

Get Your Gele: Nigerian Dress, Diasporic Identity, and Translocalism

by

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Abstract

In the U.S., Texas is home to the largest Nigerian-American community, specifically in Tarrant, Harris, Dallas, & Travis Counties. This study was designed to explore Texan-Nigerian-American's levels of ethnic identity and self-esteem as compared to other immigrant groups and ethnic minority groups in Texas. This project specifically looked at correlations between ethnic identity in relation to dress and tradition. This was a triangulated exploratory study, which uses online surveys to measure ethnic identity, face-to-face interviews, and participant observation/focus groups within the Nigerian-American community. Results showed that Nigerian-Americans have considerably higher ethnic identity rates than other ethnic minority groups in Texas and wear ethnic dress with higher frequency. Qualitative analysis found that there was a preference for ethnic anonymity amongst younger Nigerian-Americans, even among those who wear Nigerian dress.

Keywords: ethnic dress, ethnic identity, Nigerian-Americans, self-esteem, Texas

Introduction

It is two yards of folded, crisp aso-oke fabric formed into a towering headdress. The more complex and elaborate the headdress, the more impressive it is. This is the *gele*, a rather simple, traditional Nigerian head wrap that has undergone a dramatic transformation since Nigerian-American women have turned it into a local fashion statement. According to Mr. Hakeem Oluwasegun Olaleye, better known as Segun Gele (personal communication, March, 15, 2011), when he first came to the U.S. in 2003, his female compatriots wore very dismal head wraps that were not tied well, if they wore one at all. He found his calling at a wedding he was attending where he tied a woman's head wrap in the parking lot for a few dollars.

Mr. Gele (personal communication, March 15, 2011) says that he has witnessed a rise in popularity of the gele amongst Nigerian immigrants, especially in Texas to which he partially credits himself (Showalter, 2010). Is this phenomenon truly the doings of one man, or is there something more complex factoring into this behavior? Although his creativity and ingenious entrepreneurship cannot be denied, dress has always been an integral part of the Nigerian identity, and even with acculturation into American society, it remains an important facet of the immigrant identity.

Currently, the U.S. has the third largest concentration of Nigerians outside of Nigeria and the U.K. In the U.S., Texas is home to the largest Nigerian-American community, specifically in Tarrant, Harris, Dallas, & Travis Counties (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Since the 1970s, Nigerians have been a part of the immigrant pool into the United States. Nigerian immigration has generally occurred for the following reasons: a quest for Western education, the sociopolitical situation in Nigeria, the aftermath of the Nigerian civil war, and the military dictatorships of the 1980s and 1990s (Ogbaa, 2003). Once in the U.S. they settle in the southern states where the climate is warmer and where education and living costs are generally lower, which explains the high concentration of Nigerians in Texas (Ogbaa, 2003).

With the growth of globalization, we are no longer isolated from other cultures. We are compelled to become aware of, and acknowledge other cultures, especially in a pluralistic nation like the United States.

Ultimately, the purpose of this study was to shed light on a rapidly growing ethnic group in Texas. It was an exploratory study that was conducted to obtain preliminary data on the relationships between ethnic identity, self-esteem, and the use of ethnic dress in Nigerian-Americans. Four primary research questions were examined for this study:

Q1a: Do Nigerian-Americans use ethnic dress with higher frequency than other ethnic groups in Texas?

Q1b: Do Nigerian-Americans have a stronger ethnic identity than other ethnic groups in Texas?

Q1c: Is there a correlation between high ethnic identity & self-esteem in Nigerian-Americans? What is the role of dress in this process?

Q2: Is there a correlation between ethnic identity and usage of ethnic dress of Nigerian-Americans?

Q3a: Do Nigerian-Americans have higher self-esteem scores than other Texans ethnic groups?

Q3b: Is there a correlation between use of ethnic dress and high self-esteem?

Q4: What is the role of outsider (mainstream society member's) perception on Nigerian-American ethnic identity affirmation and exploration, their self-esteem, and their choice to use ethnic dress?

Methodology

In this triangulated exploratory study, the first component used online surveys to gather basic demographic information, and secondly, it measured ethnic identity, ethnic dress usage, and self-esteem levels via a 19 question survey consisting of Likert-like scales and open-ended questions. Next, to measure ethnic identity, a variation of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) was utilized (Phinney, 1992), and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was also used to measure self-esteem levels (1965).

