the participants’
realities were accurately interpreted. Interview data, field notes, and observations also
continuously shaped the themes and patterns.

Since the goal of this study was to document the unique educational experiences of
high achieving second-generation Nigerian youths, transferability to other immigrant youths
(Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is not crucial to the findings. A major goal of the researcher was to
understand how one immigrant group experienced education in the United States and to
inspire more research on this group. To facilitate this, *thick descriptions* (Lincoln & Guba, p.
217) of the method and the population and the cases were provided to potential researchers.
Thick descriptions allow for the feelings, actions, voices, and the meaning participants
attribute to their experiences to be heard (Denzin, 1989).

HyperRESEARCH, a computer software program that is used for qualitative and
quantitative analysis of text, graphic, audio, and video materials, was used for analyzing the
data (Hesse-Biber et al., 1991). The software is also capable of testing hypotheses. Although
the goal of this study was not to generalize to all second-generation Nigerian youths,
HyperRESEARCH is a tool that facilitates the process of generating the validity and
reliability of qualitative data (Hesse-Biber et al.).

Transcribed interviews were converted from Word documents to text files and
entered into HyperRESEARCH source files. Data were initially coded according to the
questions asked and the related construct. For example, the question about parental support
was coded as parental support in the initial coding. A total of 99 codes were generated (see
Appendix G). A more focused coding followed in which codes were later assigned to
selected chunks of the data (see Appendix H). Focused coding was salient in the
identification of “themes, concepts, or dimensions of concepts” that emerged from the data
(Hesse-Biber et al., 1991, p. 292). Code categories were modified through elimination, and some were combined as needed. Repeating ideas were identified and were organized into larger themes that connected different codes and constructs.

Ethics Statement

As a Nigerian immigrant woman, the researcher is cognizant of the advantages that accrued to her through easy access to the Nigerian immigrant population and second-generation Nigerian youths. This was crucial to this study because Nigerian immigrants are geographically dispersed and not easily accessible; they do not have ethnic enclaves. She considers herself extremely lucky to be able to have the opportunity to meet Nigerian immigrants and their children in various social gatherings across the State of Connecticut and the nation.

Also, having children who attended Ivy League schools was helpful for her to gain access to high achieving second-generation youths, especially for the focus group interview. The researcher is also accustomed to the social norms, mores, and cultural expectations of the group and will use caution to protect the rights and privacy of the research participants. This is critical for a member of the community of the targeted research population who still expects to belong to that community after the study is completed.

The ethical problem presented in this study was the need to guarantee confidentiality to the participants in the written report. The purpose of the study was discussed with potential participants and the cover letter for the second-generation Nigerian youth survey was given to participants to read (see Appendix A). The informed consent form was required from all participants under age 18 before participants could complete the second-generation Nigerian
youth survey (see Appendices B & C). Actual names of the participants were not used in the data analysis and report.

Participants were asked to choose a code name for the study. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant in the discussions and reporting of the findings if they were unable to come up with a code name. In addition, participants were informed of their rights to withdraw from the study without fear of harm or retribution as well as their right to omit response to questions to which they did not feel comfortable responding.

All forms and instruments used for the study adhered to Western Connecticut State University’s formal ethical protocol and were approved by the Institutional Review Board. All data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s home and will be maintained there until the findings have been published. All data will be accessible only to other researchers enrolled in Western Connecticut State University’s Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership Program for whom the data will prove useful in further comparative analysis. Finally, the researcher conducted her study in an overall ethical manner.

Limitations of the Study

The use of qualitative case studies limited the number of participants in the study, thereby increasing the internal and external validity threats of this study (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). The small sample size, though necessary to get a richly detailed narrative of the participants’ experiences, limited the transferability and generalizability of the research findings to all second-generation Nigerians and other groups (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Second-generation Nigerian youths from lower socioeconomic groups who are struggling in urban inner-city public schools were not included in this study due to the researcher’s inability to access such students. Therefore, their experiences were not reflected in this study.
The participants came from two of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, reflecting a high number of the Igbo and Yoruba groups in the United States but not the Hausa group. High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths in this study also came from a self-selected group of immigrants from the part of Nigeria with a history of high achievement and motivation (LeVine, 1966). Although many high-achieving second-generation Nigerian males completed the survey, many were not willing to participate in subsequent follow-up interview. Thus, participants were mostly females, and the findings reflected the experiences of mostly females. This may present an illusion that the males are not doing well in school, but an empirical study needs to be conducted before such a conclusion can be drawn. The sample was drawn mostly from the social circle of the researcher and from Igbo second-generation Nigerian youths. As a result, the sample reflected primarily those she met at social gatherings. The inclusion of multiple siblings from the same family could be a limitation but it added an opportunity to understand how youths from the same family perceive their academic experiences.

In addition, data collection was based on self-reports, and such responses could be “artificial or slanted” (Isaac & Michael, 1995, p. 137). Although the researcher used attendance to Ivy League and selective colleges as evidence of academic achievement, beliefs and experiences of participants cannot be validated. Researcher bias is a real threat in this study as the researcher is a member of the Nigerian immigrant community with a high achievement motivation and a firm believer in human agency and in self-determination. Personal bias in data collection was minimized through transparency in the data collection and analysis. All instruments including interview questions and coding schemes with examples of coded texts were included in the findings. In addition, the researcher’s
biography as the key instrument in a qualitative study has been included in the study (Li, 2004).
CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS

Research Questions

This chapter discusses the findings of the study. The research questions addressed in this study were as follows:

1. What factors determine the educational outcomes of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian immigrant youths in the United States?
2. What are the effects of personal, family, school, and community factors on the academic achievement of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths?
3. What challenges do high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths face in school, and how do they deal with such challenges, in particular to the challenges of being of Black, of immigrant origin, and high achieving?

Through multiple data sources, this research explored how high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths experience education in the United States. Data for the study were generated from surveys, multiple in-depth interviews of high-achieving second-generation Nigerians, Nigerian immigrant parents, and a focus group interview of college-age, high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths. Additionally, data for students’ profiles were also generated from researcher reflectivity notes. The use of multiple data sources for data triangulation created trustworthiness in the research findings. The use of data triangulations of sources also helped to establish the confirmability of the findings (Krefting, 1991).

The study sample consisted of 11 high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths, aged from 14 to 25 years who had grown up in the United States. Participants were also
required to have completed high school or at least the freshman year of high school.

Participants were selected based on their academic achievement as ascertained from the
survey they completed. Youths were invited to participate in the study if they met four of the
following criteria:

1. High school cumulative grade point average of 3.5 or higher;
2. High school class rank in the top 10%;
3. High school AP courses undertaken (three or more) where available;
4. Extracurricular activities (high school and/or college);
5. High standardized test scores (1200 or higher out of 1600 on the old SAT, 1750 or
   higher on the new SAT, or 27 or higher on the ACT);
6. College attendance and type of college;
7. Awards and honors (high school and/or college); and
8. College and career aspirations.

Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Data generated for this study were
coded using HyperRESEARCH software. Initial coding occurred during transcription as
codes were bracketed off as the data were transcribed, and the transcriptions were returned to
interviewees for member checking. Codes were assigned to data using HyperRESEARCH to
generate a master code list (see Appendix G) after data were coded. Themes were identified
and analyzed for patterns using HyperRESEARCH software.

Findings were presented in three sections. Section one discussed findings on the
factors that determine the academic outcomes of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian
youths, and these findings were discussed according to the themes identified in the study.
The second section discussed the challenges facing high-achieving second-generation youths.
The final section discussed the coping strategies of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths. Findings reflected the analysis of the triangulated data from surveys, in-depth interviews of youths, a focus group interview of youths, and in-depth interviews of parents. Profiles of youth participants in the in-depth interviews were provided because the analysis helped enrich the study. The profiles provided readers with a background of the participants.

Profiles of Youth Participants for the In-Depth Interview

Each youth participant completed a survey, which asked for biographical, demographic, family background information as well the respondent’s opinion about cultural identity. The profiles were generated from the completed surveys, in-depth interviews, and researcher reflexivity notes based on observations. The profiles were listed in order of the interview using pseudonyms the youths chose themselves or the ones assigned by the researcher. The length of the profiles reflected the ages and experiences of the participants. College-age youths had more experiences and therefore had lengthier profiles. In addition, some high school youths were more mature than others.

Freelancer

Freelancer was a 15-year-old sophomore in a suburban high school. His older sibling was a high school senior in a magnet urban school in the city where they previously resided. His younger sibling attended a magnet interdistrict middle school located in the same city they had lived in prior to relocating. His parents purchased a home three years ago in an adjacent suburb and as a result, Freelancer started his high school career in this new setting. He lived with both parents and his two siblings. His parents were from the Igbo group in Nigeria and were college graduates with full-time employment; one as a counselor in a
hospital and the other, in a factory. Freelancer was a very articulate and wise young man who exhibited maturity beyond his age in the way he expressed his views of life. For example, he had come to the conclusion that his education was more important than being cool and created strategies to deal with peer pressure. He indicated that he was friends with everyone but claimed nobody as a close friend.

The tall lanky youth, who identified himself as Nigerian-American, was actively involved in extracurricular activities at school and in the community. He was invited to be a youth representative on the library board in the town he resided in and was the only youth on that board. Consequently, he had been featured in the local newspaper for his community involvement and for being the first youth invited to sit on the library board of his town. His essays frequently were featured in the teen section of the regional daily newspaper, hence his pseudonym. Freelancer indicated that he had a passion for writing and would like to pursue a career in journalism. His parents had tried to guide him to a career in medicine or law because he was a good student and they perceived better job prospects for him in those areas.

Freelancer acknowledged that attendance at an interdistrict urban magnet elementary school did not fully prepare him for the academic rigors of his current suburban high school. As a result, he had to struggle in his freshman year to catch up to meet the school’s expectations. Although his average is in the upper B range, he believes that he can always do better. He reported that his GPA was a 3.7, and he ranked himself in the top 10% of his class.

His address placed him in another high school located in the south end of the town he resided in, but he attended the high school in the north end of town that is perceived to be superior. Minority children in this particular town received waivers to attend the north end
school to bring racial minorities into the north end high school. All that was needed was for the family to apply for its child to attend the school.

Freelancer seemed excited about having other second-generation Nigerian youths who are highly visible and in leadership positions in his high school. This is in contrast to his elementary school years when he felt isolated and teased by other kids. He expressed admiration for the Nigerian community and how it raised its children. He was optimistic that regardless of what career he pursued in the future, he would like to contribute to society.

Amy

Amy was a 17-year-old junior in a highly selective Ivy League college. She was in a pre-med program, majoring in psychology and neuroscience. She was the oldest of four children and grew up in a suburb in one of the Mid-Atlantic States. Amy attended a public high school and described the town’s demographics as changing from all White to a diverse one due to an influx of immigrants and other minorities. Both of her parents were well-educated and employed. Her dad was a physician, and her mother, who had a law degree, was a real estate agent. Her mother was from the Yoruba group, and her dad was Ishan, another group in southwest Nigeria, but she admitted that she identified more with her Yoruba side because of its greater number in the United States. She identified her ethnicity as Nigerian-American but acknowledged the highly contextualized nature of ethnic identity.

Amy was a pleasant and respectful young lady and seemed to have some interest in second-generation Blacks. She was interested in the issue of affirmative action. She generously shared with me a research paper she had prepared on affirmative action. Amy kindly volunteered to help me locate a group of students for the focus group interview conducted on her campus. During the focus group interview, she mentioned that she had
wanted to attend a competitive non-Ivy League college in the Midwest, but when the Ivy League school’s acceptance letter arrived in the mail, she cried herself to sleep. She knew that as long as her parents were paying for college she was Ivy bound, no questions asked and no matter that she wished to attend a different college.

She shared her experiences growing up as the oldest child in an immigrant family, describing herself as a “guinea pig” for her parents. Whereas her parents were very strict with her in her younger years, they later relaxed and allowed her younger siblings more freedom than she ever had. She noted that her parents had been Americanized and had allowed her younger siblings to Americanize as well. She was expected to be a role model for her siblings and received clear expectations of her roles as the oldest child. Her parents often let her talk to her siblings about school and class selections.

Amy was unassuming although she was a high achiever. She graduated from high school with a GPA of 3.71 (unweighted) and 4.40 (weighted). She scored 1430 on the old SAT and ranked herself in the top 10% of her high school graduating senior class. She was a National Merit Finalist, National Achievement Scholar, and a member of the National Honor Society. She had received other awards and participated in other activities, also. She indicated that she was happy to be recognized on a national test like the National Merit Scholarship program. She expressed concern about being racialized by people looking at her achievements as the result of affirmative action rather than of her own efforts.

She continued to be involved in extracurricular activities in college even though she admitted that her involvement took time away from her studies. She was very committed to civic engagement and wanted to help people through her future career as a physician. Amy admitted that while she was growing up, people around her, including her parents, family
friends, and relatives had expected her to be a physician, but she naturally came to like the idea.

Amy had been identified for the gifted-and-talented program when she was in the third grade, skipped the fourth grade. She was not the only high-achiever in her family, however; she had a younger sibling in an Ivy League college. Her two youngest siblings had also been identified for the gifted-and-talented program. She recalled being teased in elementary school for being too young, and for “talking and dressing White.” As a result, she learned to code-switch depending on whom she was around. She acknowledged that code-switching was a way for her to negotiate her multiple environments and identities. Although her parents often expressed concern over her code-switching to African-American vernacular or slang, she argued that identity was highly contextualized and that she could identify herself as an African-American in certain situations. She was concerned that some Nigerian parents have bought into the media portrayal of African-Americans in a negative way and shield their children from African-Americans.

Amy’s mother, with a group of other Nigerian parents, started a Nigerian Parents Association in their school district to help other Nigerians with young children negotiate the school system and expose the younger children to the successful older ones as role models.

*Swoosh*

Swoosh was the last of three children. She was a 17-year-old high school senior. Her older sister was a law student, and her brother was an undergraduate at a local state university.

Swoosh seemed very young for her age, but appeared to be an extremely bright and independent lady. She lived with both her parents who are ethnic Yoruba, but she identified
herself as Nigerian-American. Her mother was an accountant and her father was a director at one of the state’s VA hospitals. He was completing his doctoral studies at the time of this interview.

She attended an urban magnet elementary school prior to the family’s moving to a suburb at the beginning of her middle school years. She subsequently enrolled in a local public school and was selected to attend a math and science magnet high school in the capital of the New England state in which they reside. This was in addition to the local public high school. Swoosh indicated that attending two schools made her school days extremely long. The math and science magnet school was established to encourage and attract suburban students into city schools to foster racial integration.

She complained about the regimentation of the high school curriculum and her inability to explore her interests in the arts. She admitted that she didn’t need to work hard to stay on top of her class. She appeared not to be challenged by her curriculum although she was enrolled in AP classes. When in an elective class, she opted to take it as AP by doing additional work so that she could maintain her class rank and use the credit for college. She admitted that school was easy for her and that she typically completed her homework in school.

Her GPA was 3.9 (un-weighted) and she scored 2010 on the new SAT. She graduated as the valedictorian of her senior class three months after the interview. She rated herself in the top 5% of her graduating class at the time she completed the survey. She was accepted into an Ivy League university where she intended to study engineering. Swoosh aspired to obtain a doctoral degree in the sciences with a career intention in research in the development
of alternate fuel sources. Even though she appeared young and unassuming, she had lofty goals.

*Outlier*

Outlier, who was the oldest participant at 25, grew up on the West Coast and attended a parochial high school in a suburb and an elite private college. At the time of the interview, she had just completed her MS degree in management at a New England Ivy League university and had received a job offer from one of the major financial houses on Wall Street. This interviewee had a deep and broad knowledge about second-generation Nigerians. The researcher had met her while browsing the Web for information on second-generation Nigerians. The researcher came across an article Outlier had written wrote about second-generation Igbo youths not learning their culture because their parents did not teach them enough. The researcher sent her an e-mail explaining my study with an invitation to participate. Her interview, the longest in the group, lasted for more than three hours whereas the others lasted for an average of 50 minutes. She was brilliant, assertive, and extremely articulate.

She was the oldest of four children and grew up with both parents. Her mom was a chemist and her dad, a scientist. Both of her parents were Igbo, and she identified herself as Igbo-American. She convinced her parents to send her to a private high school to get a better education. Her parents took second jobs to do so, and she found a job in high school to help offset the additional expense. She described the isolation she faced in the private high school, as most of the kids were from upper-middle-class homes. She chose to socialize outside school. She used participation in extracurricular activities as a coping strategy and to make friends based on common interests.
In college, her world opened up as she met many African second-generation students in her age group for the first time. She had to negotiate her identity between bilingual Nigerians who grew up in Nigeria with Igbo fluency and her group who grew up in the United States without knowing how to speak the language. There was the issue of who was the authentic Igbo or Nigerian. Even though she identified herself as Igbo-American, she explained that her identification was contextual depending on the audience. She expressed the importance of networking with African-Americans especially for professional purposes.

Her high school GPA was 4.4 (weighted), and she scored 1490 on the old SAT. She was the valedictorian of her class. Outlier pointed out that because of the type of high school she attended and because of her independence, her parents did not have to be much involved in her education. Her mom was now involved in the education of her younger siblings who attend a public school.

She discovered economics and venture capitalism in college. She switched her major from pre-med to economics to her parent’s dismay. Outlier stated that Igbo people did not have respect for business as a college major. She noted that Igbo people’s scope of business was limited to the import and export business often dominated by uneducated people in Nigeria. As a result, Igbo parents discouraged their children from majoring in business.

Nevertheless, she convinced her parents that it was the best field for her. After college, she consulted for a year before pursuing a graduate degree. Her parents eventually began to believe that she could make a living in that field after she opened a consulting firm in preparation for graduate school. After one year—the norm for prospective business school applicants—she applied to an Ivy League college to earn a master’s degree in management.
Upon graduation, she landed her investment banker job on Wall Street. She described herself as an outlier.

Eddie

Eddie was a 17-year-old senior in the magnet component of an urban high school. She exhibited a tremendous level of confidence. When asked how she ethnically identified herself, she went beyond the ethnic identification of Nigerian and included African-American, and she described her traits as being outspoken, charming, and ambitious. Her leadership skills and other qualities landed her one of the two seats as a student representative at the State School Board of Education in the New England state where she resided.

During the interview, she described herself as being in the top 10% of her graduating class and wanting to be a reconstructive plastic surgeon. She could have attended her state university for little or nothing, but she chose to attend an elite private college in the mid-Atlantic region.

Although she was the youngest of four children, she was an independent, determined, and focused young lady. She sees her siblings as models of success to look up to. Her older siblings were college graduates, and two were attorneys. One of her siblings attended an elite private college as well. Although she indicated that she was self-motivated, she did mention that her personal goals and her parents motivated her.

She lived with her parents, both of whom were college graduates. Her mother, who had completed all the requirements for a doctoral degree except the dissertation (ABD), was the librarian of the local community college as well as an adjunct professor there. Her father had a master’s degree in business and was self-employed. Eddie scored 1750 on the new
SAT and reported her GPA as 3.8. She was actively involved in several extracurricular activities and appeared to be very comfortable in her own skin. She believed that she had a voice in the world and would use her voice to express her opinion on important issues. She chose her pseudonym of Eddie. She liked the beat of her own drum and indicated that she wanted to be unique and to leave her mark on this world. This young lady was articulate and a natural leader. She was actively involved in many extracurricular activities.

Humility

Humility was a 19-year-old who had just completed her junior year at a competitive private college in New England. She was the youngest of five children until the family adopted her younger brother. Her older sisters were college graduates; two had graduate degrees.

She was third in her high school graduating class and scored 1220 on the old SAT. No information was provided about her GPA at the time of her graduation from high school. What was remarkable about this student was her determination to focus. She had known since elementary school that she wanted to be a clinical psychologist to help people who did not have access to such professionals. Her desire to go into this field was a result of the counseling she provided to a distressed classmate in elementary school. She was also pursuing a double major in nursing as a backup. She grew up with both parents who are from the Igbo ethnic group. Her mother was a registered nurse, and her father had a master’s degree in engineering. He worked as a high school teacher. Humility was a humble youth. She seemed very sure of what her goals were; she had a clearly defined career path and a road map with a fall back plan.
Joy was the third child in her family and had six siblings. She was an 18-year-old who had just completed her first year in an Ivy League college where her two older siblings were also enrolled. There was pure joy and ecstasy around this youth. Like her older siblings, she attended parochial schools. She was the valedictorian of her senior class and scored 1890 on the new SAT. She reported her GPA at the end of high school career as 4.0 and was very active in several extracurricular activities in high school. Because her parents were devout Roman Catholics, the church played a significant role in her upbringing. She admitted that religion was the center of her life and expressed gratitude to her parents for bringing her up in the church.

Joy was very candid about her experiences. She discussed the challenges of going from an urban parochial high school to an Ivy League college. She had to compete with much better prepared students who had attended private schools and suburban high schools. She was focused on her goal of being a physician with a determination to work harder in spite of her under-preparation in high school.

Both of her parents were from the Igbo ethnic group and were college graduates. Her mom was a high school chemistry teacher and her father was an accountant by training who had recently suffered a major health setback. Her mother ran a language program in which she taught the Igbo language and culture to children born to Igbo parents. The program provided her children the opportunity to learn and teach Igbo language and culture.

Joy had been actively involved in extracurricular activities but reduced her involvement in college. Still, she believed that there were tremendous benefits in getting involved in such activities.
Scholar

Scholar, a sister to Joy, was 20 years old. Like Joy, she attended parochial schools and graduated as the valedictorian of her senior class. She graduated with a 4.0 GPA and scored 1320 on the old SAT. Her parents learned about American schools as they raised her because she was the oldest of seven children. Like Amy, she was the guinea pig like Amy. She was not allowed to socialize outside the home and church in her early years, but her parents relaxed their strict rules when she was in high school. Her mother described her as being another mother in the home because she was very responsible. She assumed the mantle of leadership for her siblings after her dad suffered a catastrophic health setback and her mother’s time was primarily devoted to her father’s care.

She was highly intellectual in her appearance, and she aspired to a career as a researcher in the pharmaceutical field after obtaining a doctorate degree in engineering. She had not only identified her goals and defined them but also she has secured all the financing as a Gates Millennium Scholar to pay for her education up to the doctoral level. She indicated that she realized early on that her parents would be unable to pay for her college education. So she spent hours in her junior year searching for scholarship money. She was also a Jackie Robinson Scholar in addition to the recipient of other awards at graduation from high school.

She was energetically involved in several activities in high school and has continued to be involved in college. She was the second youth to identify herself as Igbo-American rather than Nigerian-American. Her mother, who was an educator, ran an Igbo language and cultural program and enmeshed her seven children in the program. Scholar and her siblings understand Igbo language and can speak and read in the language.
This young man was a brother to both Scholar and Joy. He attended the same parochial high school as his siblings. He was 18 years old and had just completed his sophomore year in the same Ivy League college that both his sisters attended. He was the first college age male in my in-depth interview group. There was a lot of optimism in the air as he talked about his experiences and his future. He had a lot to share and could barely contain his exuberance for his life and his goals.

He bared his soul as he described the academic difficulties in his first year in college that nearly caused him to drop out. In addition to being ill-prepared for Ivy League school rigor, he lacked good study habits and was a social butterfly. Also, after his dad suffered a major health setback that left him incapacitated, Optimist, as the oldest son, returned home to help with his care.

These challenges motivated Optimist to take a good look at his future and to re-examine his major. Initially, he was enrolled in a pre-med program. After being placed on academic probation, he explored other majors and started contemplating majoring in business, public policy, and sociology with a goal of going to law school. He identified himself as Nigerian-American and had a circle of second-generation Nigerians he called his core friends.

He related to me that the hardest thing he ever had to do was to face his parents and to inform them of his decision to change his major. He was surprised that his parents did not express disappointment over this. As the oldest son, his parents had certain expectations of him, as Nigerian parents do have expectations for the oldest son and oldest daughter. He knew he did not want to disappoint his parents. He grew up hearing the expectations from his
parents, relatives, and grandparents. Optimist’s grandfather was a retired state judge in Nigeria. His parents always told him that he could not achieve less than his predecessors or lower the bar.

His mother acknowledged during an interview that they set very high expectations for their children so that if they fall, they can still land on something. Optimist’s resiliency and ability to bounce back from challenges was remarkable. He said he was deeply spiritual and had a wealth of friends. He was easily drawn to people.

Growing up, he was motivated by his parents as well as his siblings. He mentioned that there was sibling competition. At one time, he resented his older sibling, who always overshadowed him in academic performance. As they grew older, they motivated each other; however, he felt he could have done better in high school if he had studied harder. Also, he did not need to study hard in high school as he performed well with minimum effort. He graduated as number seven in his senior year class with a GPA of 3.6 and scored 1340 on the old SAT. In college, he had a rude awakening as he lacked good study skills, which he said were never taught in his high school. As a result, he nearly dropped out and had to learn how to study to overcome his academic difficulties.

This young man clearly had a future in a public sector area. He was vocal, articulate, involved, well informed, and social. He finally found his niche in the social sciences. He acknowledged that he was now happy with what he was studying in college and that satisfaction was reflected in his current grades. Optimist’s excitement about life and the future were visible as he spoke.