Correspondingly, the interview and focus group questions were based on those questions presented in the online survey. Hence, the interviews were particularly useful because they allowed for an in-depth study of perceptions, attitudes, and other internal processes of the participants in their natural environments. And finally, the sample selection consisted of men and women of Nigerian ethnic decent, a minimum of 18 years of age and living in the state of Texas (n=31). A control group was also included which consisted of other ethnic minority men and women 18 years or older (n=75). A comparison of ethnic identity awareness and use of ethnic dress was made between the two groups. Participants were recruited through word-of-mouth, university classrooms, personal references, and cultural organizations at the local university. Other interviews and observations took place in Houston Texas with Mr. Segun Gele (a well-known headwear designer in the Nigerian community residing in the Houston area) and his Nigerian clients.

Results

A total of 196 responses were collected, 31 of which were Nigerian Americans and 75 were from other minority ethnic groups (African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Middle Eastern Americans). The remaining 90 responses came from individuals who claimed to be Caucasian or European American. These 90 responses were of little use for the purposes of this study, other than for comparative analysis to ethnic minority groups as a whole (see Q3a).

Ethnic Identity

Identity is the self-constructed, mental representation of who and what we are, and it is essential for organizing our beliefs, individual histories, and social relations. We all have multiple identities, which relate to our various positions within society. We identify with a gender category, an ethnic or racial category, a religious category, etc. However, depending on the context, each identity will vary in the degree it is expressed. For example, an individual might identify more with ethnic identity when in the company of others who share their ethnic background.

Social Identity Theory (SI Theory) was developed by Henri Tajfel to explain the extent to which an individual recognizes his/her membership in a group. The central concept of the theory is that “a part of everyone’s self-concept derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership(s)” (Segall, Dasen, Berry, & Poortinga, 1999, p.275). An ethnic group is one of the many social groups an individual may belong to. Thus, ethnicity is linked to one’s self-concept and overall identity formation, depending on the amount of significance one attributes to their ethnic background. After deciding what role ethnicity will play in one’s life, the individual will then explore different aspects of their ethnicity. Eventually, they will incorporate those aspects they find significant, into their social identity (Phinney, 1990).

A fundamental element of Social Identity Theory is the process by which we use physical and social attributes to categorize people as members of social groups (Segall, Dasen, Berry, & Poortinga, 1999). According to Social Identity Theory, we try to make sense of the world through a systematic arrangement of visual cues, and therefore create a “locus for the self within the orderly structure” (Segall et al., 1999, p. 275). Dress is an essential component used in our categorization of the social world, because it communicates distinct personality traits of the wearer. As a member of a social group individuals are inclined to follow the prescribed dress of that particular group in order to enhance their sense of belonging and, thus, their self-concept.

Ethnic identity is the conscious part of the self that is formed through self-identified associations with others influenced by similar backgrounds with common desires for cultural continuity. Ethnic identity is also multidimensional in that it incorporates the values, attitudes, and shared experiences of a group of people, and relies on learned behavior to transmit values, language, ideas, food habits, sexual behaviors, and political ideology from one generation to another (Cislo, 2008).

Most often, ethnic identity is represented symbolically which adds to its complexity, which arises from its contextual nature (Phelps, Taylor, & Gerard, 2001; Wang & Zambonga, 2007). Despite its complexity, research has consistently found that ethnic identity is essential to the psychological functioning of the individual, and the survival of ethnic groups (Forehand & Deshpande, 2001; Guanipa, n.d.).

Nigerian-Americans and Ethnic Identity

Nigerian-Americans hail from one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. With approximately 200 to 440 ethnic groups, it is of no surprise that ethnic heritage is valued more so than the individual, nationality, and even the family (Chapin-Metz, 1991; Ogbaa, 2003). Unfortunately, it is this strong that ethnic association is often the root of many of the troubles in Nigeria, where certain ethnic groups dominate and others are marginalized (Ogbaa, 2003; Ukiwo, 2005). Because of the extreme importance placed on one's ethnic group, in general, Nigerians will do whatever is necessary to ensure the continuation of their heritage through subsequent generations, a process often practiced out of fear of losing their individual ethnic heritage in the U.S. where "all black people are classified as one group" (Ogbaa, 2003, p. 130).

Even with a long history of immigration and positive integration into the American culture, as compared with other ethnic groups in Texas, Nigerian-Americans appear to have maintained rather high levels of identity with their Nigerian ethnicity, evidenced in their use of traditional Nigerian dress (Cordell & Garcia y Griega, n.d.; Ogbaa, 2003). Most research on ethnic dress asserts that an individual's use of ethnic attire is related to their level of assimilation or acculturation into the mainstream culture, and serves as a material embodiment of ethnicity and social structure (Forney & Rabolt, 1985-1986). Many individuals choose to abandon ethnic dress (and other aspects of ethnic identity) to visually signify their incorporation of the mainstream culture.

Consequently, Nigerian-Americans appear to have an easier time at adaption while maintaining their strong Nigerian ethnic identity because they embrace aspects of American culture that are markedly African-American. Society as a whole is more likely to accept Nigerians because they are, in effect, visually indistinguishable from African Americans. According to Cordell and Garcia y Griega (n.d.), Nigerian immigrants are also more likely to experience positive incorporation into the mainstream culture, as opposed to their Hispanic immigrant counterparts in Texas, because they enter the U.S with higher levels of education, more spoken English capabilities, greater economic security, and they attain professional occupations where they have higher levels of interaction with a greater diversity of people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Self-Esteem and Ethnicity

Social scientists across disciplines are increasingly interested in the relationship between ethnic identity and psychosocial adjustment, such as self-esteem (Cislo, 2008). The theory of Social Identity assumes that people are motivated to establish and maintain their self-esteem and that of their in-group members. To enhance self-esteem, a person can affiliate with social groups that are already considered attractive, or they can attempt to view their own social category more positively (Devine, 1995; Phinney, 1990). In the case of ethnic identity, an individual who holds a negative perception of their ethnicity will deny its values and conventions, thus assimilating with the major ethnic group. A person with a positive view of their ethnicity can continue to affiliate with their ethnic group of origin with no damage to self-image, and simultaneously participate in majority ethnic group activities.

According to Tajfel (1981), the negative attitudes and discrimination by the majority ethnic group can result in psychological dysfunction for the ridiculed minority group. Here, it is very possible that a minority ethnic group may internalize negative stereotype, because people validate their self-concept through feedback from others. Hence, this could negatively affect their self-image and the self-esteem of particular minority ethnic group members. Conversely, a positive identification as a member of an ethnic group is expected to be associated with a positive self-concept at the individual level (Cislo, 2008). Therefore, feelings associated with belonging are, thus, essential for stable, healthy identity development, wherein recognition of and positive association with one's ethnic background can shield a person from the marginalization and prejudices executed by the majority society.

Research has shown that ethnic minorities report stronger levels of ethnic identity than other broadly defined groups, such as Whites who tend to feel ethnic ambivalence. Studies have also shown that African Americans repeatedly express higher or equally high self-esteem level to Whites (Cislo, 2008; Jaret & Reitzes, 2009; Phinney, 1990; Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997; Smith & Silva, 2011). And further, another study by Wang & Zambonga (2007) showed a positive correlation between salient ethnic identity and self-esteem, particularly for Mexican-American college students.

Ethnic Dress and Ethnicity

Clothing is an important aspect of culture because it is an obvious, outward symbol, and one of the first aspects of culture that can be readily discerned. Clothing is seen as a means of identifying an ethnic group, and ethnic dress is seen as an expression of pride in one's heritage and group cohesion. It also indicates an aspect of one's own identity and demonstrates that group inclusion and exclusion are made apparent through modifying and supplementing the body.

Ethnic dress is also worn by members of a group to distinguish themselves from the members of another group, especially in the face of powerful homogenizing forces (Petersen, Novak, & Gleason, 1982). Hence, dress is the one aspect of material culture that can provide information about societal development and the interrelationship among nature, selves, and the socio-cultural environment (Eicher & Sumberg, 1995; Kaiser, 1985). Also, studies have consistently shown that people with high ethnic identity identify with dress which reflects their ethnicity (Chattaraman & Lennon, 2007; Forehand & Deshpande, 2001).

Griebel (1995) showed that African-American women who wanted to consciously acknowledge a bond between themselves and the women of their past, were more likely to wear the traditional African-American headwrap in varying social contexts. “Today the headwrap is emblematic of [the] bond [that] encompass[es] not only the enslaved American ancestors but those who remained in Africa as well” (Griebel, 1995, p. 457). Therefore, re-incorporating the African headwrap into everyday dress is a means of commemorating and revitalizing African-American ethnicity.

In contrast, a study conducted on ethnic Bangladeshis in East London in 2001 also showed the more clinical implications associated with wearing ethnic attire. The girls in the study who wore traditional ethnic Bangladeshi clothing were less likely to have mental health problems than those who chose to wear both ethnic and Western clothing (C.J., 2008). The author believed that the choice to wear ethnic dress was related to a more traditional upbringing, which would generate “less exposure to unfamiliar and therefore culturally challenging life events” (C.J., 2008, p.471).