Like his older sister Scholar and his younger sister Joy, Optimistic grew up involved in his mother’s Igbo language and cultural program. He discussed at length the value of
second-generation Nigerians’ being able to identify with their roots because it allowed them
to be able to relate to their peers of the same background while strengthening their identity to
be able to relate to the outside world. According to Optimist, those second-generation
Nigerians who were not taught the Nigerian culture lacked the skills to code-switch into
Nigerian cultural patterns in the presence of their Nigerian peers and often avoided their
peers from the same background. His observation was that such youths stopped being
Nigerians as it was too hard for them. He appeared to relish the ability to be able to slip into
multiple cultures and joked about how the second-generation Nigerian youths mimicked their
Nigerian parents in skits during cultural awareness week on campus.

Modesty

Modesty was a 16-year-old senior in a magnet component of an urban high school.
She was born in the United Kingdom and came to the United States with her parents at the
age of five years. They lived in the New York Tri-state area before moving to New England
where her parents purchased a home. She was the oldest of four children and she was getting
ready to apply to colleges. Her GPA was 3.6, and she was ranked in the top 5% of her class.
She scored 1760 in the new SAT. Modesty aspired to a career in pharmacy.

Her father was a mathematics professor. Her mom, who received a degree in business
from a college in the United Kingdom, was at home with her younger children while
pursuing a master’s degree. Modesty was involved in extracurricular activities, and she
volunteered in a daycare center in the city. She was very modest in her appearance and
expression and in the way she described her life, but she was focused on her future and her
goals.
Both her parents were from the Yoruba ethnic group and she identified herself as Nigerian of Yoruba descent. Her mother indicated that after they moved from the United Kingdom to the United States, Modesty was confused about her identity, wondering whether she was British, Nigerian, or American. Her parents reassured her that she was Nigerian because her parents were from Nigeria.

Arch

Arch was the 14-year-old brother of Modesty and was a sophomore in another magnet urban high school in the city where they resided. He originally attended the same magnet high school his sister was enrolled in. Upon discovering that another magnet school in the city was geared towards students interested in the health-related fields, he convinced his parents to allow him to transfer. His parents checked out his findings and allowed him to transfer. The family was new to the area, but that did not deter Arch. He kept his eyes open for opportunities that would help him with his future.

Arch was an ambitious youth who was dedicated to his education. He indicated that his dream was to become a physician. This 14-year-old student knew not only that he wanted to be a physician but also how to achieve that goal. He was the architect of his life, although he came across as young and immature. He sought out different extracurricular activities that would enhance his college and career prospects. He identified some extracurricular activities that would help him to achieve his goal. One of the groups he belonged to had taken him to visit colleges. Arch’s Saturdays were devoted to extracurricular activities.

He reported his GPA as 3.4 and rated himself in the top 10% of his class. He had also participated in after-school college-preparation programs that help youths prepare for and succeed in college. Arch was self-motivated and was diligently working hard towards his
goals. His mother expressed surprise that he would like to be a physician, as she does not believe in pushing kids into any profession.

Like his sister, he described himself as a Nigerian of Yoruba descent. Because he was also born in the United Kingdom and came to the United States at the age of four, he was confused about whether he was British, Nigerian, or American.

Characteristics of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths

The characteristics of high achieving second-generation Nigerian youths were categorized under personal, home, and school components. Personal characteristics were further classified into history of achievement, academic expectations, motivation, career aspirations, ethnic identity, Nigerian identity, and perception of Nigerians as academic achievers. Parental background, parental expectations, home structure and routines, and parental engagement were discussed under home characteristics. Relationship with peers, relationship with African-American peers, relationships with teachers, and relationships with counselors were discussed under school characteristics. The challenges of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths were identified and discussed under peer teasing, high school under-preparation for college, parental pressure, and fear of racialization of their achievements. Fear of racialized achievement meant that people attributed the academic success of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths to race rather than to their efforts.

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths devised strategies for dealing with their challenges. The coping strategies were code-switching, extracurricular involvement, and increased determination and effort. They were resilient and had the social intelligence to
devise practical solutions to their challenges. The youths were adept with problem solving skills and were able to effectively meet the demands of their various challenges.

*Personal Characteristics of High Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths*

*History of Achievement*

All youth participants in the study had demonstrated a history of achievement. Survey self-reports indicated that 10 of the 11 youth participants in the in-depth interview had a GPA of 3.40 or higher in high school and many of them were 4.00 students (Table 1).
Table 1

*Personal Background of Youth Participants in the In-depth Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Type of high school/location</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>High school rank (self-rated)</th>
<th>SAT/ACT score</th>
<th>Career/educational aspiration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freelancer</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Public (suburban)</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Top 10%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>(Ivy League)</td>
<td>Public (suburban)</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>Valedictorian</td>
<td>1430</td>
<td>Physician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swoosh</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>High schoola</td>
<td>Public (suburban)</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>Valedictorian</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlier</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>school</td>
<td>Private (suburban)</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Valedictorian</td>
<td>1490</td>
<td>Investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>High schoolb</td>
<td>Public (urban)</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Top 5%</td>
<td>1750</td>
<td>Physician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Parochial (urban)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Top 5%</td>
<td>1220</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 (continued).

*Personal Background of Youth Participants in the In-depth Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Type of high school/location</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>High school rank (self-rated)</th>
<th>SAT/ACT score</th>
<th>Career/educational aspiration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>College (Ivy League)</td>
<td>Parochial (urban)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Valedictorian</td>
<td>New SAT</td>
<td>1890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholar</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>College (Ivy League)</td>
<td>Parochial (urban)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Valedictorian</td>
<td>Old SAT</td>
<td>1230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimist</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>College (Ivy League)</td>
<td>Parochial (urban)</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Top 5%</td>
<td>Old SAT</td>
<td>1340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>High school (urban)</td>
<td>(urban)</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Top 5%</td>
<td>New SAT</td>
<td>1760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arch</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>High school (urban)</td>
<td>Public magnet</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Top 5%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Physician</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. All are Connecticut residents except for Amy and Outlier.*

*This student is now in Ivy League college. *b*This student is now in an elite private college*
College-aged participants scored 1200 or higher on the old SAT test and 1700 or higher on the new SAT test. With the exception of the one student who rated himself as an average student and yet reported a B+ average, all participants rated themselves in the top 5 to 10% of their high school class. Five participants were valedictorians of their high school classes, and another youth was third in her high school graduation class.

One youth was identified for the gifted and talented program in third grade and skipped the fourth grade. Youth participants reported membership in the National Honor Society and received national recognitions such as National Achievement Scholar, National Merit Scholar, Gates Millennium Scholar, and Jackie Robinson Scholar. All youth participants had received local recognitions, and some youths were nominated for and sat on the library and state education boards in their town and state with the accompanied press exposure. Another youth frequently published in the teen section of the local newspaper.

All youth participants were enrolled in honors and AP classes in their academic courses during high school. When enrolled in an elective, one youth opted to do extra work to earn an AP grade because her school had weighted GPA. The college youths attended Ivy League colleges or selective private colleges. Of the two high school seniors in the study, one enrolled in an Ivy League and another in a highly selective private college. The participant who recently completed her graduate program at an Ivy League college did her undergraduate work in a highly competitive private college.

The focus group interview participants had similar academic background as the individual interview group. Focus group members had high school GPAs of between 3.7 and 4.0 unweighted; and higher than 4.0 weighted (see Table 2). This group had SAT scores of 1300 or higher on the old version and an ACT score of 20 or higher.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Type of high school/ location</th>
<th>High school GPA</th>
<th>High school rank*</th>
<th>SAT/ACT</th>
<th>AP/honors classes</th>
<th>Type of College</th>
<th>Expected year of graduation</th>
<th>College major</th>
<th>Career aspirations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FB</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>(suburban)</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Top</td>
<td>25/614</td>
<td>1310</td>
<td>Ivy League</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>med</td>
<td>MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FN</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>(suburban)</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>20/550</td>
<td>1310</td>
<td>All League</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Studies</td>
<td>degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FA</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>(suburban)</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12/170</td>
<td>1350</td>
<td>League</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>ring</td>
<td>degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NA = Not available (as reported by participants). *High school rank included self-rank and actual rank
Table 2 (continued).

**Personal Background Data of Focus Group Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students’ pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Type of high school/location</th>
<th>High school GPA</th>
<th>High school rank*</th>
<th>AP/ (ACT)</th>
<th>Honors classes</th>
<th>Type of college</th>
<th>Expected year of graduation</th>
<th>College major</th>
<th>Career aspirations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FO</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Private (suburban)</td>
<td>3.7 (unweighted)</td>
<td>Top 10%</td>
<td>22/311</td>
<td>1430</td>
<td>Ivy League</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Pre-med</td>
<td>MD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FM</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Public (urban)</td>
<td>5.0 (weighted)</td>
<td>NA (21)</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ivy Pre-med</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>JD/MPP</td>
<td>International and public in public policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FP</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Parochial (urban)</td>
<td>4.0 Salutatian</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>League</td>
<td>Pre-med</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>Policy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NA = Not available (as reported by participants). *High school rank included self-rank and actual rank.
Academic Expectations

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths had high but realistic academic expectations for themselves. Although the youths demonstrated academic achievement as evidenced by their credentials, many were not content with grades of less than an A. It appeared that obtaining good grades was important to the youths and that they were used to getting a grade of A in all their classes prior to high school and college. They realistically tailored their expectations to meet their goals in different contexts and experiences. Conversely, their expectations were modified according to their experiences and age. For example, when the college-age youths realized that they could no longer obtain an A in all their classes, they adjusted their expectations.

The high school youths who received a grade of less than an A felt that their grades could be better, but they also realized that the most important thing was to put in their best effort. This was reflected in the youths’ responses to the meaning of academic success. Whereas some youths defined academic success in terms of grades, others broadened the definition to include efforts and working hard toward their goals.

To the question, “What does academic success mean to you?”, Swoosh, a high school senior who graduated as the valedictorian of her senior class, indicated that the definition of academic success varied according to individuals. She defined the construct as follows: “For me, it is getting an A, but I know for others it is trying as hard as they can even if they don’t do well—but I never had that problem.”

Freelancer, a high school sophomore responded, “Academic success means trying my best and succeeding. Putting in my best effort into it is what counts. If I get a B+ in
science by putting in my best effort, it means more to me that getting an easy A in English because I am really good in English.”

Arch, another high school sophomore reaffirmed Freelancer’s statement with his response: “Academic success is not really getting As but doing good, working hard in your studies. This is because not everyone gets straight As. They do good in some subjects and not in others. Getting straight As is not everything.”

Modesty, a high school senior, responded with, “Academic success is not getting an A in a class but trying your best until you feel that you learned. Sometimes you get an A in a class but you learned nothing from it. All you did is do your homework and the teacher gave you an A. In other classes you work hard and learn something that will help you in the future, but you will not get an A.”

Another high school youth included social development in her definition of academic success. Eddie, a high school senior, defined academic success thus: “Success doesn’t necessarily mean grades and graduating. Of course you go through elementary, middle, and high school. You want to leave your mark. You want people to know that you lived. It is not just getting an A but proving to yourself that you can prosper as a person. Success is not just academic; it includes social development. It means that you are bettering yourself socially, academically and you are applying the concepts learned in everyday life. It is not learning but applying what you learned.”

The contextualized nature of the meaning of academic success was reflected in the responses of some of the college-age youths. Amy, a college junior, defined academic success as “performing well enough in your school classes to be happy with yourself and to
allow you to achieve your next goal, whatever that might be—graduation from college, being accepted into a graduate school or professional school.”

Another college youth, Optimist, survived a period of academic probation. He thrived academically after he changed his major and study skills. He defined academic success as “to me especially at an Ivy League, I really think it is just graduating. The first step, high school is not good enough. You can’t get far with just a high school diploma. You need at least a Bachelors Degree and right now you probably need more than a Bachelors Degree. Ten years from now, nobody is going to care about what position (class rank) you were, they will about whether you got the degree.”

Outlier, the lone graduate student in the sample, defined academic success as follows: “For me, academic success has gone through many phases. From kindergarten to grade 12, it was about getting into college and about scoring well on the standardized tests because the system is score-oriented. For college, it was getting the tools I needed for a job and positioning myself for the right type of job. In graduate school, it was about acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to be successful on the job. From a sociocultural point of view, it is about making my parents proud; about being distinguished.”

Youths were asked to respond to the question: “How are you doing in school?” the researcher asked this question in an attempt to understand how they perceived their academic achievement. Amy, a junior in an Ivy League college who scored 1450 on the old SAT test, responded to the question as follows: “I guess I am doing fine. I am an average Ivy League student. I did well in high school. College has been a humbling experience. I am a B+ student. I was hoping for a continuation (getting high grades in college as she did in high school), and that didn’t quite happen with my expectation.”
Amy was also involved in several college extracurricular activities because she felt that college was the place to become involved and extend her social network. She also believed that college was the place to enjoy her life, and getting involved made her happy. It appeared that Amy had realized that there were other ways to be successful aside from getting As in her classes and she had embraced extracurricular activities as another way to be successful.

Joy, another Ivy League college youth, who, like Amy, was the valedictorian of her class, responded to the question, “How are you doing in school?”, with, “I think I am doing OK. I started out rough. Because it is an Ivy League college, everything is just harder, and I found out the hard way. So I think I am doing average.” When asked to define average, Joy hesitantly revealed that her GPA was a 3.0 and added, “I have never done average in school. I have always done better than I have done here. Average to me is not what I think I should be. I did better my second semester.” Joy also noted, “I attend an Ivy League college, and everyone else here had done above average in high school. If you are above average here, you are exceptional because everyone is above average”

Another Ivy League youth, Amy shared the same beliefs as Joy. Amy stated, “All of us here are from the top 10% of our high school classes, and of course we can’t all be in the top 10% again. There has to be a redistribution of class position. Some of the courses are tough. However, I am holding my own. I am pre-med with a concentration in neuroscience in the department of psychology.”

Motivation

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths in this study were motivated to achieve academically, and they attribute their motivation to internal and external factors. All
participants had career goals for which they were aiming. Many youths expressed that the
need to meet their goals and the need to help others through their career choices as the source
of their motivation to do well in school.

For example, Amy stated, “My ultimate motivation and goal is to become a
physician-and a good one. I want to help others and I can do that through medicine, which is
the most fundamental way of helping any human being. So my motivation is to help others.”

Arch, who was in high school, also indicated that he was interested in medicine and
was motivated by the desire to help others. However, Arch also mentioned that he wanted to
be a medical doctor because he was good in math and science. He responded to the
motivation question with, “I want to be a medical doctor because I like math and science and
I want to help others.” For Swoosh, it was her career interest that motivated her. She stated
that she was motivated by her goal of researching alternate energy fuels to find other sources
of fuel.

Eddie, another high school youth, indicated that she was “motivated by her goals, the
end, for the long-term effects of education, for what it gets you in life. Learning teaches you
things.” Scholar reaffirmed Eddie’s beliefs with the following statement: “Just knowing that
education is the key. I want to go into the pharmaceutical sciences. Without an education, I
can’t get there. Doing well in school is the key to succeeding and that’s what motivates me.”

Joy, another college youth at an Ivy League university, added that the academic
environment she was in was partly her motivation to succeed. She stated, “Being in a
competitive college setting and my large dreams and goals motivated me to work hard, and I
can’t get there without working hard.”
Humility’s goals as well as her fear of failure motivated her to work hard. Humility, who knew from the time she was in grade school that she wanted to be a clinical psychologist, planned to double major in psychology and nursing as a backup to insure that she would always have a job.

Outlier stated, “I am goal-oriented, ambitious; and I have a personality growing up that was bound for success and I was also motivated by the idea of giving back to the community.” Like Outlier, Humility stated that in addition to her goals, “Another important source of motivation is my parents.”

Optimist talked about the satisfaction of getting good grades as one of his sources of motivation. He stated, “When you get the paper with a 100 on it, you smiled because you did well.” Optimist also added negative consequences as a motivation for doing well in school. He noted that a source of motivation was “primarily knowing that if I came home with poor grades, it would be the end of my life.” When asked to clarify what he meant, he said, “It was the scolding and the complete failure you felt. You were looking toward a beating.”

For Optimist, sibling competition was also initially part of his motivation to do well in school, especially because he had an older sister who did well in school. He described how his siblings motivated him as follows: “Here at my house, it was also a competition with no prize. But at this level, we just do it for ourselves and we are not competing. Out of the seven of us, it is the oldest three children in the household who are in college and close in age because we have always been in school together and feel that you have to be as good as each other. My oldest sister has always motivated me. Part of my motivation to work hard was my sister. She always overshadowed me. At one point, I was bitter toward her for that because I didn’t get straight As. I got As and Bs. I was always involved in things. My parents always
said that the limelight was on my older sister and me because we had to show good examples to the younger ones. For the younger ones, it is easy because they see us.”

Amy also credited her family and her family’s friends as a source of her motivation. She stated, “My motivation comes from my family and their strong emphasis on education.” Amy also indicated that family friends motivated her through their high expectations of her as the oldest child of her parents. Growing up, she often heard comments such as “Oh, you are going to be a doctor like your dad.” As she grew up she realized that she “really” liked medicine and wanted to be a doctor.

Freelancer indicated that his parents were an important source of his motivation. To the question “What motivated you to work hard in school?” he responded, “First my parents. They are always trying to make me get involved, and because of that they put it [instilled] in me at a young age to do my homework and to study. Now I can do it myself. It is a combination of my environment, my cousins, my extended cousins, and the Nigerian community. A lot of them are lawyers, doctors, married, and successful. I don’t want to compete or outshine them; I just want to be successful for me. My classmates also help me to do my best.”

Eddie’s experiences also confirmed what Freelancer said. Eddie stated: “Seeing my sisters and how they succeeded helped to keep me motivated. Also, everyone around me, including relatives and parents, is a source of motivation.” Focus group participants indicated that parents used older siblings as role models to motivate the younger ones.

**Career Aspirations**

Another personal characteristic evident in the finding was that all youth participants had high career aspirations. Achieving such aspirations often required professional training
or attending graduate school. Some youths were motivated to their career aspiration out of a need to give back to the community. Youths indicated career interests in medicine, engineering, pharmacology, psychology, and journalism. Three of them indicated they would pursue doctorates as terminal degrees (see Table 3).

Eight youths indicated that math with a combination of another subject such as English was their academic strength. Seven youths planned for a career in the health and physical sciences. One youth, who indicated that his strength was in the social sciences, had switched his major from pre-med to business and sociology. Another youth, who planned a career in journalism, indicated that English and geometry were his favorite subjects. The youths in high school were as likely to aspire to careers in the health and physical science as the college youths. Females as well males were likely to aspire to careers in those same areas. Of the three males in the sample, one aspired to a career in medicine, and two planned to study journalism, business and sociology. During the in-depth interview, the last two males indicated that they aspired to earn a law degree.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Educational level</th>
<th>Favorite subjects</th>
<th>Least or worst subjects</th>
<th>College major</th>
<th>Career aspiration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freelancer</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>geometry</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>NA*</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>social sciences</td>
<td>chemistry</td>
<td>neuroscience</td>
<td>health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swoosh</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>math</td>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>NA*</td>
<td>Scientist (Ph.D.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlier</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Grad school</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>(Spanish)</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Investment banker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>NA(*)</td>
<td>Physician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>nursing</td>
<td>(Ph.D.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Information is not available because youths are high school students.
Table 3 (continued).

**Academic Interests and Career Aspirations of Youth Participants in the In-depth Interview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Educational level</th>
<th>Favorite subjects</th>
<th>Least or worst subjects</th>
<th>College major</th>
<th>Career aspiration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Math and English</td>
<td>Chemistry and physics</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>Physician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholar</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Physical Sciences</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Chemical engineering</td>
<td>Drug researcher (Ph.D.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimist</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Social sciences</td>
<td>Business and sociology</td>
<td>Law (unsure)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Math and English</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>NA*</td>
<td>Pharmacist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arch</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Math and science</td>
<td>History and English</td>
<td>NA*</td>
<td>Physician</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Information is not available because youths are high school students.*
The focus group participants were also found to possess high career aspirations (see Table 2, previously cited). Three of the focus group participants were in pre-med programs, one was in engineering, and the other two were majoring in Near Eastern studies and in international and public policy. The last two had considered pre-med, and both indicated that they would attend graduate school.

Optimist attributed such career aspiration and educational aspiration to having Nigerian parents. He stated, “It is a testament to our upbringing. It is not just at this college but also at other colleges. There is a certain approach to education that is taught to the children regardless of the household they grew up in. They are taught that education is first. Everyone is going to be a doctor, engineer, or lawyer because these are the professions that are worth more and you are always going to have a job.”

Such parental influence on career paths steered some second-generation Nigerian youths into pre-med programs in college, which also resulted in high attrition rates. As Optimist observed in his college campus, “Of my five closest friends, three started out in pre-med, and two are still there. But of all my Nigerian friends in general, 50% started out as pre-med and now you can easily cut that into half. Everyone discovers that you can’t force yourself into it. If you don’t have it within you, you can’t do it. Even with engineering, I know people who after three years in the program changed their major. If you force yourself into it, it is not going to be your favorite.”

Some youths aspired to careers in fields where a parent was employed. Amy, who grew up hearing, “Oh you’re going to be a doctor like your dad” is interested in pursuing medicine as a career goal. On the other hand, some Nigerian parents want their children to go into a career direction different from their own. One of the focus group participants whose
dad was an engineer told his father he wanted to study engineering, but his father’s response was, “Oh, are you sure you don’t want to be a doctor?” According to this youth, engineering was not an adequate career even though his father is an engineer and engineering is a field desired by many Nigerians for their children.

Such observations indicated that parents steered youths into certain careers for various reasons. Freelancer, who wanted to pursue a career as a journalist, stated that his parents were directing him to certain careers “because of their background and how they grew up. They grew up poor and they are looking for opportunities for their children to get into professions where they will succeed.”

Amy, whose physician dad grew up less privileged, commented that her father was more forceful and strict regarding academic and career achievement than her mom who grew up in a middle-class family in Nigeria. For many high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths, such parental pushing toward certain careers complicated their decision to select a major in college. One youth, Optimist, noted that deciding on a college major was the hardest thing he had to do in his life, especially as he grew up believing he was going to be a doctor and had to face the pressure and disappointment of going home to face his parents when his educational plans changed. He admitted that it was painful for him to go home and inform his parents about his change of college major, as well as the prospect of dropping out of college, because he could not handle physical sciences and chemistry. Meanwhile, he had already changed majors three times in the process of exploring and discovering what he really wanted to do.

Outlier, who recently landed a job on Wall Street as an investment banker upon completing a graduate program at an Ivy League school of management, indicated that her
parents were uneasy when she informing them that she was changing her major from pre-med to economics. She explained that her parents’ uneasiness was due to the negative perception that Igbo people had about people in business because their scope of business was limited to the import and export business. Some youths were determined to pursue their talents while keeping in mind the desire to satisfy their parents. Freelancer noted, “sometimes they [parents] feel I should be going this way or that way, like in a certain profession, like doctor, but I know my talents and what I want to do even though I might still get to the other things I want.” Freelancer speculated that he might attend law school to satisfy his parents’ desire for a trophy degree.

When asked to speculate on why Nigerians steered their children into certain professions such as medicine, law and engineering, Outlier responded, “a part of the construct is being a professional and the ability to get a job in the United States and another is the status. The fact that many engineers in Nigeria prefix their names with engineer this or that, is a good example.” Outlier further noted, “Many Nigerian parents are fixated on careers such as medicine, law, and engineering, and they get uneasy when their children do not go that route. I remember a Nigerian mother pleading with Nigerian parents to allow their children to study what they liked and to follow their interest.” Outlier was speaking from personal experience as she went through switching from a pre-med program to economics, and her parents felt uneasy about her decision.

In conclusion, Humility noted, “It has been my experience as well as the experience of other second-generation Nigerian youths that Nigerian parents are demanding as far as what your goals should be and not allowing you to explore.” In fact, this youth thought it
might be interesting to explore the role of Nigerian parents in how second-generation Nigerian youths set their academic goals as a future study.

*Ethnic Identity*

Survey data showed that the youths in the study claimed a Nigerian-affiliated identity, although during the interview many of them recognized the situational and contextualized nature of their identity (see Table 4). Twelve youths identified themselves as Nigerian-Americans, two as Igbo-Americans, and two identified themselves as Nigerians of Yoruba origin.

Although high-achieving second-generation youths indicated that they were friends with African-Americans whenever possible, they primarily identified with Nigerians. They had met successful Nigerians through their parents and at. Youths such as Amy indicated that she drew her core values from her Nigerian identity but that there are circumstances when she identified herself as Black or African-American. Some youths also believed that Nigerian identity was contextualized.

For example, if they were among other Nigerians, they identified with their ethnic Nigerian identity (Igbo or Yoruba), but in the presence of other Blacks (including African-Americans and other second-generation youths from Africa and the Caribbean), they claimed Nigerian identity. To add to their contextualized identity, Optimist observed that when second-generation Nigerian youths visited Nigeria, their cousins referred to them as Americans but in America, they are Nigerians. He concluded, “Basically, my general conclusion is I am Nigerian-American. It is great. My generation has gotten into that [accepting the Nigerian-American identity].” Referring to camaraderie with other second-generation Nigerians on campus, Optimist added, “I am Igbo, but I say that I am Nigerian,
especially at school. We flow well.” This youth exemplified the optimism found among many of the youths interviewed. The youths appeared comfortable with their identity as Americans of Nigerian descent; yet they recognized the multidimensional and situational nature of identity. One youth indicated that being identified as African-American is also acceptable as all Blacks are of African origin.
Table 4

Nigerian Ethnic and Preferred American Identity of Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student pseudonym</th>
<th>Nigerian ethnicity</th>
<th>Preferred American ethnic identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freelancer</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>Nigerian-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy*</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>Nigerian-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swoosh</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>Nigerian-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlier</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>Igbo-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>Nigerian-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>Nigerian-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>Nigerian-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholar</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>Igbo-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimist</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>Nigerian-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>Nigerian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arch</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>Nigerian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FB</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>Nigerian-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FN</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>Nigerian-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FA</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>Nigerian-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FO</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>Nigerian-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FM</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>Nigerian-American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FP</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>Nigerian-American</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Amy participated in the focus group interview.
Nigerian Identity

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths attributed their academic success to Nigerian identity. This was evident in their identity preferences and how they perceived their Nigerian identity. Youths stated that Nigerian identity was critical to who they were and to their academic success, although they acknowledged their contextualized identity. They attributed positive qualities to Nigerian identity and credited their parents and the Nigerian community for the development of their identity.

Youths also understood the importance of identity and how it influenced one’s views of life. They were keenly aware of the role of perceptions and the negative perceptions of African-Americans in the United States. Outlier made the following comment regarding identity: “I think identity has an impact on self-perception. Perception is very important, and I think that is what holds African-Americans back. If you start thinking about or becoming absorbed in the mentality that the whole system is against us, then you cannot succeed. If you have an identity aligned with the Nigerian mindset to succeed, you will. That is not found in African-Americans. You need the mindset that is focused on achievement. The mindset that the White people are not against us, Nigerians do not have this. I feel that Nigerians coming from Nigeria feel they are capable of anything. They may not necessarily feel inferior though their behavior may say that, but they don’t feel they can’t do chemistry or engineering or anything because they are Black.” It appears that the youths in this study grew up believing equally that they can achieve in school and that they need not be inhibited by obstacles.

Outlier, the oldest participant, shared her experiences regarding her Nigerian identity. When asked whether being Black or Nigerian was a problem for her in school. She responded, “I think being Nigerian has been an advantage, especially today. A lot of the job
opportunities I have had are because I am Nigerian. I think there is discrimination against African-Americans in hiring, especially in investment banking, and Nigerians dominate that field. For me starting in college, it was always an advantage to say I am Nigerian. People in America have an obvious bias against African-Americans. I feel that I get a very positive response when I say that I am a Nigerian. I definitely feel that identifying as a Nigerian has been a professional advantage. I went for an interview with a Japanese bank and once they found out that I was Nigerian, one of the interviewers told me about a Nigerian he went to school with and how smart and intelligent the Nigerian schoolmate was. It is an image problem. Whites and Asians see Africans as being different from African-Americans. It is a problem of institutional bias in hiring.”

Outlier also noted that from personal knowledge, Nigerian immigrants have lived in either White America or Black America unless parents sheltered the children, and that has influenced the academic achievement of second-generation Nigerian youths. She speculated that the low performing and badly behaved second-generation Nigerian youths tended to live in predominantly inner-city neighborhoods where they were exposed to poor African-Americans. She believed that the exposure of these second-generation Nigerian youths to non-Nigerian identity contributed to the poor academic performances of the youths. This observation required further exploration.

Perceptions of Nigerians as Academic Achievers

Some youths stated that being around Nigerians meant that they were expected to do well in school. They have observed their parents, relatives, and family friends who did well and had internalized that being Nigerian meant doing well in school. As Joy stated, “I am used to being around Nigerians, and you are expected to do well.”
Being around Nigerians meant exposure to young and adult Nigerian role models. Freelancer was visibly excited when asked if he considered Nigerians successful. He responded with a resounding yes and further elaborated, “Even at my school, there are four Nigerian kids, and they are doing well. One of them has been on the honor roll for four years and heads three clubs as the president. Another one is so smart and popular that everyone knows her by name. It is common with Nigerians. I see them at school, church, and the conventions (Nigerian cultural conventions).”

High-achieving second-generation Nigerians consider other second-generation Nigerian youths to be successful in academics. All youth participants indicated that they knew some successful Nigerians through their parents. Five college youths indicated that in college, their knowledge base regarding Nigerians increased through contact with their peers. The youths’ perception of Nigerians and their academic prowess also changed as a result of college experience. As the youths in this study primarily attended Ivy League colleges, the focus group commented that Nigerian youths were not particularly academically talented as they did not stand out for academic performance on campus, but in terms of their numbers in the Ivy League colleges, they were academic high-achievers.

To the question, “Do you know any successful Nigerians and how did you meet them?”, Amy responded, “I know successful Nigerians mostly through my parents. When I came here (to an Ivy League college), I met even more and I learned about what their parents do and how they are successful. Most of the other Nigerian kids that I talk to have experiences and conclusions similar to mine, which is they know many professional and successful Nigerians no matter the part of the country they are from. So I have just come to assume that perhaps many Nigerians all over the United States are generally well off and
doing well. But I know of people, mainly second-generation Nigerians who have ended up in jail or sent to military school or something similar; however, they usually seem to be the black sheep of the family and the rest of the family is doing OK. In most of the cases, the Nigerians are lower-middle-class, instead of the upper-middle-class that I consider myself to be a part of. However, they are still making a living- and I wouldn’t consider them really lower class, like living in section 8 or something.”

Optimist observed a high proportion of second-generation Nigerians in elite colleges. When asked whether he considered Nigerians successful in academics, Optimist, an Ivy League student, chuckled and responded, “Most definitely! It is one of the biggest jokes and complaints at school. It’s been said that when you walk into a room of 11 Black students on this campus, 5 or 6 are Nigerians, 3 are Afro-Caribbean, and the rest are Blacks (African-Americans). It is a testament to our upbringing. It is not just at this Ivy League college but also in other colleges.” It was evident from the responses to perception of Nigerians in academics that high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths perceived Nigerian identity positively.

Home Characteristics of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths

Parental Background

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths in the in-depth interview group shared some similar characteristics in their family background. They grew up in two-parent homes and their parents were college graduates, many with graduate or professional degrees (see Table 5). The parents were gainfully employed and from the nature of the jobs they did, were in the middle- or upper-middle-class income strata. Survey data indicated their parents
Table 5

*Family Background of the Youth Participants in the In-depth Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student pseudonym</th>
<th>Nigerian ethnicity</th>
<th>Family structure</th>
<th>Mother’s education</th>
<th>Father’s education</th>
<th>Mother’s employment</th>
<th>Father’s employment</th>
<th>No. of children in family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freelancer</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>2 parents</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>Blue collar</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>2 parents</td>
<td>school</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>Realtor</td>
<td>Physician</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swoosh</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>2 parents</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>student</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>VA hospital</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlier</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>2 parents</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Chemist</td>
<td>Scientist</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>2 parents</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>2 parents</td>
<td>BSN</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>RN</td>
<td>Engineer/teacher</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 (continued).

*Family Background of the Youth Participants in the In-depth Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Nigerian ethnicity</th>
<th>Family structure</th>
<th>Mother’s education</th>
<th>Father’s education</th>
<th>Mother’s employment</th>
<th>Father’s employment</th>
<th>No. of children in family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>2 parents</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Accountant/self-employed</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholar</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>2 parents</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Accountant/self-employed</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimist</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>2 parents</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Accountant/self-employed</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>2 parents</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>Grad student</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arch</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>2 parents</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>Grad student</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
came to the United States to further their education and most of them received their college education in the United States. Whereas four youths grew up in a suburb, seven of them lived in an urban setting. But five of the seven urban dwellers grew up in two families.

The focus group interview participants shared family backgrounds similar to those of the members of the in-depth individual interview group. Parents of the focus group were also college graduates, but had more professional and graduate degrees than their counterparts in the individual interview group (see Table 6). All focus group participants grew up in a two-parent household. The parents also came to the United States to further their education.

Fathers of the focus group participants had professional degrees and professional jobs. A disproportionate number of their mothers had professional degrees compared to the individual in-depth interview participants. All mothers had professional jobs, but one was self-employed. As with the in-depth interview participants, parents of the focus group participants were in the middle- or upper-middle-class income strata. Whereas two focus group participants grew up in urban settings, four of them grew up in a suburb. A disproportionate number of the focus group participants grew up in the suburbs in comparison to the individual in-depth interview group.
Table 6

*Family Background of Focus Group Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student pseudonym</th>
<th>Nigerian ethnicity</th>
<th>Family structure</th>
<th>Mother’s education</th>
<th>Father’s education</th>
<th>Mother’s employment</th>
<th>Father’s employment</th>
<th>No. of children in family</th>
<th>Neighborhood type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FB</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>2 parents</td>
<td>BS/RN</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>RN (Director)</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FN</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>2 parents</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FA</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>2 parents</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FO</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>2 parents</td>
<td>Law school</td>
<td>MD</td>
<td>Realtor</td>
<td>Physician</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FM</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>2 parents</td>
<td>Pham. D.</td>
<td>MD/PhD.</td>
<td>Pharmacist</td>
<td>Physician</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FP</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>2 parents</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey data showed that most of the parents (mothers) interviewed obtained their college education in the United States (see Table 7). During the interview, participants indicated that they came to the United States to join their husbands who were pursuing their education. This supported survey data completed by the youths. One mother was in the United States on a Nigerian government-sponsored scholarship, pursuing her education when she met her husband who was also a student. All parent participants had lived in the United States for at least 10 years. One parent had resided in the United States for more than three decades.

All the mothers interviewed had a college degree and all but one had professional jobs. The exception was at home with her children. During her interview, she indicated that she was enrolled in a master’s degree program with the anticipation of securing employment afterwards. She came to the United States with a bachelor’s degree from the United Kingdom, revealing during the interview that it was difficult to secure employment in the United States with a degree from a foreign country. After attempting to gain employment after she arrived in the United States, her husband told her to stay home with their children.
### Table 7

**Background of Parent Participants (Mothers)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent pseudonym</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Length of residence in US</th>
<th>Reason for immigration</th>
<th>Pre-immigration education</th>
<th>Current educational level</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FB</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Since 1997</td>
<td>Came from the UK</td>
<td>BS from the UK</td>
<td>Pursuing MS</td>
<td>Stay-at-home mom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(mother of Arch and Modesty)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FN</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Since 1979</td>
<td>Join husband</td>
<td>RN</td>
<td>BSN</td>
<td>Nurse supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(mother of Humility)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Since 1987</td>
<td>Join husband</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Social worker / counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(mother of Freelancer)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>in a health care facility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

137
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent pseudonym</th>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Length of residence in US</th>
<th>Reason for immigration</th>
<th>Pre-immigration education</th>
<th>Current educational level</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FO (mother of Joy, Optimist and Scholar)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Since 1986</td>
<td>Join husband /</td>
<td>3 years of</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>MA Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FM (mother of Eddie)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Since 1977</td>
<td>Join husband /</td>
<td></td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>MA/ABD Librarian / adjunct professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FP (mother of Swoosh)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Since 1979</td>
<td>For education</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parental Expectations

Parental expectations were evident also in some of the actions of Nigerian parents in ensuring the academic success of their children. Nigerian parents expected their children to work hard, to do well, and to behave properly in school. As middle-class, educated parents, they emphasized education at home. All the youths understood the value and importance of education early on their lives. A common trend that ran through all the responses was that from early on, as far as the youths could remember, they were expected to do well in school, and their parents did not accept any excuses. As Joy stated, “My parents promoted education. They expected us to do well.” She also noted that it was assumed that she would do well in school or something was wrong, and that belief applied to all her siblings.

Freelancer described his parents’ reaction when he approached them about switching out of honors chemistry because it was too hard. His parents convinced him to stay in the class because he was doing well overall and told him that not doing well in honors chemistry was “not the end of the world.”

The drive to do well academically was part of the upbringing of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths. Amy noted, “My parents had instilled in me respect, discipline and the importance of academic success.” Nigerian parents also expected their children to take the highest level of classes they could get into. Amy also stated, “My parents just assumed that we would take the highest level [of courses]. If your parents put emphasis on education when you’re young, the kids will get ahead.”

Nigerian parents also expected and supported their children to do well in school. As Scholar noted, “It was part of my upbringing. Being Igbo-Nigerian, school was integral. They [Nigerian parents] understood that education was the key to success in this country and
they are 100% supportive.” Amy also stated that her parents “instilled the values to try your best because they knew that we could do it.”

In addition, Nigerian parents had behavioral expectations for their children in school. When parents were asked if they had experienced any problems with their children’s school, one parent answered, “No, I have never experienced any such thing where the kids are going to school. Also, partly I may say that because of the way our children were brought up, they know that misbehaving in school is unacceptable.”

Another parent had this to say in response to the same question: “It depends on you and the kids. If you let your kids understand the purpose of school, and that it is to learn, not make friends or disturb the class, they won’t have any problem with their teachers. They have to respect teachers, not just their parents. They need to understand the importance of being where they are. No teacher will pick on them if they are well-behaved.” This parent raised her children to value education and the opportunity they had to be educated but valued the role of teachers.

One parent recited a quote she raised her children with. She stated, “We are your parents, we are here to support you, and your job is to study. We are not asking you to pay us money. Your job is to go to school, listen to the teachers, come home, and do your homework. You are not going to school for me. That homework that is too hard doesn’t count.” She continued, “One thing that helped is that my kids studied together and helped each other as soon as they got back from school.”

To ensure proper behavior from their children, Nigerian parents knew the friends of their children and also monitored who their children were friends with. One parent described her monitoring strategy as follows: “I know their friends, and I met them at school, A few of
them they brought home. “This parent believed that friends had an influential role on whether children listened to their parents and did well in school or not. As a result, she monitored the peers her children associated with. When asked how she monitored her children, she responded, “I always asked them if their friends did their homework today, and I monitored the phone calls they get to know who was calling and why the person was calling. Is the person having the same problem with the homework as my child? Is the homework being discussed? Also, going to the mall was forbidden in my house unless you were going to buy something. You don’t go to the mall to start walking around as some people do in this country. You go to the mall to shop.”

**Parental Engagement**

The oldest youths in the sample reported that their parents were not actively engaged with their school when they were growing up but had witnessed an increase in the level of their parents’ engagement with the education of their younger siblings. Participants attributed that trend to parental lack of understanding of the American educational system when they were growing up. Some youths noted that the children’s motivation and the type of school the children attended dictated parent-school engagement rather than the birth order. Nigerian parents were engaged with the schools more frequently if the children attended a public school where it was easy to fall through the cracks or if the children were unmotivated.

Freelancer, who started out in a public school noted, “My mom was involved in the PTA and was in contact with the teacher. Now I think that I can take care of myself but I tell them what is going on.” During her interview, Freelancer’s mother confirmed his statements. She described her engagement with her children’s education and school involvement as follows: “From kindergarten until my children finished primary school and were in high
school, I was active in the PTA, and I was involved in activities in their school. I sneaked into their classrooms and checked with their teachers to make sure that they were doing what they were supposed to do. I also checked with the principals. I was reading to my children when they were young. They were able to read before they started kindergarten. I still help them with the small knowledge I have. I still discuss their education with them.”

This parent realized that she was unable to provide direct help with the assignments her children brought home. So she supported her children in other ways. She indicated that when she discussed school with her children, she asked them about the type of homework they had and provided some input as needed. She believed that her active involvement and presence in her children’s school helped her children to do well in school as she got to know the teachers, principal, and other kids in her children’s classes. Her beliefs were shared by other Nigerian parents who suggested that their presence in the schools helped their children to do well in school. Nigerian parents believed that their presence in the schools made their children comfortable with their identity.

The mother of Arch and Modesty, who was engaged early in her children’s school, had this comment about her school engagement and the value of her presence in the schools: “I visit their schools. From elementary school, kindergarten to grade one, I took them to school. They need you with them. It builds their confidence to stay in school. I chaperoned school activities and did read aloud for the elementary school ones. I attended most school activities though it is now tougher with my studies but I make sure that I do all I can do.”

This mother, who was a fulltime mother, went on to describe what she did to stay engaged. “I supported them in their homework. In the beginning of each year, I tried to know their teachers and relate with the teachers to let them know that I am one of the student’s mothers.
I get some of the syllabus and help my kids before they go back to school. I make my children understand the meaning of time management in life and to understand that one can never waste his time and to make effective use of time.”

Another youth, Swoosh, who also started out in an urban public school, indicated that her dad was an active member of the PTA in her elementary school years but her parents were not as involved in her high school years, although her mother was frequently in touch with the counselor so that they could talk. Her school was a suburban one, but she also was attending a special science and math inter-district urban high school. She also stated that her parents have left her to her own devices in high school. When her mother was interviewed, she pointed out that Swoosh’s high school did not encourage parental engagement and she missed not being as involved in her high school as she would have wanted to. The high school Swoosh attended invited parents in for open houses in the beginning of the year, and that was the only opportunity parents had to visit the school without a special appointment.

When Swoosh’s mother was interviewed, she stated that when her children were younger, both she and her husband were actively engaged with the education of their children. She noted, “With all of them, we made it a duty to be engaged. With the first and second ones, we lived in a city and we took the opportunity to go for their report card conferences whether the kids were doing well or bad. We wanted to know their teachers and ask questions. Being that they were in football and the marching band in high school, I was involved in the band parents selling things at the concession stand at band events, did bake sales and traveled with the group to competitions. With the third child, we moved to this suburb [name omitted for privacy]. We always struggled with the fact that they didn’t have conferences during report card in this school district. You went at the beginning of the school
year as a group for open house, not on a one-on-one basis, and that was it. You were allowed a parent conference if your child was not doing well. That didn’t sit well with us. For six years, I went in for parent conferences for her. I don’t think [this method] correct. To me, it was not a good idea even though my kid was doing well. I would have preferred to know the teachers. I did not have any interaction with the school in the last two years of her high school other than going to the early open house. I did not enjoy that. In the first two years in high school, she was in marching band and I went to parents’ meeting but stopped after two years.”

Joy, the third of seven children, indicated that her parents were “not necessarily involved in school but it was assumed that I had to do well or something was wrong.” Another youth scholar, and older sibling of Joy said, “My mom always wanted to get involved but couldn’t because she had to work. And my dad had to work especially in elementary school when we had the PTA meetings. My mom had the intentions but life was hard. When she did come, she made her face known and everybody recognized her and knew who we were because there are so many of us.”

Scholar’s mom reiterated what her daughter said when she was interviewed but indicated that whenever the schools called upon her for anything, she tried to respond. She explained that she was completely involved when her children were young and when she was a student and didn’t have to work. She had gone to perform cultural activities for her children’s school. She also made sure that she went in to meet the teachers. One of her children, Optimist, summed up her school engagement with the following statement: “Basically, I have a large family. In general, my parents weren’t available. For parent-teacher
conferences, they made sure they were there to meet the teachers and to see what we were doing.”

Some parents were not as engaged with their children’s schools for other reasons. Outlier, the oldest of four children, pointed out that her parents did not understand how the American educational system worked. Therefore, her parents relied on her to often lead the way. She was the one who researched better schools around her community and convinced her parents to send her to a private Catholic school. As a result of her self-determination and self-motivation, her parents did not have to become engaged in her school directly. Her mother taught her to be self-reliant by asking her to use the dictionary whenever she asked her for the meaning of a word she read at a young age. Outlier also pushed her parents to enroll her in a community college while she was in high school in order to challenge herself. Outlier believed that because of her innate personality and drive to succeed and the type of school she attended, her parents did not need to directly engage with her school. Unlike her younger siblings, who were attending a public school and were not as motivated, her parents were actively engaged with the school to make sure her siblings were taking the required courses and being challenged in preparation for college.

Outlier’s experience was similar to Amy’s. Amy, the oldest of four children, stated that as the oldest child, she was a guinea pig for her parents. Her parents did not actively engage with her school but she noticed a tremendous difference between her mother’s engagement with the school during her tenure and that of her siblings. Outlier attributed the increased parental engagement of her parents to the fact that her mom knew more about how the system works from the experience of raising her. In addition, her siblings, who attended a public school, were not as motivated as she was. She believed that the level of motivation of
the child and the type of school the child attended mitigated the level of parent-school
e ngagement of Nigerian parents. As she observed, “Public schools are bigger and it is easier
to fall through the cracks, like taking regular courses rather than taking higher level courses.”
Her mother became more actively involved to make sure that the counselors did their job.

Amy attributed her parent’s lack of engagement to being immigrants and a lack of
awareness about how the American educational system worked. Her mother had since
become more engaged with the schools her younger siblings attended and was instrumental
in rallying other Nigerian parents in their school district to form a Nigerian parents’
association to promote the interests of their children.

*Non-School Parental Engagement*

There were various ways that Nigerian parents engaged their children academically
both at home and outside the home that were not visible or known to the schools. Non-school
engagement was defined in this study as the ways that Nigerian parents engaged their
children academically without the involvement of the schools. In addition to the expectation
to do well in school, Nigerian parents supported their children to do well in school morally,
financially, through home structure and routine, by providing enrichment education, and by
being role models to their children.

High-achieving second-generation youths talked about the importance of having
routines and structure early in their lives. They also valued knowing that their parents were
there to help them with their homework when needed. For example, Eddie mentioned that the
routines she had were helpful. She stated: “The routines I had, especially in elementary and
middle school, helped. My dad always helped me with math and my mom always helped me
with the science projects. They both used their strengths to build my character and work ethic, which taught me to work hard.”

Some youths indicated that they did not need their parents’ help with homework in high school, but their parents pushed them to do their best and taught them time management. For example, Humility indicated that she did not often need homework help from her parents but when she asked for help, her dad explained more than she ever needed. Modesty stated that other people that played a role in her academic success were her parents, who taught her to manage her time. Her parents also taught her how to stay focused and determined and to always think of the future. Arch, a younger sibling to Modesty, stated that their father, a math professor, always helped with math homework.

Home Structure and Routines

The youths had daily scheduled activities, and homework was built into their daily activities along with household chores and extracurricular activities. For example, Amy and Outlier reported that they had house chores as part of their daily routines and that it made them more responsible than their peers. Their parents did not need to be home for homework to be done, as that was understood by all the youths. Nigerian parents established routines and structure for their children. One parent noted, “I had some rules when they were younger. Before 8 p.m., homework was done and they had to go to bed early and get up early, especially when I was in school. That helped me to study when they were younger.” She also indicated that from the time they were in kindergarten through to eighth grade, her children could not watch TV during the weekdays. This mother admitted that her children were able to stay up until midnight when they were older. Her son, Freelancer, mentioned during his interview that he stayed up till midnight or until his homework was completed.
Another parent noted, “We did set the rule that after school was snack, nap if needed, and homework, but you couldn’t do homework past 9 PM with the exception of if you had a band practice or game. There was a rule that 9 p.m. was bedtime, unless you had a game. By the time we were ready for dinner, homework was done and we would check it, and they could read for another half hour before going to bed.”

One parent, the mother of Swoosh, explained her rationale for TV rules for her children. “We looked at the hours that American kids watched TV and it depends on how you were raised. You didn’t spend that much time on TV. From others we knew and we saw how many hours they spent on TV and felt it was not what we wanted our kids to do. We wanted to interact more with them rather than have them sitting in front of the TV.”

Amy described the TV rules in her house as follows, “In elementary school and middle school, dad had no TV days. On three of the five week days, you picked may be two programs you wanted to watch during the week. Dad did not like the values or rather, the lack of values portrayed on American television.” Other youths shared similar TV rules growing up but added that even when they were allowed to watch TV, they did not have the time for TV, as they were often busy with other activities.

Optimist described the TV rules at his home as follows: “Basically, no TV was allowed when we were growing up but as I got closer to college age, my parents became more relaxed with TV. It was obvious that at this point we knew how to handle ourselves and the TV wouldn’t interfere. We never really had a need for TV because we were always doing something. I was at basketball games or playing my game upstairs, especially during primetime shows. I was tired when I got home anyway, unless it was the weekend.”

Optimist’s mother validated his statement regarding the TV rule. She stated, “They just have
to do all the homework above and beyond. When they were growing up, they were only allowed to watch TV on the weekends. During the week, when they finished their homework, they read. They could not isolate or lock themselves up to watch TV.”

Another parent, the mother of Swoosh, noted, “When they were young I remember we had a rule on no TV during the week from Sunday to Thursday night because they need to focus on their study, homework, sports activities, and extracurricular events at the school. During the weekends were not a problem and they could stay up to watch TV as long as they get up in the morning to do their chores.” Swoosh, the valedictorian of her class, admitted during her interview that in high school that she spent a lot of time watching TV and had to get her homework done in school before she got home.

The youths acknowledged that the financial the support they received from their parents allowed them to excel in school. Outlier acknowledged that even though she was self-motivated, her parents were very supportive financially; they had to get second jobs to pay for her private high school education. She stated, “My parents sacrificed a lot to put my siblings and me in private school. It was not easy for them being lower-middle-class background then. It was hard to pay for the education for my siblings and me and so my parents took extra jobs and sacrificed.” Her parents also paid for her to take courses at the community college while she was in high school.

Amy, who attended public suburban schools from kindergarten through 12th grade, acknowledged that her parents were supportive in paying for an Ivy League education in addition to the other types of support they gave her prior to college. For example, she indicated that her parents made sure that her homework and projects were done and took her to the library when needed. Even when her parents could not give direct help, like when she
took calculus, they supported her indirectly by supporting her morally to make sure she did well.

Parents Moral Support

Some parents supplemented school assignments with parental assignments. For example, Joy, whose mother taught science in the high school, remembered being in the second grade and her mom gave her a science project from her school to do. Her dad took her to the science and math institute and to summer and Saturday enrichment programs in the sixth and seventh grades. As a result, she was always ahead of her classmates in the middle school.

For the youths that needed extra challenges, parents paid for college courses while the youths were in high school. Outlier’s parents paid for community college courses while she was still in private high school, which they also paid for.

Amy remembered her dad making up writing assignments out of her summer activities. For example, if she was taking swimming in the summer, she had to research how to build and maintain a swimming pool. Some of the parents interviewed also indicated that they created mom’s assignments to supplement the school’s curriculum and to challenge their children. Nigerian parents were resourceful and creative when resources were scarce. One focus group participant remembered one summer she did not have anything to do with her siblings. Her parents hired her to teach her siblings. She designed a curriculum she used for the summer. She believed she learned responsibility from that experience.

Some youths sought their own enrichment programs when their parents were not well informed. Arch, who had recently moved with his family to his current state of residence, took the lead to transfer to a health magnet high school of their public school system and
found a Saturday enrichment program for college-bound youths. He has been able to visit colleges through this Saturday enrichment program and credited this program as part of his motivation to achieve.

Finally, high-achieving second-generation youths indicated that their parents were their role models and that they emulated the work ethic of their parents. Outlier summed up what she learned from her mother with, “My mom, she was going to college and working. When I was young, any time I asked her a question she told me to go and do it myself. Figure it out, look it up in the dictionary.” She indicated that such responses helped her to be independent and self-reliant. Outlier’s mother’s experience was not unique, as all the mothers interviewed for this study attended college while they had young children and some worked outside the home as well. Eddie also stated that her parents were her role models, and both her parents used their strengths to build her character and work ethic, which taught her to work hard.

**Cultural Socialization**

Cultural socialization was the process through which high achieving second-generation Nigerian youths were introduced to Nigerian values and culture. Parents exposed their children to Nigerian culture through a variety of ways. Nigerian immigrants belonged to cultural associations, and they brought their children to cultural celebrations. One youth, Outlier, indicated that her desire to give back to the community was inspired by her attendance at cultural events with her parents. These events typically engaged in fundraising activities to help groups in Nigeria.

Three of the youths spoke of how they had lived and embraced Nigerian culture without knowing it. They had participated in various activities and gatherings. They took part
in religious activities such as Igbo Mass for the Nigerian Catholic community. Three of the youths were actively engaged in their mother’s Igbo language and cultural program as counselors and dancers, and their circle of friends in their early years came from that group.

All youths indicated that they had participated in Nigerian cultural activities. They attributed the Nigerian cultural socialization as being important in their approach and outlook and their drive to succeed. Optimist noted that, “there is a certain approach to education that is taught to the children regardless of the household they grew up in. They are taught that education is first. Everyone is going to be a doctor, engineer, or lawyer because they are the professions that are worth more and you are always going to have a job.”

Outlier affirmed Optimist when she said that part of her motivation was to make her parents proud. She stated, “From a sociocultural point of view, making my parents proud, being distinguished is part of my motivation for doing well. The Nigerian community focuses on doing well and distinguishing itself. They refer to what their children are doing because Nigerians are competitive. Nigerian parents want to say they have a daughter or son who went to such and such a school.”

Scholar commented that second-generation Nigerian youths were socialized to achieve. She stated, “I feel that because of our upbringing, education is so integral to an Igbo child’s upbringing. We are predisposed to achieve because it is encouraged. I don’t think it is a one size fits all as circumstances are different, but because of our upbringing, we have a tendency to want to do well in school.” Scholar attributed the tendency to do well among second-generation Nigerians to their upbringing and speculated that there was a correlation between the upbringing and outlook in life and academic pursuit among second-generation Nigerian-Americans.
Some youths noted that exposure to Nigerian culture, which valued education, provided them with a foundation in life. Scholar noted, “being Nigerian gave me a culture from which to jump off. I was taught values and to value education. I learned to adjust. When I realized that I was ill-prepared for college in high school, I didn’t jump [participant attended an urban parochial high school and felt that the school did not fully prepare her for the academic rigors of an Ivy League college]. Rather, I had to work harder.” Another youth, Eddie, noted that Nigerian culture influenced her perspectives in life. She stated, “My culture had strengthened me. Igbo culture is very strong. It has a lot of values. It has made me strong and has built my character to be tough and to be able to take the punches. I have learned not to cry over spilled milk. I have matured a lot in comparison to my friends.” Eddie also felt that exposure to older Nigerians helped her to mature as they used proverbs to teach her about real life. Another youth, Freelancer, also extolled the value of Nigerian community. He believed that the extended family found in those communities taught the children to work together and be proud of who they are.

Optimist, one of seven children, was active in her mother’s language and cultural programs and attributed his success in life to Nigerian cultural activities. He spoke highly of the importance of exposing second-generation Nigerians to Nigerian culture, as it was a key component of his success. He stated, “I encourage Nigerian parents to expose their kids to it [Nigerian cultural activities]. I see a few kids on campus that weren’t exposed to it and they look awkward around those exposed to the culture. When you are growing, at a certain age you realize that you are different from other Blacks because of your culture and name and you accept it or reject it. Diversity is now celebrated and professors ask you your experiences and they love it. The kids [second-generation Nigerians] who weren’t exposed want to learn
it and they can’t because it should have started early.” Optimist also commented that second-generation Nigerians need peers with a similar background in this “crazy world we live in.”

Outlier reaffirmed the need to teach second-generation Nigerian youths their culture and to involve the youths in Nigerian gatherings. She indicated that youths often felt left out in Nigerian events and she believed that the youths should be included in Nigerian events and should be taught to take ownership of Nigerian culture for the next generation. She emphasized the need to transmit the “mindset” that youths could achieve to second-generation Nigerian youths. She noted, “Nigerians in Nigeria don’t feel inhibited. Even for Nigerians living in the United States, that mindset is transmitted, but it goes back to Nigeria where growing up in the majority is different from being in the minority.”

It was evident from the responses of the youths that Nigerian culture was salient to how they perceive their academic experiences and how they perceived themselves.

Parental Motivation

Nigerian parents interviewed for this study utilized various approaches to motivate their children. In addition to creating routines and structures for their children, they supported their children in other ways. They motivated their children to achieve by rewarding good grades and told them folk stories of success as passed on from their parents. They used folk stories about growing up in Nigeria to provide an alternate frame of reference for their children and to remind their children that life could be worse. When parents were asked how they motivated their children to do well in school, one mother, the parent of Swoosh, responded, “We usually give them money, financial rewards or take them to dinner or shopping. Let’s say they wanted a game like Nintendo. We would say okay you did well in
school so let’s go and get the game you wanted. Most of the time, it was a financial reward, though—and of course a big hug.”

Upon further inquiries on the use of folk stories of growing up in Nigeria, Swoosh’s mother admitted: “We tell them the entire story all the time. We tell them about what they have that we didn’t have, especially their dad. It has become a family joke. When they ask for something and I would say, ‘Go to dad,’ my youngest would say, ‘Either give to me or forget it because if I go to dad, he will tell me about not having sneakers when he was growing up.’”

Another parent, the mother of Eddie, indicated that she used herself and family as a model of success and was very clear about her expectations. She stated, “Sometimes I would point out that certain jobs and position would get you far. I told them about the value and the ability to make decisions and not be subject to others pushing you around. Because they are girls, it was important to me that they don’t depend on a husband.”

The mother of Freelancer described her motivation strategy as follows: “We take them out for lunch, to the movies, give them money, and buy things they need when they do well in school. I talk to them and tell them that life was not easy for us growing up in Nigeria. I tell them that most of us that made it to the United States came from poor families and that we struggle to make it and do better than our parents. It is not that our parents weren’t talented enough, but they lacked the opportunity and it is now their time to do it and take advantage of the opportunity they have. Like my mom, she is very smart, but being a woman, her parents could not afford to educate her and she always told me to do better. The children are supposed to do better than their parents, and my children have the opportunity. I
always tell my children what I learned from my parents and grandparents and that they have
to focus on their education and not waste their time.”

Another parent, the mother of Arch and Modesty, narrated the actions her own
mother took to keep her motivated as a young girl, which she would narrate to her children.
She described her mother’s actions as follows: “When I was growing up at home, my mother
used to take me to her workplace and show me the director and the top people and would tell
me that they got there because of their education. She would also take me to the market and
show me the people under the sun and she would say that they got there due to a lack of
education and would tell me that it was my choice as to which one I would prefer in life. I
use all these examples for my children. I also encourage them by giving them what they
want. I don’t want to say ‘bribe them.’”

One parent who had seven children used a variety of motivation methods, including
some of what the previous parents cited. Her motivation strategies depended on the child’s
level of motivation. She narrated, “Some motivations we used included money or Broadway
shows, but I set the expectations so high that there were few Broadway trips. They looked
forward to our three-day weekend trips in the Poconos for our timeshare. It was not part of
the reward, but I could say to them that we would cancel the vacation to get them working
hard. The trip was something we know we had to do to get out of the city and relax. I used to
give money to them if they get all 95, but as time went by, the kids became self-motivated—
especially the older ones. For the younger ones at home, doing consistently well would make
me do something like pay a bill for them. My high school son bought a car with his summer
earnings but the car is parked here and is uninsured. He wants to do things differently and
doesn’t want to be associated with the Ivy Leagues (his three older siblings were in an Ivy
League college). As a high school senior, when he does something associated with his graduation, he gets a reward.”

The same parent indicated that as a public school educator, she learned from her colleagues that high schools were ranked for college admission purposes. As a result, she and her husband planned early on that their children would attend either the special public high schools (for example, the math and science school) or Catholic schools as a preparation for a competitive college. She also stated that she advised her children to pursue careers in the sciences where minorities were underrepresented. She sought enrichment programs for her children to participate in to give them a competitive edge.

School Characteristics of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths

A major goal of this study was to identify the influence of school factors on the academic outcomes of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths. Four school factors were identified: relationships with peers, relationships with African-American peers, relationships with teachers, and relationships with guidance counselors.

*Relationships with Peers*

The youths realized the value of peer relationship even when they did not always get along with some of their peers. For example, Freelancer, who was frequently teased in the elementary school, stated, “Classmates will save you when it comes to projects, homework, and they can explain it to you. You need to make strong connections and bonds even though you are not in the same level with them, but you need to associate with them.” He admittedly had friends from a diverse background (African-Americans, Asians, Whites, and Hispanics), but he did not trust anyone as a close friend because of the history of teasing he endured in his younger years. As he stated, “I was made fun of because I am Black and tall. People have
stereotypes and they call you names. People can be judgmental. When you say the wrong answer or make a mistake, they make fun of you. When you make friends with one group the other group will make fun of you. But people are always going to make fun of you for one reason or the other. When I was young, I wanted to be cool and looked up to. Now all I care is getting my work done. Doing what I have to do.”

All youths selected their friends from peers with similar backgrounds such as second-generation background and from within the same classes they were enrolled in. Joy reported: “My school is diverse, and my friends include four or five Nigerians, a majority are second-generation Nigerians, and some of my friends are African-Americans.” She also indicated that she did not make friends until she got to college. Prior to college, her friends were often in the same classes and were competing with her for grades. Her parents restricted her socialization with classmates and she could not go over to her friends’ houses or attend sleepover parties. She related that her siblings had the same experiences.

But Optimist, Joy’s brother, described his experiences thus: “My primary group of friends were the honors group. I understood early while going to school in New York, where kids were mean, that quiet ones got picked on all the time. When I saw new kids in school, I reached out to them and invited them to join a club; they would stop feeling lonely. I find it easy to make friends. As my friends would say, I find it easy to slip into people’s lives. I feel like friends are vital in each stage of life and especially people sharing the same stage of life with you.” Another youth, Outlier, stated that prior to meeting other second-generation Nigerian youths in college, she tended to associate with other second-generation youths from the Middle East, Asia, and India as well as with Jewish people.
The attraction for the circle of friendship for all high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths in the study was that their friends were often in the same classes, which were honors and AP classes. Their friends were also in the same sports and clubs and often from a minority group, although they indicated that they got along with everyone. As Scholar stated, “I did have three friends. We were in all honors classes. I was friendly with everyone. It was a very small school and I got along with everyone.”

Swoosh also noted that in school her friends were Indian, Latino, White, Black, and Asian. Modesty reiterated what the others said with, “I have friends and they are mostly African-Americans, and I have some Jamaican and Haitian (second-generation) friends. I became friends with some from the middle school. My closest friends are from freshman year because we were in the same classes, but we are not in the same classes this year.”

*Relationships with African-American Peers*

All high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths identified themselves primarily as Nigerian-Americans or Nigerians but understood the contextualized nature of identity. Two youths identified themselves as Igbo-American and two others identified themselves as Yoruba-American. Clearly, they knew that they were racially Black and were aware of the negative perception of Africa-Americans and avoided behaviors that would portray them as such. Three youths participated in the African-American Club where African clubs did not exist and were friends with African-American youths who shared similar academic aspirations.

Amy, who counted some African-Americans as her friends in high school, and was teased by some African-American girls, described her high school interaction with African-American peers as follows: “My high school was two-thirds White, one-third Asian and very
few Latinos. The first two years, it was 20% Black and then with neighborhood redistricting due to overpopulation at another local high school, it was (her school) 5% Black in a county that has a 25% Black population. The Blacks sat together in the cafeteria, dressed in baggy clothes, wore braids and nails with extensions, and were loud. Of course this wasn’t representative of every Black person at my school, but a number of them were. And of course this behavior is very salient in a school of racial composition like we had. It is not that I wasn’t proud to be Black, I was friends with them on an individual basis, but I just didn’t sit at the table with them in the cafeteria or wear the same things. I was on the executive board of the African-American Awareness Club as secretary and treasurer. I code-switched in speech patterns and dressing sometimes. I definitely dress up more when I know I am going to something with a lot of Black people (African-Americans). I won’t dress up for Akwabaa (African Students Club), but I will for a Black Students Union meeting (African and African-America group).”

Another youth, Outlier, who attended an elite Catholic high school, described her relationship with African-Americans and other Nigerian youths as follows: “In college, for the first time, I met other Nigerian youths my age that I did not have the opportunity to meet where I lived. I also met a diverse group of Nigerian youths, those who grew up in Africa as well as those who grew up like me. It was interesting to see the perspective of those who grew up in Nigeria and to see that those students were normal and confident (contrary to popular perceptions). I became more involved with African organizations and less with mainstream ones. I didn’t grow up with African-Americans prior to college. I never felt like I could hang out with them, but now as I got older, I do especially from a professional perspective for networking. I didn’t like the Black Students Union (BSU). We shared a
common area, the quad, and a common dining area, though I didn’t live in the UJAMAA Hall (Black resident hall). I couldn’t relate to the African-American culture. I was struggling with where I fit in, with the Whites I spent 12 years of my life with, with the new (found) African group with whom I shared a heritage with, or with the African-Americans. I now had a choice and I gravitated toward African students. Also as a group, Africans didn’t associate with African-Americans. There was tension between the African Students Union and the Black Students Union because the population of African students was growing and the African-Americans took notice. A lot of second-generation Igbo youths joined the Black Students Association because of the elitism of the African Students Association members and so they (second-generation Igbo youths) joined the Black Students Association and could identify with African-Americans, especially if the Igbo youths attended an urban high school in the United States.”

Two high achieving second-generation Nigerian youths were negotiating their identity across multiple social terrains. Amy indicated that she realized that she was Black and could identify herself as African-American under certain circumstances. She developed a strategy to cope with her multiple identities by code-switching. In the presence of her African-American friends, she spoke Black English.

Outlier indicated that she had to negotiate her identity with the second-generation Nigerian youths who were born in the United States but grew up in Nigeria. Although she admitted that these youth “crawl under your skin,” she still preferred to associate with them than with Africa-Americans primarily because she had a choice to discover more about herself and her heritage. She had earlier admitted during the interview that it was tough growing up as second-generation Nigerian youths because there were not many youths in her
age group. During her interview, she noted that some second-generation Nigerians in her age group grew up isolated from each other and as a result, some of them were “closet Igbo.” She also understood that second-generation Nigerian youths’ relationship with African-Americans was influenced by whether the youths grew up in an urban setting and therefore were exposed to African-Americans or not. She attended a high school where she was the only Black in her class.

*Relationships with Guidance Counselors*

The nature of the relationship that high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths established with their guidance counselors varied and was dependent on the nature and the type of help youths sought. With regard to course selection and tracking, the youths reported that because they were on track for honors and AP classes, their academic track was pre-programmed. As a result, the counselors did not have to do much. Two youths reported that they did not have the need to make use of their guidance counselors. For example, Swoosh indicated, “Teachers recommended us for what level of courses to take—AP, honors, and regular. The guidance counselors usually follow the teacher’s recommendation, but your parents can override the recommendation. It has never happened to me because I am always in AP and honors classes. In ninth grade, the English honors class was full but my counselor put me in it anyway because I would be bored in a lower level class.”

When youths were asked if their guidance counselors helped them with course selection and college preparation, Amy stated, “I didn’t really feel much need to use them. There were four counselors for 1526 students. I started talking to my counselor more when applying for college and scholarships. I don’t know if the counselor treated me differently as a Black because I was doing well. Also, I don’t know if they treated me differently from
other students because I wasn’t there when they interacted with those students.” Amy also
pointed out that as the most qualified Black student in her senior year, based on her PSAT,
SAT and GPA, her counselor nominated her for several awards and scholarships, but she
could only get those that were non need-based,

The youth who attended an elite private high school with favorable student-guidance
counselor ratios reported a better guidance counselor relationship. Outlier, who attended such
a school, noted, “we had a school counselor assigned to us in the ninth grade and a career
counselor in the sophomore and junior year. It shows how involved the school was and the
attention it gives to the students. You had to apply and interview to be able to get into the
school. There were plenty of resources available for a school population of 380-400
students.”

Although all youths reported that they were pre-tracked for honors and AP classes
and therefore needed minimum guidance counselor help, but such help did not always come.
Three of the students who attended urban magnet and urban parochial high schools reported
that their counselors were not very helpful. Eddie, who attended an urban magnet high
school, reported, “The counselor assigned to me was not very helpful, but other counselors
within my house were very helpful. The combination of the three counselors within my
house helped. The other counselors were always there when I needed them.” Another youth,
who attended the same high school as Eddie, felt the same way as Eddie. Modesty stated, “I
don’t really like my guidance counselor because the only time I have spoken to him is when I
needed to change my class and I don’t think he was helpful to me.”

Two youths who reported favorable relationships with their counselors were proactive
and prompted the counselors. Four youths who attended the same urban parochial high
school reportedly had to push their counselors for what they needed. Scholar indicated “in my school, which didn’t have a lot of kids, the seniors typically went to local colleges, so going away to college wasn’t the emphasis. I had to press the counselor for a lot of things. I had to seek her out and pull the information out. The counselor was not bad, just that it was not typical for kids at this high school to want to go out of state for college or to apply to an Ivy League college. The counselor wasn’t progressive, but now it might have changed because me, my brother, and my sister have gone to an Ivy League college from the school. The counselor may see that she needs to be outgoing since we went to an Ivy League college from this high school.”

Optimist, a younger brother to Scholar, attended the same high school and confirmed Scholar’s perception. Optimist noted, “She [counselor] went the extra mile with me. I remember the time I came in with an application that was due in three days and she had it ready the same afternoon. That’s why I said it was unfair earlier [youth had earlier indicated that counselors often help high achieving students more than low achieving students]. Preference is not necessarily great because it was helpful to some but unfair to others. In talking to other students in high school, some of the students said that their counselors weren’t really pushing them. Even some of the students that I met in college have said that the only reason they made it to an Ivy League college was because of themselves. If they hadn’t pushed themselves, they wouldn’t have made it to the Ivy League college.”

Joy, the younger sibling of Scholar and Optimist, also attended the same school and reported a different experience. She stated, “We had two counselors, one for the freshman and sophomores and one for the juniors and seniors. In my freshman year, I did not know the counselor assigned to me. I used to talk to the other counselor for juniors and seniors, but she
left after my junior year. I was concerned that her replacement would not be able to know me to be able to write a good college recommendation, so I sought her out and befriended her. As a result, she came to recognize my face and know me and whenever new information about scholarships came in, she told me. She gave me great opportunities to get scholarships.”

Another youth, Humility attended the same high school as Joy and her siblings and was in the same class as Joy, but she reported an experience similar to Scholar, which suggested that counselors have not changed as Scholar had predicted. It appeared that the three siblings—Scholar, Optimist, and Joy—were more assertive in pursuing the guidance counselors to get what they wanted. Humility, who was equally motivated and was third in her graduating class, reported, “We had two guidance counselors in high school, one for the freshman and sophomores and one for the juniors and seniors. My counselor wasn’t necessarily very helpful. I kind of did everything for myself. She helped me to narrow my college choices and that’s it. I remember when I told her that I wanted to go to this college. She said the only people that she had seen get into this college were the valedictorians and the salutatorians, but I was third in my graduating class.”

Freelancer summed up the relationship between guidance counselors and high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths with his relationship with his own counselor. He described his relationship with his counselor in the following manner: “She’s helpful when I go to ask questions but would not put out stuff or helpful information on scholarships. They are not proactive. You have to seek out information from them.” That was precisely what four youths in the study had done. They sought out guidance counselors whether they
were assigned to them or not. They were also proactive and created their relationship with the counselors and made the counselors take notice of them.

*Relationships with Teachers*

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths reported a favorable relationship with their teachers. All youths indicated teachers were very supportive of their schooling, although two also reported having some unresponsive teachers. Such youths did not take unresponsive teachers as personally targeting them. Youths realized that establishing a good relationship with teachers was important. For example, Freelancer, who reported that most of his teachers had been supportive, stated, “Most of the teachers have been supportive but they pick favorites and some are not actively involved with students, but overall they have been supportive. I feel that having a good relationship with teachers and classmates are important. Teachers are grading you.”

Youths spoke of the special bonds they formed with their teachers in elementary school. Such bonds left impressionable imprints on the minds of the youths. Joy ecstatically recalled her relationship with some of her teachers. She described her experiences as follows: “I had really great teachers. My first grade teacher, Ms. R., was great. I think I remember I was doing something bad like talking in class and she gave me a mean look. It reminded me of my mom and I stopped. My second grade teacher, Mr. T., I still keep in contact with him and I send him cards. All the teachers we had were instrumental to our success. We all went to the same school. Since we are a large family, teachers knew us and we were good kids. My eighth grade teacher was great.” When asked to elaborate on what made her eighth grade teacher great Joy added, “She was instrumental in helping me adjust to my new school. She made history so interesting, relevant, and alive. She taught us poetry and I wasn’t a fan of
poetry and I never read poetry, but she made it fun and interesting. Since she taught us many subjects, I feel I learned a lot from her.”

Eddie, a high school senior, indicated that teachers and staff had been supportive from early on in her schooling career. She stated, “From pre-kindergarten to last year they [teachers] have been supportive not only in the classroom but outside. I have cultivated a strong support group amongst the faculty, staff, principal, and counselors. I went to them at times of need.” Eddie’s principal also nominated her to the state board of education where she represented the voice of youths in her state.

Three youths indicated that given the type of school they attended and their drive to do well in school, teachers had no choice but to be supportive. Outlier, who attended a small elite Catholic school, explained, “I went to a very good high school, a private Catholic school for girls. The set up is one with a lot of individual attention to students. If I were struggling, though that wasn’t the case, there was help, but in my case their goal was to challenge me and they did. The student-teacher ratio was favorable.”

Scholar, the valedictorian of her senior class stated, “My teachers were very supportive. If teachers have students who are motivated and thirsty for knowledge, they [teachers] have no choice but to support them. I have had some teachers who were not interested or supportive, but it was not personal to me. Even now, I have some professors who have been supportive and helping me to see that education is very important.”

When asked about teacher support, Optimist, a younger sibling of Scholar related his experience with teachers as the following: “I would say yes, [to teacher support] for a lot of teachers, because some kids do not want to try, when they [teachers] see kids trying, they grab them. It became a complaint in the junior year when everyone was trying to work on the
college application. The top 10 students were getting a priority, but the others were forgotten or had something missing from their files after the due date. I appreciated it, but at the same time resented it because those kids were also trying to go to college. The English teacher was my favorite. She told me about the Ivy League schools. I remember her saying that the Ivy League was overrated in this country and around the world but an Ivy education can allow you to get into places. That was the reason I chose to attend an Ivy League college. I could have gone to a state college on a free ride.”

All youths reported that overall they had good teacher relationships and most of their teachers were supportive, but they also recounted a negative teacher experience. For example, Amy described her experience with teachers as follows: “Yes, for the most part [teachers] were supportive. A teacher recommended me to skip a grade in elementary school. In elementary and middle school years they were supportive, but in high school they were indifferent. Maybe because of the student’s age, they relied on the students’ motivation to do well in school. In a few cases, a teacher thought I was a typical Black kid. For example, in my senior year in high school, I was taking five AP classes out of the possible seven and needed to drop one to do independent research. Before I dropped one, I had a difficulty in AP chemistry. We had to take this one quiz and keep taking it until you get 10 out of the 10 questions right. By the fifth time I got 9 out of 10 and was frustrated. The teacher said to me, ‘You may not be able to handle everything we do in this class during the year.’ Although he didn’t say it directly, I could tell he didn’t have a high expectation of me, probably because I was Black. Although other kids were still taking this quiz, I don’t know if he told them that they couldn’t handle it. I told him that this was my fifth AP class because I knew that he was
thinking that I was a low achiever; he then looked at me with a very surprised look. He realized that it wasn’t that I wasn’t capable but that I was doing too much.”

In conclusion, high achieving second-generation Nigerian youths had positive relationships with their teachers in the lower grades. One youth indicated that they encountered low teacher expectation and apathy on the part of some teachers in the upper grades but that was not representative of the group.

Challenges of High Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths

Survey data revealed that high achieving second-generation Nigerian youths in the study had challenges primarily in the social and peer relationship domains (see Table 8). Five youths each reported challenges in the social and peer relationship domains, two reported academic challenges, and one participant reported teacher/staff challenges. Those areas were related to peer teasing, under-preparation for college, racialization of success, and parental pressure. One youth noted that she perceived low expectations from one of her teachers. She also reported fear of her accomplishments being racialized. Another youth in the focus group also mentioned racialization of his success as an attempt to discredit his efforts.

Although two participants identified academic challenges as difficulties on the survey, six participants talked about academic challenges in school. The academic difficulties they talked about were primarily having to deal with under-preparation for college. Seven of the youth participants resided in an urban setting and attended parochial schools. Five of the youths talked about the challenges of dealing with the academic rigors of competitive colleges. When the issue of choosing a college major came up during the focus group interview, two participants indicated that they chose their majors after experiencing difficulty in the pre-med track.
Table 8

_Challenges of Students as Reported in the Survey_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student pseudonym</th>
<th>Academic problem</th>
<th>Social relationship problem</th>
<th>Peer</th>
<th>Teacher/staff problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freelancer</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy*</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swoosh</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlier</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholar</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimist</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arch</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FP</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FB</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FM</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FN</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* "Amy participated in the focus group interview."
Peer Teasing

Several youths reported that they were teased in school and the teasing came from Black as well as White students, regardless of the setting—whether public or private, urban or suburban. The youths recognized that peers were instrumental to their success in school, and they attempted to shield themselves from being abused by their peers. Optimist was proactive and projected himself visibly to avoid peer teasing. He indicated that often he would approach new students and offer to help them out by introducing them to various school clubs. He also reported that he participated in several activities and hung out with smart and popular kids. All the youths indicated that they limited their peer selection to students from the same classes they were taking and students with similar immigrant backgrounds as well as peers participating in the same activities and clubs.

Youths were teased for various reasons. Three youths were teased for being too young, for being too tall, for acting White (accent, clothing style, being smart), for being African, and for other reasons, depending on the environment they grew up in. Amy, who grew up in a suburban upper-middle-class family, stated that even though she got along with her peers in middle school, she was teased for many reasons. She stated, “I was teased by kids in my classes for being younger than other kids (skipped a grade and started sixth grade at an earlier age) but not for academics. Other Black kids teased me for being too White. It was a suburban school outside the District of Columbia, which has changed from a mostly White to a more diverse school district. However, the particular school was mostly White.”

When asked to elaborate on being too White, Amy responded with the following, “I think it was my accent. Over the years I have learned to talk differently and have learned to switch back and forth depending on whom I’m talking to. Also, my dress, I didn’t dress in
the Black fashion that they (other Black students) wore when they teased me for being too White. They had braids, and my hair was relaxed and straight. One of these three girls that particularly liked to tease me ended up getting expelled from our school. The main group of students I hung out with in middle school was mainly from the minority group—one Nigerian, one Haitian, one African-American, one Vietnamese, one Chilean, one Jewish, and two White students. Of the Black—in my group, we were the more high achieving Blacks. We were in the gifted and talented classes together, and the other Black girls that teased me were in the regular classes.”

Freelancer, who attended a public urban elementary school and urban magnet elementary and middle school before moving to a suburban high school, described some of the teasing that he endured: “I was made fun of because I am Black and tall. People have stereotypes and call you names. People can be judgmental. When you say the wrong answer or make a mistake, they make fun of you. When you make friends with one group, the other group will make fun of you. But people are always going to make fun of you for one reason or the other. When I was young, I wanted to be cool and be looked up to. Now all I care about is getting my work done, doing what I have to do.”

Freelancer also acknowledged that his being teased was due to a combination of factors. He added, “It is the combination of being Black and tall. Some see me as fitting in with White people because I am smart. That shouldn’t get to me because there is always something people won’t like about you. It could be anything. I don’t let it get to me.”

Another youth, Eddie, who was a high school senior, described her experiences of being teased as a young person: “When you are younger, you get teased because you’re African, but the school was diverse, and if you pick on people you get picked on too. In freshman
year, you got picked on because you were African, but it wasn’t a problem because I embraced my culture and people accepted.” Focus group participants also experienced teasing in school. Four of them were teased for various reasons. FP was teased for being White (being in advanced classes) and for her African name. FA was teased for his clothing, whereas FP was teased for being biracial. FA was teased for being too young and for talking White.

High School Underpreparation for College

All youths attended parochial or magnet and suburban high schools. Although they were in honors and AP classes in all their academic courses, three out of the four college youths who attended the same urban parochial high reported that they were ill-prepared for the academic rigors of Ivy League colleges. Additionally, many youths reported that they did not really need to know how to study in high school; therefore, they did not cultivate good study skills in high school. This was the case because the youths were able to ace the high school tests and quizzes without studying. Optimist, in particular, described the impact of his lack of good study skills on his first year in college as follows: “In high school, you didn’t need to study. It was just go to class, take a test, and ace it. I didn’t study. I just did the required assignments. Studying was foreign to me until I got to college. In high school if anything, when we had a game or an activity with my classmates, we got on the bus and did homework. In our class, my friends and I were in the top seven. If we studied, we could have done better. We could have been the valedictorian and the salutatorian. My two sisters understood that, and studied, and both were the valedictorian—and we went to the same high school. Until college, I realized what studying meant and that studying meant locking yourself up for three to four hours. It didn’t happen in high school.”
As a follow-up question, Optimist was asked how he made up for his lack of study skills, to which he responded: “My first semester in college was my worst ever, academically, socially, and culturally. It was terrible. I did poorly because I didn’t understand what studying was. I couldn’t do a shift suddenly to go from not knowing how to study, to studying. The process takes a long time. I did so poorly my first semester, I was in academic probation and I couldn’t understand why. I didn’t know how to do it properly, how to get into the mood, and how to retain what I studied. So I let my friends distract me and when they said let’s hang out. Since they were done studying, they thought I was done. Because studying was driving me crazy, I would hang out with them. I was a party king and knew all the party information instead of studying. I had so much ‘free time’ due to not studying and I found ways to occupy myself. If anybody needed information about a party, they would call me or say, ‘Call Optimist, he would know.’”

Although Optimist indicated that both his sisters, who were valedictorians of their senior class, understood what studying meant, both siblings also reported that they were under-prepared for college in their high school.

**Parental Pressure**

Three high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths along with the focus group participants acknowledged there was a parental push for them to go into competitive colleges and certain careers, such as medicine, law, and engineering. The desire for trophy degrees (professional degrees) and trophy colleges (Ivy League) were attributed to the fact that Nigerians were also achievement-oriented, as one youth observed. Outlier explained part of her motivation as follows: “The Nigerian community focuses on doing well and distinguishing itself. Nigerians refer to what their children are doing because Nigerians are
competitive. Nigerian parents want to say they have a daughter or a son who went to such and such a school.”

Amy, who grew up with a physician father and a mother with a law degree, wanted to attend a competitive non-Ivy League private university and had received a full scholarship to attend one. But when an Ivy League college admission letter came, she knew she was going to the Ivy League college. She remembered crying herself to bed because she would have to attend the college her parents wanted as long as they were willing to pay for the education. However, she was appreciative of the sacrifices her parents were making to pay for her college education and was doing her part through work-study and by being a resident advisor.

Optimist attributed the academic success of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths to three factors: Nigerian parents’ push for certain careers for their children, their expectations, and their valuing of education. Eddie, Outlier, and Scholar also shared the same belief as Optimist that Nigerian parents placed a premium on education.

Optimist also mentioned that second-generation Nigerian youths were taught that education comes first. He added, “Everyone is going to be a doctor, engineer, or lawyer because these are the professions that are worth more, and you are always going to have a job.” Optimist, who switched out of pre-med after a difficult first year in college, observed that among his Nigerian friends in college, “50% started out as pre-med, and now you easily cut that into half. Every one discovers that you can’t force yourself into it [medicine].”

Optimist indicated that one of the most difficult situations in his life was making the decision to change his major from pre-med to explore other career paths because he did not want to disappoint his parents and well-wishers. He described the difficulty of making the
transition to another major as follows: “It was a lot of heartache because a lot of what you heard when people had heard that you want to be a doctor was the clapping. So I spent a lot of time thinking about what people would say. What will I do with my life? I have taken a lot of sociology courses, and I love doing my work and talking to the professors. I have become friends with the professors. I am happy.” Optimist had found his calling in the social sciences, and he said his grades had improved dramatically because he was doing what he loved to do.

Optimist mentioned that one of the most terrifying moments in his life was when he informed his parents that he was changing his major. He described his experience as follows: “I remember one of the most wrecking and terrifying moments of my life was when I told them I was going to change my major. I told them, and they saw my face, and they said it was okay. It is only when I have no plans and goals and thoughts that they have a problem with.” (Participant implied that his parents would have been more concerned if he had no goals for the future). Luckily for Optimist, his parents were very supportive of his decision to change his major.

The focus group participants had similar experiences with their parents steering them to certain careers and mentioned that the joke among other second-generation Africans was that all Nigerians were pre-med by default.

Outlier also indicated that deciding on a college major and a career path has been one of her challenges. She admitted that her parents were uneasy when she went from pre-med to economics. Her parents remained uneasy until she graduated from college and ran her own consulting firm for a year before heading to graduate school at an Ivy League university. She
had subsequently proved to her parents that going to medical school was not the only way to earn a good living or to gain status, because she now works on Wall Street.

Five members of the focus group interview described similar experiences as Optimist in trying to pick a college major. One youth indicated that she really wanted to study sociology, but her father discouraged her by saying, “What are going to do with that?” She eventually negotiated with her father and she chose English as a major. Two focus group participants stated that Nigerian parents were primarily concerned about the ability of their children to make a living, and that influenced the career aspirations they set for their children. They also observed that their parents gave them more leeway in terms of their major because parents believed that with an Ivy League degree, they would always do well as opposed to their siblings who attended state colleges. [The implication was that an Ivy League degree would open up more doors than a degree from a state college].

An extreme case of parental pressure was revealed by one of the participants in the focus group who told a story of an Ivy League student who was alienated from her father and the entire family over her change of college major. As a result, this particular youth could not go home during the holidays. Another incident that came up was the case of a second-generation Nigerian youth who reportedly committed suicide over parental pressure to succeed in school.

The issue of parental pressure to pursue a certain career path was rampant among Nigerian parents. In fact, it came up in the individual and focus group interviews. One youth, Humility, raised it as a concern and suggested that a question that could be further explored was the role of Nigerian parents in the career paths of second-generation Nigerian youths. Outlier summarized this problem succinctly when she stated, “I think many Nigerian parents
are fixated on careers such as medicine, law, and engineering, and they get uneasy when their children do not go that route.”

_Fear of Racialization of Success_

An issue that arose for two youths was the notion that some people saw them as token Blacks did well academically based on their skin color rather than their hard work. They resented their academic achievement’s being racialized and being attributed to race-based programs such as affirmative action. Amy, who was involved in several extracurricular activities, and had an SAT score of 1450 (old version) and a GPA of 4.40 and who was in the top 5% of her class of 1526 students, was elated to qualify as the National Merit Scholar Finalist and the National Achievement Scholar (recognition for academically talented Black students). As she stated, “This definitely made me equal in the eyes of other students and administrators. I wasn’t just that smart Black girl, or the smartest Black person [in her class]. I was actually one of the smart kids. I did well enough to be recognized by the regular, mainstream criteria, and not just for the Black award [National Achievement Scholar].”

Amy further described how she felt about being racialized in the following words: “I applied and got many of the non-need-based Black scholarships in high school. At the senior awards ceremony, I got called to the stage so many times for Black awards and the other regular awards. It was almost embarrassing, because some people started saying that I got the scholarships just because I was Black. People said the same about my getting into the Ivy League. Other people from my class who had been ranked higher than I didn’t get in, and some people said that it was because I was Black. Therefore, there is always at the back of your mind—self-doubt and wondering, if I weren’t Black, would I have gotten in? Even
doing as well as I did on PSAT, SAT, and with my 4.40 GPA, I often wonder if I would have gotten into this college” [If I was not black].

Another youth in the focus group interview talked about being labeled the “token Black” at his job. Although he acknowledged being the token Black in that setting as the only Black, he admitted that he resented all his academic credentials being reduced to race. It appeared that high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths seek recognition based on what they had accomplished rather than on their race.

Coping Strategies of High Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths

High achieving second-generation Nigerian youths coped with their challenges using the following strategies: code-switching, extracurricular participation, and increased determination and effort.

*Code-Switching*

Amy earlier described the landscape and the transformation of her high school during her four years there. She described her relationship with her peers and the process she used to negotiate her identity and academic achievement while maintaining friendship with peers). Amy used code-switching to describe her coping strategy. She noted that African-Americans in the regular classes teased her, although she had African-American friends from her higher-level classes. As a result, she code-switched between African-American slang and mainstream speech patterns. She also indicated that her code-switching was not limited to speech patterns as she sometimes code-switched her dressing style. She has continued to do so even in college. As she stated, “I code-switched in speech patterns and dressing sometimes; I definitely dress up more, dress to impress when I know I’m going to something
with a lot of Black people, even on this campus. I won’t dress up for and Akwabaa (African Students Union), but I will for a Black Students meeting.”

It appeared that youths code-switched between African-American slang, Nigerian accent, and mainstream speech patterns in addition to the dressing pattern Amy cited earlier. Optimist and Scholar also indicated that they code-switched when talking to different people. When the issue of code-switching came up in the focus group, one participant stated, “A lot of my friends are Nigerians. I code-switch especially with Nigerians. We switch codes. When I speak to non-Americans, I try not to sound so Americanized. To Americans, I sound more American, but to others who are not Americans, I try to sound less American.” Another focus group participant added, “I have a little Nigerian accent for fun, especially on the phone. I change my accent often. When I am talking to African-Americans, I sound Black, and when I am talking to Asians, I sound more American [standard English]. Even my speed changes depending on whom I am talking to.”

Another focus group participant revealed that code-switching was a significant part of her life. She stated, “I am used to it; it has become second nature to me. I do it so much that I don’t notice it; but others do. I often switch to my Nigerian accent when I am serious. I had a disagreement with a friend, and from the way I spoke, he told me that he knew I was dead serious because I had my Nigerian accent on.”

All youths who admitted to code-switching also explained that code-switching served an important role in their lives. One focus group participant stated, “We code-switch so we can relate to others. I don’t want to sound like I am high and mighty.” The same youth also added, “It is just a way to make life easier, it is not just a Nigerian thing. There is a corporate me, a student me, and just me.” Another youth noted that her parents were not pleased when
she code-switched to African-America slang. According to this youth, “My parents say I am talking too Black when I am on the phone with African-American friends. They always say, ‘Why are you talking like that? Don’t hang out with African-American because they get uneasy when they hear me code-switch to Black slang.’ I ask them, ‘Why do you speak pidgin, Igbo, Yoruba, and English?’”

This youth added that even though her parents opposed her code-switching to African-American slang, she reminded her parents that when they speak pidgin English (a Nigerian version of Ebonics or African-American language), the Nigerian language, or English, they too were code-switching. Such parental code-switching served the same role for the parents as for the youths. One youth added, “We code-switch so that relatives can hear us and understand us and won’t say, ‘You are now an American.’” Finally, one focus group participant said, “When I visit Nigeria, I speak pidgin English to relatives.”

Extracurricular Involvement

All youths in the study reported that they were engaged in several activities, both at the high school and college level. The activities they were involved in fell into religious, cultural, school club, community activity, and sports categories. They had various motives for involvement in extracurricular activities. Participation in various extracurricular activities enabled high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths to form friendships and bonds with their peers as well as with some adults, thereby helping them to create social networks necessary for academic success. Extracurricular involvement therefore served as a coping mechanism for the youths as it helped them to occupy themselves productively while creating social bonds and networks.
Five youths indicated that extracurricular activities took a lot of their time but that they needed those activities to create a balance between their academic and social lives. One high school youth indicated that his parents encouraged him to participate in extracurricular activities in preparation for college. Two youths also indicated that they had to find employment after the age of 16 to help with their expenses. Another youth reported participation in high school orchestra and playing the violin.

Several youths were in so many activities that they hardly had time for anything after school. For example, Freelancer noted, “I hardly have any time after school because of activities. When I come home, I am so tired that I sit for a while, eat, and sleep a little before I do my homework whether it takes me to 1 a.m. and sometimes later. It does because my activities back me up. I must sleep before I start the homework.” Freelancer also reported being in track, on the stage, in the multicultural club, in the poetry club and literary magazine, and a part of the model UN. Optimist, Outlier, and Scholar shared the same experience as Freelancer with regard to the degree of their extracurricular involvement.

Like Freelancer, all the youths reported that homework was a priority that must be done before anything else when they got home. Whether the youths did homework immediately after school or later due to after school activities, it was built into their daily routines, and they did not need any reminder for their homework to be done.

Among those youths who participated in clubs, five reported holding leadership positions in them. For example, Optimist described his extracurricular involvement in high school as follows, “After school, I had different activities every day, and I was a superman. If I were in a club, I was the vice president or president. I was on the prom committee and
student council, I was captain of the volleyball team, and I was president of Junior Achievement.

Outlier started her day with an extracurricular activity. She described her involvement in extracurricular activities as follows: “My day started early—especially as I was involved in student government, which met early before the school day. I went to classes and played tennis after classes during the season from 3 to 7 or 8 p.m. After tennis, I studied typically from 8 to midnight or 1:00 a.m. depending. Tennis was a daily activity and I did other extracurricular activities. I was heavily involved in extracurricular activities or clubs from career to tennis and community services. Weekends were devoted entirely to homework.”

Another youth reported that her days were long due to her extracurricular activities. Scholar stated, “I stayed in school for extracurricular activities. I was a member of the student council, the prom committee, Just K (a Christian youth group), Building with Books (a community service organization), and Junior Achievement. I was the vice president of finance for one year. I was very involved in school, and I usually didn’t see home until late because of the activities.”

Eddie stated that she was very involved in school. “I belonged to several clubs. I was in the African-American club for three years and I was a vice president and president of the club. I was in Interact Club, which is a community service club. I was in the National Honor Society. I was a member of the State Board of Education.” Some youths participated in activities that helped with college preparation, such as the VIP Club, which took local high school kids on college tours to get an early preview of college life.

All youths reported volunteering in the community in addition to their other activities. For some youths who attended parochial high schools, volunteering in the
community was a requirement for graduation. Humility, who started volunteering as a requirement for a class, ended up volunteering in a day care, elderly home, and a homeless shelter; and she tutored elementary school students while she was in high school. Joy, who attended the same high school as Humility, relayed a similar experience: “A major activity on my résumé is Sunday school teaching. First, I started as an aide and became a teacher for four years until I graduated. I was part of Building with Books, and we did fundraising to send kids to Third World countries to build schools. I was in chorus and I am still doing it in college. I like choir because it brings me back to reality and it is my most rewarding activity. I was a member of the prom council for two years. At school, we were required to put in some hours in a year volunteering but I ended up volunteering all year.” On Fridays when Joy did not have much extracurricular activity in school, she also volunteered to help out in the office.

Nine youths were involved in church activities, in addition to other activities. Arch was a member of the youth grade church group and a choir member. Swoosh was a part of the youth community of her church in addition to her membership in the National Honor Society, Spanish Honor Society, color guard, yearbook, and creative writing club; she also tutored chemistry and math to freshmen and sophomores in her senior year.

Modesty was a member of the National Honor Society, National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), and Smart Start, a youth group of her church for which she served as the secretary. She was also a member of Usher’s Guild and the vice president of NSBE.

When asked why she participated in extracurricular activities, Outlier responded, “In high school, I know how the system worked to get into college. I played tennis because I liked it and for the exercise. I am not into sports for activities. It was the pressure to get into
college. But in college, I did less because I didn’t have the pressure to do it. So once the pressure was lifted, I didn’t do as much. I didn’t play sports in college and I didn’t play in graduate school.”

Freelancer also indicated that his parents encouraged him to participate in extracurricular activities because it would help him to get into a college. Freelancer also noted that he participated in extracurricular activities for the benefit of meeting different people.

Unlike Outlier, who reduced her extracurricular activity in college, Amy continued them in college. She stated, “I am involved in many extracurricular activities: I am a Residential College Advisor (RA), Eating Concerns peer educator, a member of Akwabaa, and Club Volleyball, co-chair of Community House (a community service organization), and a board member. I run the Sib Program, which served minority youths in grades 7 and 8 in the community. I am a member of Christian Fellowship, Minority Association of Pre-Med, and Black Students Union Leadership and Mentoring Program. I also work in a neuroscience lab for independent study in addition to a work-study job.” Amy understood that extracurricular involvement in college cut into her study time, but she saw the value in extracurricular participation. She described her reasons for involvement as follows: “They provided the opportunity [for personal growth] because different groups wanted me to do different things. For example, the African-American Awareness Club gave leadership positions, responsibility, and the chance to show others that I am responsible. Volleyball was discipline-oriented, and our team has won the state championship 14 out of the past 17 years or so. Working with team mates help to mold me to learn teamwork and adjust to those around me. Track helps me to challenge myself as an individual and push myself beyond my
limits. In college, I continued what I did in high school minus track but with other activities. College is more involved, and I am learning to help others help themselves. Christian Fellowship is for personal spiritual growth. RA is interesting because it helps me to help people with their daily needs. You need good judgment because people are looking up to your ability to resolve conflicts in a fair manner. You also need to have the ability to manage emergency situations while keeping calm. All of these things help mold me into a mature person.”

Another youth, Eddie, a high school senior, added, “Community service instills something in you. It also humbles you. You build your character by helping others and that helps you too. You get to know people you will never get to know talk to you. You meet people with the same drive, and you see people from different groups interact.”

In college, four students reduced the level of their extracurricular activities and selected activities to reflect their interests and time available to them. For example, Joy indicated that she reduced the number of activities she participated in college after her first year to devote more time to her studies, but she was recruited to stay on in some associations. Joy stated, “In college, I was a member of Nigerian Students Association. The Association recruited me to become a member and I was freshman reporter. I am a member of the Black Women’s Support Network. The groups sought me out and voted me the president for the next year. I am also involved in other foundations. The activities keep me busy. I spend three hours a week in choir during the weekend and [daily] during concert season,…it is very rewarding.” Optimist and Scholar also indicated they reduced their extracurricular participation in college. Outlier, who played sports in high school, indicated that she did not participate in college sports.
Scholar noted, “In college, I am part of the Sorority Sigma Delta, National Society of Black Engineers, Nigerian Students Association, an Executive Board Member of our Lifestyle Magazine, and a Board Member of Coalition for the Pan African Scholars.

**Increased Determination and Effort**

On the survey, two youths admitted to having experienced academic difficulty (see Table 8), and eight participants talked about academic difficulty during the interview. The four college youths who attended an urban parochial school indicated that the high school did not prepare them for the academic rigors of highly selective colleges. Another college youth who attended a suburban public high school, Amy experienced difficulty in organic chemistry. All the college youths admitted to working harder due to the competitive nature of the colleges they attended. Freelancer, a high school youth who attended an urban magnet school prior to his current suburban public school, admitted that he, too, was ill-prepared for the academic rigors of his suburban high school. Two other high school youths talked about the challenges of taking difficult subjects.

Although, the study participants were academic achievers as demonstrated in their history of achievement, they encountered difficulties due to the academic rigors of their classes. As a result, the youths reassessed their needs and found solutions to their difficulties. They changed their strategies and increased their determination and effort. Youths sought help from teachers, parents, and peers and increased their efforts by developing study habits. Optimist, a college youth, admitted to lacking study skills in high school and needed to develop them in college after nearly dropping out.

Joy, who attended an urban parochial school and was underprepared for college, described how she coped with her challenges as follows: “I sat back and reevaluated, figuring
out what was not working and finding out what worked. It was a mindset thing. I came here [to an Ivy League college] thinking that I had done well in high school so it would be easy. I had to change my method, and I reevaluated my strategies.”

The fact that high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths performed well in high school made it more difficult for one youth to accept that he was having academic difficulty. Optimist, who was put on academic probation after his first year in college, related his experiences: “The biggest problem was admitting that I had a difficulty. If I had spoken up earlier, I would have been helped. If you were known to be smart, you don’t want to admit that you had academic difficulty. I went to study sessions and talked to the teaching assistants and to professors”

In response to the question regarding challenges faced in school, Scholar narrated, “Well, basically it was the lack of preparation in high school. My first semester was a shock, and my grades reflected that. I had to learn how to study and study well because I didn’t learn how to in high school. I had to learn to be OK with doing my best. I had to struggle with that because for our whole lives, straight As defined success. I had to identify what true success was. It is not just a grade point average but my sanity, being able to sleep and eat. I had to redefine success. Success is not just black and white or one size fits all.”

For two youths, the solution was in hiring a private tutor. Amy, who also was an Ivy League student and was planning to attend medical school, decided to hire a tutor for her organic chemistry class, in which course she said she hated and in which she earned the only C in her life. Like Amy, Humility who was attending a competitive private college, noted, “Everything seemed different in college, and I couldn’t do the same things I had done in high school. The competition was greater in college so I had to change my study habits or get the
same results.” Humility acknowledged that she sought out study groups and made other changes: “In physiology, I was overwhelmed because I was a freshman, so I joined a study group and got a tutor. Biology was difficult because it was not a class I was fond of, and I lacked focus. For gross anatomy, I had to change my study habits because the course was different from any other class I had ever taken.” Humility also indicated that the lesson she learned from the experience was that “hard work and interest work.” She concluded that she would not have done well in those classes if she were not interested in them. This could have prompted her to wonder about youths being pushed into areas they were not interested in and her suggestion for that as a follow-up study.

For the high school youths, their strategies revolved around getting help from teachers and parents and studying more. Freelancer, a high school sophomore, explained that he was having difficulty in chemistry, so he went to the teacher for extra help. The teacher helped him, explained how he could do better in the class, and made him comfortable in the class. He had actually considered dropping the class, but his parents urged him not to. With parental and teacher support, he completed honors chemistry with a B. This was significant because it showed that parental support and teacher support could offset the potential academic failures of students. Siblings such as Arch and Modesty, who were also in high school, increased their efforts studying and got help with math homework from their father, who was a math professor. For these youths, all that was needed to cope with an academic challenge was the ability to seek and receive help from others.

Summary

This study was conducted to identify the characteristics and challenges of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths in the United States. Findings were divided into
three categories. The first part discussed the characteristics exhibited by high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths in the sample. The characteristics were discussed under personal, home, and school factors. The second part of this chapter discussed the challenges of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths, and the third part discussed how these youths coped with their challenges.

Personal Characteristics of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths

Second-generation Nigerian youths in this study considered themselves to be academic achievers and had high school GPAs of 3.4 to 4.0. The college participants attended Ivy League or other competitive private colleges. They had high academic and career aspirations, some aiming for professional and graduate school. The youths resided in two-parent homes where both parents were college graduates; this could have influenced their educational and career goals.

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths had high academic expectations for themselves and were not only highly motivated but also self-motivated. They were not content with grades lower than an A and had to adjust to grade expectations at the Ivy League colleges in which most of the participants were enrolled. The youths attributed their academic success not only to their internal motivation but also to their parents, extended family, and the Nigerian community. Nigerian parents were demanding in terms of the academic expectations they set for their children.

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths claimed a Nigerian identity and credited their Nigerian culture and values for the value they had for education and for their academic success. They also indicated that part of their motivation was the desire to give back to the society, and especially to Nigeria, because they heard from their parents how
needy people were in Nigeria. These youths were actively involved in several extracurricular activities and believed that such involvement helped them to help others. Extracurricular involvement also helped them to create social networks and break down social barriers.

*Home Characteristics of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths*

The youths in this study grew up in two-parent homes with college-educated parents. They indicated that their parents were demanding and placed a premium on education and supported them financially and morally. Nigerian parents had high academic expectations for their children, and they steered their children to certain careers based on their experiences growing up in Nigeria. Parents pushed careers in medicine, law, and engineering for status and job security. The focus group participants and the parent participants validated this finding. High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths grew up in homes where education was valued and the value was instilled in the youths early. Nigerian parents created routines and structures to enable their children to focus on their education. Parents also used fear of punishment to motivate their children to work hard. Youths and parent talked about TV restrictions during the weekday and about homework rules. Parents did not need to remind the youths about doing homework, which had to be done before a certain time. Nigerian parents also created parental assignments to keep their children challenged. In addition, older siblings were encouraged to tutor the younger ones and to be good role models.

Parents used a variety of ways to motivate their children. They used financial and nonfinancial rewards to encourage their children. They helped out with homework and projects when necessary and used folk tales about growing up in Nigeria to provide youths
with an alternate frame of reference. Parents exposed their children to Nigerian culture and Nigerian role models who reinforced the same values for education for the youths.

All parents were engaged with the education of their children at home and with the school. The school engagement varied according to how familiar the parents were with the American educational system, the type of school the youth attended and the personal motivation of the youth in question. Youths with younger siblings who were unmotivated and those whose siblings were in public schools observed that their parents were actively more engaged with the schools attended by their siblings than during their time. Youths also reported that the nature and type of parental engagement decreased as they got older. Youths were older, more mature, and in higher level classes that required skills not readily available to parents. So, at that level, parents provided moral support.

*School Characteristics of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths*

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths described their relationship with school as satisfactory because they were motivated and did not misbehave in school. Their parents expected good behavior in addition to good grades. The youths understood that their parents did not want to be called into school because of their children’s improper behavior. All participants attended an urban parochial, private, urban magnet, or suburban high school.

They reported that they had good relationships with the teachers and guidance counselors, but were teased by their peers. They indicated that some schools had a favorable counselor-student ratio and that made a difference in the type of counselor support students received. In schools with unfavorable counselor-student ratios, youths reported that counselors were unresponsive, and they had to pull information from their counselors or seek
counselors not assigned to them for help. Other youths resorted to getting help from their friends’ counselors.

*Challenges of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths*

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths faced challenges in the area of peer relationships (peer teasing), under-preparation for the rigors of Ivy League college work, racialization of their achievement. Finally, the youths faced pressure from their parents to pursue careers in the medical, law, and engineering fields without regards to the interest of the youths. Such parental pressure led to a high attrition rate from pre-med programs and difficulty in deciding college majors and career paths.

A major challenge that many youths faced was peer teasing. High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths were teased for being the youngest in class, being too tall, for behaving White due to their styles of dressing and accent, and for being smart. One youth who attended an elite private high school for girls reported a feeling of isolation due to class rather than race. The focus group participants also reported that they felt the class differences at their highly selective Ivy League campus. Youths, including the focus group participants, also experienced racialization of their success. They expressed concern that people attributed their achievements to being Black rather than to their hard work.

*Coping Strategies of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths*

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths devised strategies to cope with their challenges. Youths adopted a contextualized, but strong, Nigerian identity while recognizing that identities were situational. They could identify as Black, African-American, Nigerian, Igbo, and Yoruba depending on the social context and the attitude of the people around them. Youths were aware of the negative perceptions of African-Americans and took
care to avoid associating with African-Americans who perpetuated such negative perceptions. As a result, their peer networks among students who shared the same academic aspirations. Such peers came from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, including African-American.

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths were involved in extracurricular activities. The activities included sports, cultural, volunteer, religious, and professional groups that they believed allowed them to help others and help themselves. Involvement in extracurricular activities allowed the youths to create social networks and break down social barriers.

When youths recognized that they were ill-prepared for the rigors of the Ivy League college, they developed new study strategies. Some youths reevaluated their skills, learned how to study, and devoted more time to studying. Others hired private tutors and formed or joined a study group. Finally, college experiences led high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths to redefine the meaning of academic success. Prior to college, they viewed academic success as getting As in all their classes. They changed that view to putting in their best effort and working toward a particular goal.

To deal with their multiple social contexts, high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths used code-switching. They indicated that they code-switched in speech and dressing when dealing with different groups. They learned to successfully navigate their different social contexts in order to fit in and not feel out of place among their peers and their relatives. It appeared that these youths were able to build social capital through their ability to negotiate different cultural groups and their involvement in several extracurricular activities. A strong bicultural identity could have enabled high-achieving second-generation
Nigerian youths to weave in and out of their multicultural worlds. Additionally, a bicultural identity and the ability to code-switch might have served as resiliency tools that helped these youths to succeed in school. This would require further exploration.

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths indicated that they embraced their ethnic identities as well as their Nigerian culture. Yet, they also acknowledged that they code-switched in different contexts so that they could function successfully in their mainstream and in other environments.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Research Questions

The questions that guided this research were as follows:

1. What are the characteristics of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian immigrant youths in the United States?

2. What are the effects of personal, family, school, and community factors on the academic achievement of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths?

3. What challenges do high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths face in the schools and how do they deal with the challenges of being of Black, of immigrant origin, and high achieving?

Review of Findings Related to the Research Questions

In this final chapter, a summary of the study and the major findings were presented. In addition, the implications of the study were explained with both the limitations and recommendations for future research. This study focused on the characteristics and challenges of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths to understand factors that determine their academic outcomes and the challenges facing these youths. Findings also yielded coping patterns that these youths utilized to handle challenges and negotiate their academic experiences in the United States. This study used theoretical triangulation from cultural-ecological, social capital, and social cognitive theories to explore the academic experiences of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths.

The influx of immigrants from Africa, Asia, and Latin America in the post-1965 immigration era has led to increased research on the academic experiences of second-
generation youths from immigrant families in the last two decades (Noguera, 2004). Such research often focused on second-generation youths of Asian and Hispanic backgrounds but rarely on second-generation immigrant youths from Africa (Rong & Brown, 2001). The number of second-generation youths from Africa has steadily increased the need to expand research on this population (Logan & Deane, 2003). Researchers (Massey et al., 2007) have determined that second-generation African students were high academic achievers, but no research had focused on an African group to examine what determined their academic outcomes.

The sample for this study consisted of 11 high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths aged from 14 to 25, 6 focus group participants and 6 Nigerian mothers. The youths attended urban magnet high schools, urban parochial high schools, or suburban public high schools. College-aged youths attended Ivy League colleges or competitive private colleges. All youths resided in two-parent homes where both parents were college graduates. This was a qualitative study utilizing triangulated data sources and methods. Data sources included individual youths, a focus group, and parents (mothers). Methodology for the study included in-depth interviews from youths and parents as well as surveys. Youth participants completed a survey on demographic background in addition to the in-depth interviews.

Data analysis was initiated as interviews were transcribed from cassette tapes. Codes were sectioned off in brackets for the interviewees to validate during member checking. Each transcription was coded, and themes and patterns were identified. The codes were analyzed using HyperRESEARCH software.

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths in the study demonstrated high academic expectations and had high career aspirations. Many ranked high in their high
school graduation class, were valedictorians, and were enrolled in Ivy League colleges or a competitive private college. They scored 1200 and 1700 or higher on the old and new SAT tests. Study participants had school GPAs that ranged from 3.4 to 4.00, and they were actively involved in several extracurricular activities. The youths’ academic expectations mirrored those of their parents.

Using method triangulation and theory triangulation, the researcher found that parental engagement played a significant role in the academic outcomes of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths. The youths attributed their academic success to their parents, extended family, and the Nigerian community as well as to their personal motivation to succeed. They perceived themselves and Nigerians as academic achievers. Additionally, high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths learned to negotiate their bicultural identity and adeptly created coping strategies. They created social networks through participation in extracurricular activities and peer selection and used code-switching to negotiate their multiple social contexts.

Findings were discussed under the following categories:

1. Personal characteristics of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths, with a focus on youths’ history of academic achievement, youths’ self-perception/identity, and motivation;
2. Family characteristics of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths with a focus on parental engagement and home structure/routines;
3. School characteristics of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths;
4. Challenges of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths; and
5. Youths’ responses to challenges.
Personal Characteristics of High Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths

History of Academic Achievement

The second-generation Nigerian youths in the study had demonstrated academic credentials as evident in their GPA, class rank, standardized test scores, and enrollments in Ivy League and competitive private colleges. This finding supported a study by Massey et al. (2007), which found second-generation Black students from Africa, especially from Nigeria, were overrepresented in America’s most selective colleges. Such over-representation was greatest in the Ivy League colleges, as was the case in this sample. All six of the college-age participants in the individual in-depth interview attended an Ivy League or a highly selective college. Four were enrolled in an Ivy League college. Another one who graduated from a highly selective college received a graduate degree from an Ivy League college. The sixth youth was enrolled in a selective college. Among the two high school seniors in the sample, one has enrolled in an Ivy League college, and the other has enrolled in a highly selective college.

Another finding that was supported by Massey et al. (2007) was the high selectivity of African immigrants. The parents of high-achieving second-generation Nigerians in this study were college graduates, many of whom hold professional and master’s degrees. To many Nigerian parents, college was not an option, and a bachelor’s degree alone was not considered to be an acceptable final goal of education. Nigerian parents have transferred such educational aspirations to their children. None of the youth participants, both in the individual in-depth and in the focus group, indicated that a bachelor’s degree was a terminal degree. They aspired to careers that would require a professional or graduate school. One
focus group participant, FP, recalled hearing from his father that a bachelors degree (BA) stood for “begin again” as a way to drive home the need for graduate school.

Youths’ Self-Perception and Identity

Nigerian parents empowered their children with a sense of agency. Bandura (2001) stated that “agency embodies the endowment, belief system, self-regulatory capabilities and distributed structures and the functions through which personal influence is exercised rather than residing in a discrete entity in a particular place” (p. 2). Parents had high academic expectations and taught their children self-regulation and autonomy. Parents created structure for their children at an early age. To Nigerian parents, there was no such thing as “can’t do” and no excuses were allowed for academic failure.

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths internalized these beliefs of agency from their parents. Youths exhibited agency traits in some of their behaviors. They influenced their parents to send them to the schools that would support their goals. These youths challenged guidance counselors to help them find information they needed to meet their goals. When their assigned counselors provided minimum help, they did not accept “no” for an answer. They sought out other counselors who could help them when their assigned ones were unable to deliver. The youths were proactive in creating favorable relationships with new counselors in anticipation of receiving college recommendations. When asked about how much control they had over their academic success, all youth participants attributed their success to their motivation and partly to their parents and good teachers. This was an indication that they had personal agency. They used such agency to find ways to navigate their academic experiences.
It appeared that the youths’ agency originated in their Nigerian ethnic identity, which they credited for their academic success. All youths claimed a Nigerian-affiliated identity and believed that Nigerians were successful in academics. Such group identity could be salient in how high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths perceived themselves as academic achievers. This finding supported the findings of Oyserman et al. (2001), which found that the perception of being in-group as academic achievers could motivate youths and foster academic efficacy. Oyserman et al. (2001) posited that ethnic identity could offer positive protection against low academic efficacy because efficacy was a motivational factor and because belonging to a minority group could be “deflating and stigmatizing” (p. 384).

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths grew up with educated parents and were exposed to educated Nigerians. Therefore, they had come to view academic achievement as an in-group marker for Nigerians. These youths understood that academic achievement was valued among Nigerians and expected by their parents and the Nigerian community. The youths also grew up believing in their ability to do well in school. Outlier had indicated that Nigerians, whether in the United States or in Nigeria, were not afraid to tackle any subject. According to Outlier, Nigerians did not feel inhibited and did not grow up with the mentality that somebody could be in their way to succeeding. They had the self-efficacy that said, “I can do it.” Outlier felt that such beliefs had been transmitted to high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths.

All the youths in the study indicated that their parents instilled the value of education in them early on. It appeared that these youths had internalized the belief that education was the key to the future. High achieving second-generation youths did not exhibit an oppositional identity (Ogbu, 1978; 1991) against academic achievement or mainstream
society. They did not exhibit any animosity toward the mainstream society or view race as an obstacle to their academic success. These youths exhibited an approach to race in which they were aware of the race issue in our society but chose not to dwell on it. Rather, they focused on their goals. This supported Ogbu’s view that the children of voluntary immigrants did not develop an oppositional identity to education.

Motivation

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths in this study were highly motivated to achieve, as demonstrated by their academic credentials. These youths attributed their achievement motivation to internal and external sources. The internal motivation included the drive to succeed in a given career path and to make a difference in the lives of others. The reasons cited by the youths for their external motivation was to make parents and relatives proud. High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths grew up being cheered on by parents and relatives and they have internalized the expectations of the people around them to do well in school.

It was apparent that Nigerian parents used all available tools to motivate their children to succeed in school. They used material rewards as well as words of encouragement and some folk stories that provided high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths another frame of reference to be able to appreciate the opportunities available to them in the United States.

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths had high academic expectations of themselves. They did well academically in high school and had expected to perform well in college. Some of the college youths expressed disappointment in their inability to maintain their history of high GPAs in college. These youths had been humbled by their college
experiences. Their disappointments were evident in responses to the question: How are you doing in school?

For example, Joy, an Ivy League college student, who had graduated as the valedictorian of her high school class and had maintained a 3.00 in college after her freshman year, described her feelings with the following statement: “Average to me is not what I think I should be.” Joy clearly had very high academic expectations for herself and was not pleased with a B average in college, despite the higher academic rigors of an Ivy League school, coupled with the fact that she admitted that she attended an urban parochial high school that did not prepare her for such college rigors. All the college youth participants shared the same view as Joy. Such beliefs could have been intensified by Nigerian parents’ high academic expectations for their children.

In conclusion, it was evident that parents, siblings and extended relatives played an important role in the motivation of these youths through their actions and beliefs. Outlier summed up such a role and influence when she stated, “Growing up, there was a lot of focus on educational achievement and academic success. Both my parents have graduate degrees, and the emphasis was on academic achievement. It was ingrained in us. It was also due to intrinsic motivation.” She also cited her extended family as a source of her motivation. Her relatives in Nigeria always asked her when she was coming home to teach at the university even though she had no aspiration of being a college professor.

Home Characteristics of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths

Parental Engagement

A finding that was salient in the characteristics of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths was parental engagement. Nigerian parents were engaged with the education
of their children at home and in school. They were actively engaged with their children at home, but selectively engaged with their children’s schools.

The engagement at home involved all participants regardless of their birth order, but some youths reported decreased parental engagement with them as they got older but parents’ increased engagement with their younger siblings. Often, the reason for decreased engagement was because youths did not need direct supervision to do well in school as they got older. For example, Freelancer and Swoosh, whose parents were actively engaged with their school in the elementary school years, indicated decreased parental involvement in the high school. The youths believed that they did not need as much monitoring in high school because they were more mature.

Additionally, parents were also not able to handle their children’s course content in the upper grades. This reflected the experiences of Amy and Freelancer. In such instances in which parents were unable to provide direct homework help, the parents took on the indirect role as a supporter rather than the direct one of trying to help with homework. One parent, the mother of Freelancer, recognized her inability to provide content help with her children’s homework. She subsequently offered moral support to her children during homework time.

Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) defined parental engagement in education as parental involvement, such as parents spending resources on their children in the form of behavior (participation in school activities), cognitive-intellectual (engagement of children in intellectually stimulating activities), and personal (knowing what is going on at the child’s school). Grolnick, et al. (1997) later broadened the definition to include the emotional and personal aspects, as well as school-enhancing activities parents use to support the academic outcomes of their children.
Some immigrant parents used “real life” lessons to involve themselves in the education of their children (Lopez, 2001). For example, as migrant workers, the immigrant parents that Lopez studied took their children to the farm to show them what life could be for them without an education. This taught the children to value hard work and the value of working hard in school by providing them with another frame of reference. Nigerian parents in this study also provided another frame of reference for their children by retelling folk stories they heard from their parents while growing up and by telling stories about how they grew up.

Nigerian parents were actively involved in the education of their children. They used all of the various strategies mentioned in the studies above to engage their children academically. Parental engagement was multifaceted and included the various roles parents played in the creation of a home academic environment with clear expectations. Parental engagement also included parental expectations and support, motivation, home structures and routines, and various parent-school engagements. Nigerian parents emphasized the value of education to their children and set high expectations for their children at an early age.

One form of parental financial support was evident as all the youths who resided in an urban area and who did not attend a magnet school, attended a parochial school. This meant that the families made the financial investment required for their children to succeed; many of the youths grew up in large families that required more financial sacrifices on the part of the family. For some parents, the decision to send their children to a parochial school was due to their religious beliefs, in addition to the prospect of a better education.

Another form of non-school engagement identified in this study was parental use of enrichment activities. Nigerian parents sought out programs that could provide their children
opportunities to excel in school. Parents sent their children to Saturday enrichment programs and paid for community college courses while youths were still in high school.

One parent commented that her expectations were high so that if the children fell short of these expectations, they would still be able to land on something. In other words, if the goal was an excellent report card and the children fell a little short, they would still bring home a good report card. One of the focus group participants mentioned that at the age of six, he knew that he was expected to bring home good grades from school and he gladly lived up to it “without really understanding what all that meant.” Another youth from the focus group recalled that as early as age three, he knew it was expected of him to do well in school. The rest of the focus group participants concurred and referred to it as the “Nigerian parents factor.”

Carreon et al. (2005) found that immigrant parents in their sample engaged in the education of their children as questioner, strategic helper, and listener. Nigerian parents in this study exhibited a similar pattern of engagement. Like parents in the Carreon et al. study, Nigerian parents chose a variety of strategies to stay engaged with the education of their children depending on the social context. Such engagement included engagement in ethnic activities and religious activities that were outside the traditional school engagement.

The findings in this study regarding family influence on student motivation and achievement were supported by Urdan et al. (2007). They found that parental expectations in the form of parental beliefs and cognitive support influenced student motivation. Their conclusion was that parental behavior, such as parental involvement and structure at home, provided autonomy and influenced student motivation. In other words, parents who supported their children and were involved, valued educational achievement, and did not use
coercion often had children who valued academic achievement. They also noted that siblings and a critical event such as illness in the family also influenced student motivation.

Nigerian parents valued education, as demonstrated through their own academic achievements. They strongly believed in education and therefore provided role models for their children to emulate. They supported and motivated their children with all available resources at their disposal. As Urdan et al. (2007) noted, parental beliefs played a key role in influencing student motivation. They stated: “Parents who value academic achievement often have children who value academic achievement as well” (p. 9).

Contrary to how parental involvement was defined in the literature, Nigerian parents created their construct of parental involvement from their history and experiences as immigrants. To Nigerian parents, parental involvement primarily revolved around the home and outside of school activities rather than the participation in school-related activities or the participation in school-related groups such as the Parent Teacher Association type of involvements. When Nigerian parents engaged with the school, it was primarily to meet the teacher, not for active participation in school activities. Parents went into the school to expose the school to Nigerian culture. By doing this, Nigerian parents were creating an atmosphere in which multiculturalism would be tolerated in the schools attended by their children. When Nigerian parents engaged with their children’s schools, it was also to make their children feel comfortable and confident about their heritage and to motivate them.

In the process of preparing the youths to be successful in school, parents utilized whatever resources they could tap into, including financial, family, and cultural resources. Family resources include older children and extended family. Cultural resources include Nigerian cultural events and Nigerian cultural achievement ethos. The parents sent their
children to school with high expectations and an attitude of being ready to learn, which made it easy for the school to follow suit. High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths were empowered with a sense of self-agency, which they used to negotiate their environments. One parent participant, the mother of Humility, stated that there was “no such thing as can’t” in her home. The youths were able to convince their parents and counselors to support their academic needs. For example, Outlier and Arch were able to seek out opportunities that would help them to meet their goals, and they convinced their parents to support them.

Pre-immigration status was salient in how parents motivated their children. Parents who grew up wealthy in Nigeria frequently used that to motivate their children to succeed; their children were told that their achievements must exceed their parents’. Such parents told their children that they must maintain the family legacy given the opportunities available in the United States. On the other hand, parents who grew up in lower socioeconomic status families in Nigeria told their children about the opportunity available to them in the United States compared to how they grew up in Nigeria. These parents encouraged their children to take advantage of the educational opportunities available in the United States.

*Home Structure and Routines*

Other family characteristics of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths were the structure and routines in their homes. Youths revealed during interviews that they had routines in their younger years. They had clear expectations regarding homework and when it would be completed. Parents also had TV rules, and youths’ TV viewing was limited. Parents provided the home routines and structures and sent their children to school ready to learn. Parents in the study indicated, that as parents, their job was to send their children to school ready to learn, not to play or to distract others.
Proper behavior at school was also important to Nigerian parents, and they communicated that to their children. The parents claimed that they prepared their children for school as their own parents had prepared them. These parents subsequently used the same folk stories of success their parents told them to motivate their children in the United States. Parents also exposed their children to successful Nigerian professionals through attendance at Nigerian cultural events. Nigerian parents in the study indicated that they belonged to several Nigerian cultural associations. Such associations often served the functions of immigrant ethnic enclaves since Nigerian immigrants lacked their own ethnic communities.

Even when parents did not establish routines, their children created one based on the parental expectations. One parent had this to say about creating rules and structure for her children; “As a matter of fact, we never set any schedule for them any time. They knew what was expected of them. They came home and gathered around the table and did their homework.”

Parental engagement was also evident in the way Nigerian parents socialized their children. Cultural socialization was salient in the academic outcomes of these youths. Cultural socialization was the process through which high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths were introduced to Nigerian culture and values. Nigerians belonged to cultural associations, and they brought their children to cultural celebrations. One second-generation youth, Outlier, indicated that her desire to give back to society was inspired by attendance at cultural events with her parents. These events typically engaged in fund raising activities to help groups in Nigeria. Nigerian culture was significant to how the youths perceived their academic experiences and how they perceived themselves.
Biculturalism could be considered a form of cultural capital (Schmid, 2001). Schmid found that the children of immigrants who retained their parents’ culture with fluency in both their ethnic language and in English had a higher academic performance than the third generation youth who were “English dominant” (p. 82). High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths retained their parents’ culture, but were English fluent as they lacked fluency in their parents’ ethnic languages. That could indicate that biculturalism meant more than ethnic language fluency. It could include the internalization of the beliefs and values of the parents.

In order to deal with their multiple social contexts, high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths used code-switching when dealing with different groups. They learned to successfully navigate their different social contexts with code-switching to fit in and not feel elitist and out of place among their peers and their relatives. It appeared that these youths were able to build social capital through their ability to negotiate different cultural groups and through their involvement in several extracurricular activities. A strong bicultural identity could have enabled high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths to be able to weave in and out of their multicultural worlds. Additionally, a bicultural identity and the ability to code-switch might have served as resiliency tools that helped these youths to succeed in school, although this would require further exploration.

The relationship between a bicultural identity and academic achievement warrants further exploration. Zarate et al. (2005) also found that middleschool Latino students in their sample who had a positive view of their non-American ethnic identity performed better in middle school standardized reading and math tests than their peers. Although they cautioned that no causal relationship should be implied, they hypothesized that bicultural identity could
be considered a cultural capital to serve as a protective factor to help minority children “negotiate dominant structures and institutional systems” (Zarate et al., p. 112). They concluded that a positive view of home culture helped minority youths counter the negative mainstream constructions of minority students’ home culture and language. This conclusion supported earlier findings (Arriaza, 2003) that racialized youths build social capital as they learn to negotiate their status in society. According to Arriaza, such capital involved the development of a nurturing self that embraces one’s own racial identity as well as understanding the identity of others to succeed in a mainstream culture.

School Characteristics of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths

Of the 11 participants, 7 resided in urban settings and attended parochial or urban magnet high schools. Of the four participants who resided in suburban settings, two started out in a magnet urban school prior to relocating to the suburbs. The remaining two suburban youths attended a public high school.

Overall, youths reported that they had supportive teachers, with the exception of Amy, who had mixed experiences. Even though most of her teachers were supportive, she reported the case of one teacher whom she perceived had low expectations of her in his AP chemistry class. She made sure that the teacher understood that she was not a low achiever.

It appeared that Nigerian parents were selective in terms of the type of schools to which they sent their children. Parents who resided in the suburbs sent their children to the public schools; whereas, those parents who resided in urban areas paid for parochial school or sought out magnet schools in their school districts. One parent, a mother of three participants and a public school educator, noted that she learned early on to seek out parochial or special public schools for her children. This was after her oldest child, Scholar,
came home after the first day in kindergarten crying about how badly behaved the other children were.

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths attended schools where there was a high student-guidance-counselor ratio or where guidance counselors seemed unresponsive to their needs. Yet, these youths found ways to get around the problems by reaching out to counselors not assigned to them and by pushing their counselors to meet their needs.

Challenges of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths experienced peer teasing, name-calling, parental pressure, and academic difficulties in college as a result of under-preparation in urban parochial high schools. The youths were also able to devise coping strategies for these challenges. However, three youths experienced teasing at the hands of their peers due to being too smart, too young (one youth skipped a grade), too tall, African, and for acting White. Among focus group participants, four experienced teasing about their names, academic achievement, style of clothing, and biracial identity.

Although the youths were teased and had other difficulties, they were able to devise effective strategies to cope. All the youths were involved in extracurricular activities, which enabled them to build social connections and social capital with other peers and adults outside of their homes. Youths indicated that extracurricular activities enabled them to build their résumé for college, meet different people, and socialize with peers with similar interests. Youths in religious activities said such participation help them maintain a peaceful balance in their lives.

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths realized the value of being involved as a means of creating social networks. Their involvement was motivated by the
need to gain college admission, help others, and to meet different people. Involvement in extracurricular activities afforded high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths the opportunity to be “smart and cool” as these were not mutually exclusive. Optimist indicated that one of his best friends was an athlete who was also smart and that they proved to their peers that one could be smart and cool (socially active or popular as in being an athlete). This youth understood that peer relationships were an important aspect of school adjustment, and he adeptly negotiated that terrain through peer selection while balancing academic achievement and popularity.

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths also indicated that parents expected them to pursue certain careers without regard for their interests. For example, Optimist remembered growing up and hearing the cheers of parents and relatives to high career aspiration. He stated, “Everyone is going to be a doctor, engineer, or lawyer because these are the professions worth more and you are always get to have a job.” High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths must have grown up with such expectations from their parents and the Nigerian community. This possibly contributed to the large number of these youths entering a college as pre-med students and the resulting attrition rate. Optimist, who switched out of the pre-med program after a difficult first year in college, observed that among his Nigerian friends in college, “Fifty-percent started out as pre-meds and now you can easily cut that into half.”

Nigerian parents steered high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths into the medical, law, and engineering fields both for better career prospects and as a status symbol. Nigerian parents pushed for trophy degrees and trophy colleges such as the Ivy League colleges. As a highly educated group, Nigerian parents could have perceived an Ivy League
college education as an achievement marker. It was not uncommon to have Nigerian couples with doctorate, medical, or other professional degrees. Their children’s obtaining an Ivy League degree would symbolize an improvement as expected of children.

Parents also guided their children toward certain fields based on their notion of what would make a successful career in the United States. Nigerian parents could have steered their children to certain careers in the United States based on their experiences as immigrants. Nigerian immigrants with professional and well-paying jobs often had science-related or health-related backgrounds. Nigerian parents perceived more educational opportunity in the United States and believed it was easier than the Nigerian system. Therefore, they expected their children to do better. They communicated such beliefs to their children.

The finding that Nigerian parents steered their children to certain careers was partially supported by Li (2004). In a study of recent Chinese immigrants in Canada, Li found that the experiences of the Chinese parents in his study influenced the academic aspirations they set for their children. The Chinese parents pushed their children into science fields as a way to cope with their perceived disadvantages of being a minority in Canada. Most Nigerian parents in my study did not mention their minority status as part of their academic aspirations for their children.

One Nigerian mother mentioned that as a science educator, she knew that there were more opportunities in the science area for minorities, so she subsequently encouraged her children to go into the science fields. It was difficult to tell whether it was the professional experience of this parent or her experience as a minority that instigated her career aspirations for her children. However, her husband, who had an accounting degree, could have had
difficulty gaining employment in the past because she revealed during her interview that he was a taxi driver at one point before becoming self-employed. Often, among Nigerian immigrants with college education, “self-employment” was code for an inability to find gainful employment in the field studied.

Additionally, Nigerian immigrants came from a nation of people with high achievement motivation (Levine, 1966), with a craving for titles. For example, Nigerians often prefixed their names with earned titles such as Dr., professor, chief, engineer, attorney, and so forth. This could have fueled the desire of Nigerian parents in the United States for trophy colleges and degrees. As educated people, they also expected their children to achieve a higher educational status than they had obtained, and there could be no better way to achieve that than with an Ivy League degree. The parents’ career aspirations for their children and their focus on certain careers could have been as a result of pre-immigration experiences in which those in medicine, law, and engineering commanded the highest status and pay. In Nigeria, those who studied the social sciences were limited in terms of job prospects and status recognition.

Such parental career expectations could have fueled the desire of many high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths who entered college with pre-med as their intended major. Some youths started college with a certain parent-influenced major in mind but had to change their majors. Optimist, who started as a pre-med major and changed majors several times, indicated that some of his friends went through the same experience.

Unfortunately, this could have resulted in the high attrition rate of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths in pre-med, as reported by one of the youths. Decisions
over college major also seemed to have created conflicts between high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths and their parents.

Coping Strategies of High-Achieving Second-Generation Youths

Many youths indicated during the in-depth interview that a major challenge they faced was in the area of academics. Although participants were academic achievers as demonstrated by their history of achievement, they faced academic challenges ranging from high school underpreparation for college, lack of study skills, and the highly competitiveness of the Ivy League colleges. As a result, youths had to re-evaluate themselves to figure out what they needed and to come up with the solutions to their problems through a change of strategy that required increased effort and determination. The high school youths coped by seeking help from their teachers, parents, and increased effort in studying.

Some youths who used to excel on tests and exams without studying had to learn how to study. Some adjusted to not getting As in all their classes despite working harder and lowered their grade expectations for college. Youths who never used study groups in high school realized the need for them and sought out such groups. They also initiated some study groups when they anticipated that course content would be hard.

Even though the youths claimed a Nigerian identity, the youths indicated that identity was situation-specific depending on the environment, and therefore contextualized. In other words, they could be Nigerian, Nigerian-American, Black, African-American, Igbo, or Yoruba depending on the social context and depending on who was asking and for what purpose. They code-switched identity to suit their various social contexts.

Related to the identity issue was the idea of contextualized identity. High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths also devised ways to negotiate their contextualized
identities. The youths developed adeptness for code-switching in speech and clothing style to meet the demands of their contextualized identity. Code-switching allowed the youths to deal with pressure to assimilate into mainstream culture and yet preserve some elements of their original culture (Zhou & Bankston, 1994).

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths also used code-switching to relate to their African-American and other peers. It was apparent from how they rationalized code-switching that high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths had a myriad of social relationships to navigate both in the United States and in Nigeria. In response, they had devised practical ways to cope with such challenges in order to succeed in their academic endeavors.

An identifiable characteristic of the high-achieving Nigerian youths was the number of extracurricular activities they engaged in. The survey report showed that the two areas in which high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths experienced difficulties in school were in social and peer relation areas (see table 8). This supported the findings of Datnow and Cooper (1997), Portes, A. (1995), and Portes and Zhou (1993), who found that Black immigrant youths and Mexican immigrant youths were more susceptible to peer pressure than other immigrant groups because of their proximity to groups involuntarily incorporated into the American society. Many youth participants in this study lived in the suburb and probably did not reside in close proximity with many African-Americans, but they experienced problems of peer teasing regardless of the type of schools they attended.

Peer teasing could have fueled their interest in extracurricular activities, as all the youths were involved in extracurricular activities. Involvement in extracurricular activities allowed them to gain social capital through interaction with peers and adults who supported
their goals. High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths were also careful with the selection of their friends. They selected their friends based on shared cultural background and goals.

Involvement in extracurricular activities provided high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths access to social capital. This capital, coupled with their educational background, helped high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths to succeed academically. As educated professionals, Nigerian parents had human and financial capital, which they leveraged with cultural capital to motivate their children. The cultural capital was in the form of beliefs and norms shared by the Nigerian community. This helped to reinforce parental value for education as expectations for academic achievement was conveyed across the board.

Social capital could accrue from family and community in the form of a strong ethnic identity. The focus group participants joked about how they grew up in different households but shared similar experiences. They talked about how the Nigerian community shared the same value for education and reinforced the messages they grew up hearing. The concept of “it takes a village” was repeated through the discussions among the focus group participants. One of the focus group participants, FM, indicated that with the Nigerian community, one Nigerian parent could do the trick of motivating their children to achieve. The focus group also related that all second-generation youths shared similar experiences regarding parental academic expectations. Despite the lack of ethnic enclaves, Nigerian immigrants were able to generate social capital through their ethnic organizations and cultural events.

In conclusion, high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths attributed their academic outcomes to their parents, the Nigerian community, self-motivation, and their
ability to build social capital in school through participation in extracurricular activities. Youths were able to cope with their problems by tapping into a variety of resources such as parents, school officials, peers, and their personal experiences. As Mullis (2003) noted, academic achievement was a result of individual characteristics and social influences, with each one capable of offsetting the other. The academic experiences of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths could be attributed to their personal motivation as well as to the social contexts. Identity, Nigerian culture, class background of students, peer networks, school contexts, and personal agency seemed to have played significant roles in the academic outcomes of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths in this study. No single theory could encapsulate all these variables in the explanation of the academic experiences of this group.

Implications of the Study

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths exhibited the characteristics of high-achieving students from other groups. They came from two college-educated parent homes where education was valued and emphasized. They also shared characteristics with other immigrant youths struggling to adapt to American culture while maintaining their ethnic identity and heritage. The fact that all the youths in the sample held on to their Nigerian ethnicity could indicate that identity was an integral part of their academic success.

Immigrant youths could retain their cultural heritage as social capital that could facilitate academic achievement, as evident in the findings of Matute-Bianchi (1986) and Gibson (1989). These researchers found that immigrant youths in their studies had learned to accommodate mainstream culture to the extent that such culture aided their adaptation; but, at the same time the youths chose to preserve their ethnic cultures rather than subscribe to total
assimilation to mainstream culture. High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths believed that their upbringing and a Nigerian identity helped them to succeed in school. They had developed adeptness for negotiating across cultures through code-switching.

Unlike the high-achieving Black students in Fordham’s (1988) study who adopted a raceless identity as a strategy to cope with academic success, high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths in this study embraced their ethnic and cultural identity. Rather than adopting a “raceless” identity, they adopted code-switching as a strategy to use in managing their academic experiences. Code-switching could have helped high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths to deal with peer isolation and to lessen the emotional burden of being accused of acting White.

This was particularly relevant because researchers (Ford et al., 1993; Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) have found that managing academic achievement by Black students was often a difficult task, as these students often felt rejected by their peers. All youths do not manage their academic and peer challenges in similar ways. Research on different populations would assist researchers and educators in understanding what works for different groups.

The findings of this study have implications for our schools and how we educate minority and immigrant youths. There is a need for our schools to embrace cultural pluralism and multicultural education if we are to adequately educate all youths for the 21st Century. This is especially important as the population of children of color aged 15 through 19 in our schools is projected to increase from 34% to 46% by 2025 (Kao & Thompson, 2003). Schools and our society need to appreciate the bicultural identities of immigrant youths and educate immigrant youths on how to negotiate such identities.
To be an American and to have a bicultural identity were not mutually exclusive for high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths in this study. Preparing all youths for a multicultural society would also prepare youths for a multicultural globalized world. It is possible to educate all youths about how to negotiate multiple social contexts and educate teachers and the society in general to be more accepting of multiculturalism in our schools and society.

High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths indicated that code-switching and participation in extracurricular activities were effective strategies they used to manage academic success and peer relationship across a multiple contextualized identities. They understood that as Blacks and second-generation youths, they had to learn to negotiate their identities. The youths were able to switch their accents, clothing style, and identity to suit their various social environments. One focus group participant noted that he had a “corporate self, student self, [and a]just me” self.

Minority youths such as second-generation youths should be allowed to maintain a sense of multicultural identity without feeling that their culture is at odds with the mainstream culture (Portes, P., 1996b). Such youths could be taught code-switching strategies to cope with the multiple social environments they are expected to navigate in their lives. The youths could be taught that being a minority and being academically successful are not mutually exclusive. As Li (2004) noted, second-generation youths should be helped to “develop a healthy bicultural identity that retains their heritage and incorporates western cultural codes” (p. 180). The goal of educators should include teaching minority and immigrant students to acclimate to mainstream culture while preserving their ethnic identity.
Nigerian parents could benefit from some education on how their parental pressure could negatively impact their children. Their pre-immigration views of what made for a successful career should be revisited in light of the findings. Are Nigerian parents causing more harm to their children by pushing them toward trophy degrees? More career opportunities are available to high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths than their parents might be aware of, and parents should allow youths to explore their interests before settling on a career path. Being a good student and being successful in life should not mean that one has to be a physician, lawyer, or engineer. The US, unlike Nigeria, offers an array of career opportunities to high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths.

Limitations of the Study

As a qualitative study that relied on self-reports and interviews, this study was subject to issues of validity and reliability. Trustworthiness was gained through data triangulation. Although data triangulation (individual interviews, focus group, parental interviews) was utilized in the study to reduce validity and reliability threats, the sample was a small and a purposeful one. Therefore, the sample did not represent a broad section of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths in the United States.

Additionally, the findings should not be generalized to all second-generation youths in the United States. In addition to the small sample size, the youths who participated in the study had come from the Igbo and Yoruba ethnic Nigerian backgrounds. Sampling was small and represented youths from middle-class and upper-middle-class homes. Their parents were college graduates, most with professional degrees. Most of the youths attended suburban or parochial and urban magnet public high schools, and their experiences may not reflect that of youths who attended urban non-magnet high schools or those whose parents were not college
graduates or gainfully employed. Most participants, including parents, resided in the Northeast of the United States and therefore were not a true representation of the Nigerian second-generation in the United States.

Data analysis was done with HyperRESEARCH software and member checking and peer review was used to increase the validity and reliability of the data analysis and conclusions. In member checking, all transcriptions were sent to participants to review for errors. Two people, one a college professor and the other, an all but dissertation (ABD) were given the researcher-generated codes and a transcription to verify the coding schemes utilized in the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

High-achieving second-generation youths in the sample generously shared their experiences and offered several recommendations on possible areas to expand the scope of this study. Based on the sample of this study, second-generation Nigerian males were underrepresented both in the individual and focus group interviews; so more research is needed with male students. Are second-generation Nigerian males experiencing unique challenges, or is their underrepresentation as a result of sampling error? Some participants suggested that there might be a gender difference in the experiences of the second-generation Nigerian youths. This needs further exploration.

Another area for future research is an examination of the experiences of second-generation youths who attended racially diverse schools and those who attended suburban non-diverse schools to understand whether they are subjected to more teasing. It appeared that youths who attended urban parochial high schools did not endure peer teasing, but were generally underprepared for college. On the other hand, the youths who attended suburban
schools were exposed to social isolation and racial teasing even though they benefited from the academic rigor of the suburban school districts. A comparative study of second-generation Nigerian youths attending urban and suburban schools would shed more light on this finding.

The issue of parental pressure to pursue certain careers demands further exploration. Is the idea of Nigerian parents pushing their kids into trophy careers causing harm to the youths? Is there a maximum level at which parental pressure and expectation becomes undesirable? These are some of the questions that future research needs to address. The story of a second-generation Nigerian youth committing suicide over his family’s academic pressures needs to be further explored to determine if it is a common phenomenon.

Data analysis showed that all youths attended a magnet urban high school, a parochial high school, or a suburban high school. A follow up study could investigate how Nigerian parents decided on the schools that their children attended. When the issue of school choice came up, one parent, a schoolteacher and a devout Catholic, started her children in a public school. When her first child attended public school as a first-grader after a Catholic preschool, her child came home crying about how badly behaved the children in her school were. This parent, the mother of three of the participants had an epiphany and put all her children in Catholic school. Another parent indicated she knew little about public school when her oldest child started school. Her decision to send her children to a parochial school was based on the proximity of the school and her experiences attending a Catholic school growing up in Nigeria.

The sample for this study came from middle-class or upper-middle-class background. Therefore, it was difficult to determine whether the academic success of these youths were
due to their socioeconomic background or due to “the Nigerian parents factor,” as the youths in the focus group dubbed it. Further research would be needed to determine how much of the academic success of the youths were attributable to their socioeconomic background.

One youth suggested that a follow-up study could explore how much of their academic success was attributable to their Nigerian cultural background. All youths in the study favored a Nigerian identity whether as Nigerian-American or as Igbo or Yoruba. An important follow-up study would be to examine the effects of Nigerian identity and the non-Nigerian identity on the academic outcomes of high-achieving second-generation Nigerians. Also, an extension of this study could be to explore the identity of low-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths. Is it possible that bicultural identity could serve as a protective factor for second-generation Nigerian youths in the United States? Many youths in the study alluded to the idea that Nigerian identity was instrumental to their academic success. This should be explored in future research.

Some youths indicated that they perceived differential parental expectations based on birth order and ability. It would be interesting to investigate whether parents pushed their older children more than the younger ones or whether expectations were set for children based on innate ability and self-motivation. Two focus group participants indicated that their parents were happy if their younger siblings attending state colleges would graduate with a professional degree.

Participants noted that they were pre-tracked for honors and AP classes and did not need much counselor support. When their assigned counselor did not provide help with college process, the youths sought help from other counselors or demanded the help needed from their counselors. These youths believed in their academic abilities and their ability to
determine their future goals. They were able to use their personal agency to effect a change from their counselors. Some youths were also able to convince their parents to send them to a better school. A future study should examine the self-efficacy beliefs of these youths to determine whether such beliefs played any role in how the youths negotiated their academic experiences.

Conclusions

This study attempted to build research on the backgrounds and the experiences of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian students, and it identified the characteristics and challenges of these students. In order to help all students succeed in their academic endeavors, there is a need to understand the experiences and backgrounds of high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths. Also, this study made an effort to dispel the myth of Black academic inferiority frequently portrayed in the media and often predicted by researchers (Slaughter-Defoe et al., 1990). Focusing “primarily on the problems of a group of people in isolation from data that highlight possible solutions to their problems is to promote distorted and negative stereotypes that perpetuate defeat and pessimism” (Floyd, 1996, p. 181).

It appeared that high-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths had developed resiliency in the way they responded to their challenges. They exhibited multicultural skills that allowed them to value their ethnic culture, with a mastery of the mainstream culture. They possessed a repertoire of cultural codes that they switched into when necessary. Access to social capital through their parents, schools, peers, and the Nigerian community helped to reinforce the value of education and academic achievement.
When students have access to people who support their goals, they would have a better chance of succeeding in school. Schools need to work with parents to create opportunities for immigrant and minority students to succeed. Educators and parents should empower such students with a sense of personal agency to embrace their ethnic culture and the mainstream culture or what Li (2004) termed “western cultural codes” with the skills to navigate both worlds.

It was evident that the academic achievement of immigrant and minority youths, such as the population in this study could not be attributed to a single factor. High-achieving second-generation Nigerian youths in this study attributed their academic success to their internal motivation, their parents, and the social capital available to them through their community. Although Ogbu’s cultural ecological theory (1987) was useful in understanding the academic experiences of these youths, students’ personal agency and the ability to tap the resources in their social contexts also contributed to the academic success of the youths.
REFERENCES


Louie, V. (2001). Parent’s aspirations and investment: The role of social class in the 
educational experiences of 1.5-and second-generation Chinese Americans. *Harvard 


among Mexican-Descent and Japanese American students in a California high school: 


Marsh, H.W. (1992). Content specificity of relations between academic achievement and 

concept, interest, grade, and standardized test scores: Reciprocal effects models of 
causal ordering. *Child Development, 76*(2), 397-416.

achievement: Structural equation models of longitudinal data. *Journal 
of Educational Psychology, 89*, 41-54.

Jersey: Princeton University.


Dear Second-Generation Nigerian Youth,

I am a first generation Nigerian woman who is interested in researching the schooling experiences of second-generation Nigerian youth in the U.S. I am also a mother of three second-generation Nigerian youths in the U.S. and I have taught in an urban high school in Connecticut for more than 19 years. During those years, I have witnessed an increase in the number of second-generation Nigerian youths at this particular school and in the nearby towns and cities and that have captured my interest in researching the factors that influence their educational outcomes. I am particularly interested in the youth 14 years and over who completed the entire elementary education and at least two years of high school in the United States. This survey is an attempt to collect general information and demographic profile of the second-generation Nigerian youth. The purpose of this study is to research the academic experiences of second-generation Nigerian students in the United States. This is part of a course requirement for a Doctorate degree in Education.

Though there are thousands of second-generation Nigerian youths residing and schooling in the U.S, there has been no research done on this group to determine how schools can better serve them. By participating in this study, you are not only taking part in a ground-breaking research, but you are also contributing to help remedy a problem in the lack of research on the youths of Nigerian descent residing in the U.S. It is time to lift the veil of invisibility on the second-generation Nigerian youths in the United States. I assure you that data collected will be confidential and study results will not identify anyone by name. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the study and in the coding and reporting of the findings.

I sincerely thank you for your participation and hope that you will avail yourself of the possible in-depth interview that will follow this survey. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely

Mrs. Pat Anekwe
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

My name is Pat Anekwe and I am conducting research on the academic experiences of second-generation Nigerian students in the United States. You will be asked to complete a survey about your personal background and experiences as well as your family background and your attitude toward Nigerian culture and identity. Some participants will be invited for an in-depth interview.

In agreeing to be a participant in this research, you risk being inconvenienced and exposing your identity though my research will not use your name in any written report. You may not personally benefit from this research but other Nigerian students might benefit from it. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may discontinue participation at any time. You do not have to answer any question you feel uncomfortable with. I thank you sincerely for your help if you decide to participate.

I have explained to ____________________________ the purpose of this research including the possible risk of loss of confidentiality and possible benefits to the best of my ability.

___________________________ Date: ______________
Researcher’s signature

I confirm that Pat Anekwe has explained the purpose of this research to me, the procedures, possible risk of loss of confidentiality and benefits. I have read or have had this consent form read to me and I understand it. I, therefore, give my consent to participate in this study.

I have read or have had this consent form read to me. I give my consent to participate in this research.

___________________________ Date: ______________
Participant’s signature

I have read or have had the consent form read to me and I give permission for my child to participate in this study.

___________________________ Date: ______________
Parent’s signature

Patricia N. Anekwe
Email: diewa@msn.com
Appendix C

Second-generation Nigerian Youth Survey

The purpose of this survey is to collect background information on second-generation Nigerian youths (ages 14 and over) residing in the United States. This is part of a requirement for a course toward a doctoral dissertation that seeks to examine the educational experiences of second-generation Nigerian youths in the United States in an attempt to understand what influences their academic outcomes. I sincerely appreciate your participation and contribution to this endeavor.

There are five sections of the survey: personal information, parental information, high school information, college information and cultural/identity information. If you are a college student or have graduated from college, please complete the high school section as well as the college section. If you are a high school student, please disregard the college section.

Your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue your participation at any time. The entire survey should take you about twenty minutes to complete and there are no right or wrong answers to the questions. I assure you that your responses will be confidential. My contact information is on the last page if you need a copy of the findings.

Thank you for your participation.

Directions: please fill in the blank lines and circle the appropriate boxes.

PART ONE: PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Your name: ________________________________
2. Age: __________________
3. Sex (circle one): male    female
4. Country of birth (circle one) Nigeria    USA    Other_________________
5. If born in Nigeria, year you came to the United States: ______________
6. State of residence: ____________
7. Do you live in a city or suburb? (circle one): city    suburb
8. Do you or did you live with both parents up to age 18? (circle one): yes    no
9. Do you have any siblings? (circle one): yes    no
10. Number of siblings (circle one): 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11. What is your birth order? (circle one): 1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th 6th 7th
12. Level of education you completed (circle one): High School College Grad school Other
13. Have you ever experienced any difficulties or conflicts in school with regards to academic, social, teacher or peer relations? (circle one): yes no
14. If you answered yes to #13, briefly explain_____________________________
15. How did you deal with the difficulty? ________________________________

PART TWO: PARENTAL INFORMATION

1. Father’s name:________________
2. Father’s ethnic group (circle one): Hausa Igbo Yoruba Other________
3. Year your father came to the United States:________
4. Why did your father come to the U.S.? ________________
5. Highest degree your father received at arrival to the U.S. (circle one):
   High School Associate Bachelor’s Master’s Doctoral Other____
6. Father’s current highest educational level (circle one):
   High School Associate Bachelor’s Master’s Doctoral Other____
7. Father’s occupation: ______________
8. Mother’s name:________________
9. Is your mother a Nigerian? (circle one): yes no
10. If your mother is a Nigerian, the year she came to the U.S:______________
11. Why did your mother come to the U.S?
   __________________________________________________________________
12. Highest degree mother received at the time of her arrival to the US (circle one):
   High School Associate Bachelor’s Master’s Doctoral Other____
13. Mother’s current highest level of education (circle one):
   High School Associate Bachelor’s Master’s Doctoral Other____
14. Mother’s occupation: ________________________________
Part Three: High School Information

1. Where are you currently enrolled? (circle one): High School  College  Other

2. Location of high school attending or attended (circle one): Urban  Suburban

3. Type of high school attending or attended (circle one): Private  Public  Parochial

4. Year in school-for high school students only (circle one): Freshman  Sophomore  Junior  Senior

5. What is your intended college major? (for high school students only): ______________

6. What is your career goal? (for high school students only): ______________

7. Did you start high school in the United States? (circle one): yes  no

8. If you answered “no” to #7, in what grade did you start high school in the US?: __________

9. Do you or did you consider yourself an academic achiever? (circle one): yes no

10. Rank yourself as a student (circle one): top 5%  top 10%  top 20%  average  below average

11. How many honors/AP classes do you have or did you take in high school? __________

12. What motivates you to work hard in school? ______________

13. Do you have friends who you study with for tests, quizzes, homework etc? (circle one): yes no

14. Who are these friends? (circle all that apply): Black Americans  Nigerians  White Americans  Others __________

15. What are your grades like? (circle one): Mostly A’s  Mostly B’s  Mostly C’s  Mostly D’s

16. List up to five awards you have received in high school: ______________________________

17. List up to five extracurricular activities you are involved in: ____________________________
PART FOUR: COLLEGE INFORMATION

1. Name of college: ________________________________
2. Type of college (circle one): Private  Public
3. College major: ________________________________
4. Did you complete all 4 years of high school in the U.S.? (circle one): yes  no
5. What was your high school GPA (on a scale of 1-4) at the time of graduation? ___
6. What was your class rank at high school graduation? _________________________
7. How many students were in your graduating class?________________________
8. What was your highest SAT or ACT combined score? _____________________
9. Did you take the SAT preparation course? (circle one) yes  no
10. List any 3 academic awards received in college: _______________________
11. List any 3 college extracurricular activities:________________________
12. College GPA at the time of graduation:_______________________________
13. Highest degree you have received (circle one):  Bachelor’s  Master’s  Doctoral  Other____________
14. Highest degree you anticipate to receive in the future:___________________
15. Current occupation:_________________________________________

PART FIVE: CULTURAL/IDENTITY INFORMATION

1. Do you speak any Nigerian language? (circle one): yes  no
2. If you answered yes to #1, which Nigerian language do you speak? _____________
3. Do you consider yourself a fluent speaker? (circle one): yes  no
4. Do you understand any Nigerian language? (circle one): yes  no
5. Which Nigerian language do you understand? ________________
6. Are you interested in learning more about your cultural heritage? (circle one): yes no
7. List any cultural activities you have participated in:________________________
8. How do you see yourself? (circle one): Nigerian, Nigerian-American, Black, African-American, American, Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, Other (fill in)________________

9. Explain your choice:________________________________________________________

10. How do others identify you? ______________________________________________

11. Do you have any problem with being identified as Black American? (circle one) yes no

12. Explain why:________________________________________________________________

13. How do you react to such identification? _________________________________

Would you be interested in a follow up in-depth interview with the researcher? ______
Phone #___ ___ _____
E mail__________________

ONCE AGAIN THANK YOU FOR YOUR RESPONSES.

Mrs. Pat Anekwe
Appendix D

Interview Schedule For Second-Generation Youths

Your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue at any time. You may also choose not to answer a specific question.

1. How are you doing in school?
2. Have you experienced any difficulties in school? Explain.
3. Do you believe that you are doing your best in school? Explain.
4. What motivates you to work hard in school? Or what keeps you from working hard in school?
5. Have your parents been supportive of your schooling? Explain.
6. Did your parents influence your high school course selection or express an interest in the courses you selected?
7. Describe your typical day at home during your high school years regarding routines, TV policy, extracurricular activities etc.
8. Did your parents make contacts with the school community (PTA, parent conferences, open houses, school play or sports, volunteering etc)? Explain.
9. Have your teachers been supportive of you? Explain.
10. Did your guidance counselor help you with course selections and college preparation? Explain.
11. Were you in the college prep classes in high school?
12. Did you get along with your classmates in high school? Explain.
13. Did you have friends in your school and if so, what attracted you to these friends? Explain.

14. Did you study with your friends?

15. Did you belong to community organizations, cultural groups or participate in extra-curriculum activities? Describe your involvement.

16. Did these organizations enhance your self or academic development? Explain.


18. Did you participate in any Nigerian cultural activities? Explain.

19. Describe your overall school experiences including challenges and how you dealt with those challenges.

20. Did being Black and Nigerian descent help or hurt you in school? Explain

21. What does academic success mean to you?

22. Do you consider yourself academically successful? Explain how you know this.

23. What does it take to become successful as a student and do you have it?

24. Do you consider Nigerians successful in academics? Explain.

25. Do you know any successful Nigerians? How did you meet them?

26. What are your best and worst academic subjects and your grades in those subjects?

27. Are you planning a career in a field related to your favorite subjects?

28. How much control do you have over your academic successes and failures?
Appendix E

Interview Schedule For Parents

Your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue at any time. You may also choose not to answer a specific question.

1. When did you come to the United States?
2. Did you obtain any your formal education in the United States? Explain.
3. Why did you come to the United States?
4. What type of experiences have you had living in the United States?
5. What does success mean to you?
6. Do you consider yourself an academic success? Explain.
7. Do you consider your children academically successful? Explain.
8. What role did you play in making that happen?
10. How do your children identify themselves?
11. How do you want your children to identify themselves? Explain.
12. What steps and rules did you implement to get your children to focus in academics?
13. Do you think that such measures yielded positive results?
14. How engaged were you in your children’s school? Explain.
15. Do you belong to Nigerian associations? If so, why?
17. Have you ever experienced any problem with your children’s school? Explain
18. Who are your children’s school friends? Describe.
19. How do you motivate your children to do well in school?
20. How is education in Nigeria different from education in the United States?

21. If you were to experience any problems with your child’s school, how would you handle it? Describe your experiences in handling such problems with schools.

22. Do you think that Nigerians are generally academically successful? Explain.

23. How much control do you have over the academic successes and failures of your children?
Appendix F

Interview Schedule For Focus Group

Your participation is voluntary and you may discontinue at any time. You may also choose not to answer a specific question.

2. What does success mean to you? Explain.
3. Do you consider yourselves academically successful? Explain.
4. If so, what reasons do you attribute to your academic success?
5. Do you think Nigerian youths are academically successful? Explain.
7. Do you consider Nigerians in the United States academically successful?
8. Do you know academically successful Nigerians when you were growing up?
9. What role do Nigerian parents play in the education of their children?
10. What do you think that it takes to be academically successful?
11. Did you ever have any problem in school related to your race or Nigerian background and if so, how did you deal with it?
12. Did you participate in Nigerian cultural activities growing up?
13. Who were your friends and study group friends? Explain.
14. In what ways are second-generation Nigerian youths similar or different from your friends?
15. How much control do you have over your academic successes and failures?
Appendix G

Master Code List

1. Academic achievement
2. Academic difficulty in college
3. Academic self-efficacy
4. Academic success defined broadly
5. Academic success as effort and good grades
6. Academic success defined as effort and hard work
7. Balancing smartness and popularity
8. Career aspiration
9. Child led parents as initiator
10. Code-switching
11. College extracurricular involvement
12. Comparison to other second-generation youths
13. Contextualized identity
14. Coping with academic challenges
15. Cultural socialization
16. Description of high school attended
17. Education in Nigeria
18. Ethnic identity
19. Exposure to Nigerian role models
20. Extracurricular involvement
21. Family rituals
22. Fear of achievements being racialized
23. Fear of punishment as motivation
24. Grades as measure of success
25. Group identity
26. Growing up second-generation Nigerian
27. Guidance support
28. High school extracurricular activities
29. High school friends
30. High school inadequate curriculum
31. High school tracking
32. Home structure
33. Influence of urban culture
34. Limited parent-school contact for oldest children
35. Meaning of academic success
36. Motivated by a desire to help others
37. Motivated by goals
38. Motivated by parents
39. Motivated by siblings
40. Motivation source
41. Motives for extracurricular activities
42. Negative effects of parental push
43. Nigerian craving for titles
44. Nigerian parents organize to help each other
45. Nigerian peers
46. Parent biographical information
47. Parent membership in Nigerian Associations
48. Parent’s ethnic identity
49. Parent’s perception of child's success
50. Parent’s perception of group identity
51. Parent’s perception of Nigerian identity
52. Parent’s perception of parent-school engagement
53. Parent’s perception of parental role
54. Parent’s perception of problems with school
55. Parent’s use of older sibling
56. Parent’s wish for child's ethnic identity
57. Parent-child relationship
58. Parent-school contact
59. Parent-school relationship
60. Parental efficacy in motivation
61. Parental expectation of school behavior
62. Parental expectations
63. Parental fears about code-switching
64. Parental influence
65. Parental involvement
66. Parental motivation
67. Parental role
68. Parental support  
69. Parental version on motivation  
70. Parents as role model  
71. Parents emphasized education  
72. Parents pushing certain careers  
73. Parents sacrificed for children  
74. Parents set goals for children  
75. Parents use other Nigerian kids for motivation source  
76. Parents’ definition of success  
77. Parents’ immigrant experiences  
78. Peer influence  
79. Peer relationship  
80. Peer teasing  
81. Positive black and Nigerian identity  
82. Pre-immigration family status as motivation  
83. Private versus public school  
84. Race-related school problems  
85. Racial-ethnic identity  
86. Relation with African-Americans  
87. Religious influence  
88. School difficulties  
89. School experiences  
90. School social capital
91. Self-efficacy

92. Sibling competition as motivation

93. Strategies used to resolve school-related problems

94. Teacher not supportive

95. Teacher support

96. TV rules

97. Value of Nigerian culture

98. Value of positive teacher relationship

99. Value of positive peer relationship
Appendix H

Examples of Coded Texts

Text coded for home structure

This report is on the following selected cases:
    Amy
    Arch
    Eddie
    Freelancer
    Humility
    Joy
    Modesty
    Optimist
    Outlier
    Scholar
    Swoosh

(End list of cases)

The cases reported upon are based on the following criteria:
By Name

(End selection criteria)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>home structure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TEXT</td>
<td>5934, 6605</td>
<td>Amy.txt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Material:
7. Describe your typical day at home during your high school years regarding routines, TV policy, extracurricular activities etc.

Amy: I did not have much of a day left after school. I was a varsity athlete for 4 years; and I had 3 hours of practice after school. I would come home, shower and eat dinner, and by then it may have already been 7:00 pm. I would then do homework, and sometimes enjoyed TV (but not too often). In elementary school and middle school, dad had no TV days (3 out of 5 week days). You picked maybe two programs you wanted to watch during the week. Dad did not like the values (or rather, the lack of values) portrayed on American television.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arch</td>
<td>home structure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TEXT</td>
<td>1550,1854</td>
<td>Arch.txt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Material:
7. Describe your typical day at home during your high school years regarding routines, TV policy, extracurricular activities etc.
Arch: I come home, do my homework first, I make sure to study I have a test. After that I do any extra activity I have to. On Wednesdays I go to a program at the City Hall.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>home structure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TEXT</td>
<td>2300,2712</td>
<td>Eddie.txt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Material:
7. Describe your typical day at home during your high school years regarding routines, TV policy, extracurricular activities etc.

Eddie: Before I started working in my senior year, I would go home, eat a little, do my homework, go on the computer, and relax depending on the workload. But I definitely did all my homework then watched TV with my parents and talked with them and got help with homework if needed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freelancer</td>
<td>home structure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TEXT</td>
<td>3958,4389</td>
<td>Freelancer.txt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Material:
7. Describe your typical day at home during your high school years regarding routines, TV policy, extracurricular activities etc.

Freelancer: I hardly have any time after school because of activities. When I come home, I am so tired that I sit for a while, eat, sleep a little before I do my homework whether it takes me to 1:00 am and sometimes, it does because my activities back me up. I must sleep before I start the homework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>home structure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TEXT</td>
<td>2866,3073</td>
<td>Humility.txt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Material:
7. Describe your typical day at home during your high school years regarding routines, TV policy, extracurricular activities etc.

Humility: I would get home, relax for a while, do my homework and that was it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>home structure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TEXT</td>
<td>4529,5625</td>
<td>Joy.txt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Source Material:
7. Describe your typical day at home during your high school years regarding routines, TV policy, extracurricular activities etc.

Joy: I attended KO high School (parochial) and we were on a block schedule with 4 classes of 80 minutes daily. It was intense but it was a good preparation for college for me. I woke up around 6:30 am and went to school until 2:00 pm. I stayed after school for activities. There was an activity after school daily except on Fridays. On Fridays after school, I might hang out with my friends or I would volunteer in the office. I was always doing something. I came home around 3:00 pm and did my homework and I picked up my siblings (interviewee is the 3rd of 7 children). I read a lot. I went to the library once a week and checked out stacks of books and I would read them for the whole week.
Follow up question: What about TV as you didn't mention it?
Joy: TV is not part of the plan here. In general, we were not allowed to watch TV unless it was the weekend. I read books instead TV before the Internet became big. I lived in the library.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td>home structure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TEXT</td>
<td>1598,2061</td>
<td>Modesty.txt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Material:
7. Describe your typical day at home during your high school years regarding routines, TV policy, extracurricular activities etc.

Modesty: If I have something to do at school, I will do it. If not, I will come home and do my homework. My day depends on if I have somewhere to go or things to do. I like to watch TV but I don't watch that much TV. I will watch it if I have nothing to do. Usually, I can't watch TV because I am not home. I work at a daycare.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Optimist</td>
<td>home structure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TEXT</td>
<td>6402,8025</td>
<td>Optimist.txt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Material:
7. Describe your typical day at home during your high school years regarding routines, TV policy, extracurricular activities etc.

Optimist: After school, depending on the day as I had different activities everyday, I was a superman. If were in a club, I was the vice-president or the president. I was in prom committee, student council, captain of the volleyball team, and president of Junior Achievement, an evening program that ran a pseudo made up company and had stocks to manage. My homework took little time. I could get it done in 3 hours at school. In my senior year, I had free time and all those times I had; I would say I might as well do my homework at school. I also went to basketball games and I was friendly with cheerleaders, you know? The typical things high school kids did. Nothing is to say that you can't be smart and be
popular and hang out with popular people. When school ends, you know what you want. When the school year ended and they were calling my name for the awards, people were shocked (referring to how peers were surprised to see that he was both smart and popular and in sports as these are mutually exclusive to many kids). Basically, no TV was allowed when we were growing up but as I got closer to college age, my parents became more relaxed with TV. It was obvious that at this point, we knew how to handle ourselves and the TV won't interfere. We never really had a need for TV because we were always doing something. I was at basket ball games or playing my game upstairs especially during primetime shows. I was tired when I got home anyway, unless it was the weekend.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outlier</td>
<td>home structure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TEXT</td>
<td>10429,11070</td>
<td>Outlier.txt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Material:
7. Describe your typical day at home during your high school years regarding routines, TV policy, extracurricular activities etc.

Outlier: My day started early especially as I was involved in student government, which met early before the school day. I went to classes and played tennis after classes during season from 3 to 7 or 8 pm. After tennis, I studied typically from 8-12 midnight or 1:00 am depending. Tennis was a daily activity and I did other extracurricular activities. I was heavily involved in extracurricular activities or clubs from career to tennis and community services. Weekends were devoted entirely to homework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scholar</td>
<td>home structure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TEXT</td>
<td>2399,3412</td>
<td>Scholar.txt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Material:
7. Describe your typical day at home during your high school years regarding routines, TV policy, extracurricular activities etc.

Scholar: Well for me, after classes, I stayed in school for extracurricular activities. I was a member of the student council, prom committee, "Just K"(a youth group that promotes and teaches Christian values from a youth perspective), Building With Books (an organization that raises money to send books and build schools in Third World countries), Junior Achievement (City-wide organization that builds a company from the scratch with real money and elect youths to run the company). I was the vice-president of finance for one year. I was very involved in school and I usually didn't see home until late because of the activities. We didn't watch TV. We weren't supposed to during the week but on weekends. We didn't have cable. After a certain point, it was no longer important especially in high school because I didn't have the time. Eventually, it didn't really draw me.
Source Material:
7. Describe your typical day at home during your high school years regarding routines, TV policy, extracurricular activities etc.

Swoosh: I try to get all my homework done at school. I spend a lot of time on the Internet, reading and also watching T.V. If I don't get the homework done in school, it will be unlikely done at home. This is because I go to school at 7:05 am and I get home between 5 and 5:30pm and I don't want to do more work after I come home.

Text coded for parent-school contact

This report is on the following selected cases:
   Amy
   Arch
   Eddie
   Freelancer
   Humility
   Joy
   Modesty
   Optimist
   Outlier
   Scholar
   Swoosh

(End list of cases)

The cases reported upon are based on the following criteria:
By Name
(End selection criteria)

Source Material:
8. Did your parents make contacts with the school community (PTA, parent conferences, open houses, school play or sports, volunteering etc)? Explain.

Amy: Not particularly! As the oldest child of immigrants, my parents didn't know much as other parents about the school system etc., so my brother and I, especially me, were the guinea pigs (and I still remain so!). My parents went to parent teacher conferences, and my
mom sometimes went to PTA meetings. Now for my younger sisters, my parents are more involved (especially my mom). She knows the principal, teachers, and other parents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arch</td>
<td>parent-school contact</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TEXT</td>
<td>2127,2370</td>
<td>Arch.txt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Material:
8. Did your parents make contacts with the school community (PTA, parent conferences, open houses, school play or sports, volunteering etc)? Explain.

Arch: They attend school activities for parent conferences, open house, and for report cards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>parent-school contact</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TEXT</td>
<td>2714,3449</td>
<td>Eddie.txt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Material:
8. Did your parents make contacts with the school community (PTA, parent conferences, open houses, school play or sports, volunteering etc)? Explain.

Eddie: My parents were involved lot during the elementary years but not on a daily basis. They went to the PTA meetings, parent conferences, and Science Fairs especially my mom. In high school, they were not involved as much. In high school, my mom came to a few Parent-Teacher-Student-Organization meetings. The level of their involvement died down. Follow up question: Why do you think that your parent’s level of involvement died down in high school?
Eddie: I didn't need my parents to hold my hand anymore. I also didn't need them to guide me as much because I knew what to do.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freelancer</td>
<td>parent-school contact</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TEXT</td>
<td>4391,4800</td>
<td>Freelancer.txt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Material:
8. Did your parents make contacts with the school community (PTA, parent conferences, open houses, school play or sports, volunteering etc)? Explain.
Freelancer: They did when I was younger, especially my mom because they felt that they had to take care of me. My mom was involved in PTA, and was in contact with the teacher. Now, they think that I can take care of my self but I tell them what is going on.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>parent-school contact</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TEXT</td>
<td>3075,3365</td>
<td>Humility.txt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Source Material:
8. Did your parents make contacts with the school community (PTA, parent conferences, open houses, school play or sports, volunteering etc)? Explain.

Humility: Not really! They were not at school unless they were required to be there for report card and they didn't volunteer at the school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>parent-school contact</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TEXT</td>
<td>5627,6056</td>
<td>Joy.txt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Material:
8. Did your parents make contacts with the school community (PTA, parent conferences, open houses, school play or sports, volunteering etc)? Explain.

Joy: My parents are such busy people. My freshman year, they came in. All of us were at the same school so the teachers knew us. My parent probably came once to see all the teachers. We also saw the teachers at church. We were good kids, so parents never had to be called in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td>parent-school contact</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TEXT</td>
<td>2063,2325</td>
<td>Modesty.txt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Material:
8. Did your parents make contacts with the school community (PTA, parent conferences, open houses, school play or sports, volunteering etc)? Explain.

Modesty: They did attend school activities when I was younger. If I feel it is necessary then I will tell them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Optimist</td>
<td>parent-school contact</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TEXT</td>
<td>9005,9534</td>
<td>Optimist.txt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source Material:
8. Did your parents make contacts with the school community (PTA, parent conferences, open houses, school play or sports, volunteering etc)? Explain.

Optimist: Basically, I have a large family (interviewee is 1 of 7 children and 2nd in line). In generally, my parents weren't available. For Parent-Teacher Conferences, they made sure that they were there to meet the teachers and to see what we were doing. The teachers expected parents to be there for conferences; and it forces the parents to know what is going on at school.
Outlier: My parents were not involved in the PTAs and other school associations because they were always working and both had 2 jobs. Mom also worked and was in school. They picked us up and dropped us to the babysitter. Even if they were not working, being the first born, they were not comfortable doing the middle class things (like being physically present and involved in school engagement activities at school). They only associated with other Nigerians.

Source Material:
8. Did your parents make contacts with the school community (PTA, parent conferences, open houses, school play or sports, volunteering etc)? Explain.

Scholar: My mom always wanted to get involved but couldn't because she had to work. And my dad had to work especially in the elementary school when we had the Parent-Teacher Association meetings. My mom had the intentions but life was hard. But when she did come, she made her face known and everybody recognized her and knew who were because there were so many of us (interviewee is the oldest of 7 children).

Swoosh: My dad was part of the PTA in Bridgeport (Elementary School Years). They are not as involved here but I know my mom calls the counselor and they talk. They (parents) leave me to my own devices.

Follow-up: Why?
Swoosh: I don't get in trouble, I do my work and so they don't need to talk to my teachers.