Nigerian Dress and Textiles

Africa has a long history of textile production, especially as a cottage industry in which women play a crucial role as artists and consumers. Nigeria holds approximately 63% of West Africa’s textile production, especially the wax-resist fabrics (ankara) (Castonguay, 2009; Tuloch, 2004). Thus, fabrication techniques have long held cultural meaning about individual ethnic groups and people: ethnic origin, social standing, age, and marital status. Kalu Ogbaa (2003) in her book on Nigerian-Americans emphasized the importance of fashion/dress as a way to express group identity. At the same, time dress reveals individual characterizations.

Conversely, according to Boatema Boateng (2004), Africans in the Diaspora have sought symbolic ties to their continent of origin ever since people were forced into slavery in the Americas. Hence, one of the most common types of symbolic association has been through the preservation of ethnic clothing, such as the African headwrap example mentioned above. And also, the use of African textiles helps Africans outside Africa to create and maintain an African identity, one that is often heavily influenced by mass consumption and an idealized homeland (Tuloch, 2004).

Findings: Ethnic Dress, Identity and Self-Esteem

For both the control group and the Nigerian participants the population was skewed towards a younger, female crowd (see Table 1). However, the quantitative data revealed valuable information on ethnic identity and ethnic dress usage. The majority of non-Nigerian minority participants did not wear ethnic dress (76%). However, most Nigerian-Americans (87%) did wear ethnic dress in various contexts (see Table 2). Further questioning about the use of traditional dress with Nigerian Americans showed that a large number feel that their dress reflects a specific ethnic heritage from Nigeria, which supports the literature which states that Nigerians in the U.S. do not show as much recognition of Nigeria as they do for their individual ethnic group (Ogbaa, 2003). The following tables on use of ethnic dress and demographic data illustrates our findings:

Table 1
Demographic Information for Survey Participants

Characteristic	Nigerian Group (n=31)	Control Group (n=75)
Age		
18-24	24	69
25-34	2	5
35-44	1	--
45-54	4	--
55-64	--	--
65+	--	--
Gender		
Male	5	3
Female	26	71
Ethnicity		
African American	--	30
Hispanic	--	22
Asian	--	16
Middle Eastern	--	1
Nigerian	31	--
Birthplace		
U.S.	13	60
Nigeria	17	--
Outside of the U.S. (other than Nigeria)	1	14

Table 2
Use of Ethnic Dress

Characteristic	Nigerian Group (n=31)	Control Group (n=75)
Use of ethnic dress		
Yes	27	21
No	4	
		54
Context of ethnic dress use		
All of the time	3	--
To weddings	20	3
Only in the home	3	1
Religious context	14	4
Ethnic parties (non-wedding)	23	10

Hence, a statistical analysis of the Ethnic Identity and Self-Esteem measures showed that the Nigerian American participants had a statistically significant higher ethnic identity measures ($M=31.31$, $SD=6.32$) than other ethnic minority participants ($M=28.20$, $SD= 6.44$); $t(103)=2.6192$, $p<0.05$. Analysis also showed that there was a significant relationship between a high ethnic identity score and a high self-esteem score, $r(31)= 0.438$, $p<0.05$, which supports literature that maintains positive identification as a member of an ethnic group is and is expected to be associated with a positive self- concept at the individual level (Cislo, 2008).

In this study, we also discovered that there was no significant different in ethnic identity scores of those Nigerian-Americans who wear ethnic dress ($M= 32.26$, $SD= 5.76$) and those who did not ($M= 28.00$, $SD= 5.35$); $t(29) = 1.3911$, $p>0.05$. This shows that there is simply a strong ethnic awareness amongst Nigerian-Americans; however, dress does not play a significant role in the expression of one's ethnic identity. Second, we found that here is not a significant difference in the self-esteem scores of Nigerian subjects ($M= 43.10$, $SD = 6.58$) and other ethnic minorities' self-esteem scores ($M=43.03$, $SD = 5.65$); $t(103)= 0.0549$, $p> 0.05$. Although there was no significant difference in the self-esteem scores of Nigerian subjects and other ethnic minority subjects, however a secondary analysis using the self-esteem scores of non-minority subjects, showed that there was a statistically significant difference in the self-esteem scores of Nigerian subjects ($M= 43.10$, $SD= 6.58$) and non-minority subjects ($M= 39.97$, $SD= 6.10$); $t(119)= 2.42$, $p<0.05$, thus minorities in general had higher self-esteem scores than non-ethnic minority groups. Thus there was no statistically significant difference in the self-esteem scores of Nigerian subjects who wear ethnic dress ($M=42.96$, $SD=6.61$) and those who do not wear ethnic dress ($M= 44$, $SD= 7.35$); $t(29)= 0.2894$, $p> 0.05$, suggesting that ethnic dress plays no apparent role in the high self-esteem scores of Nigerian-Americans.

Interviews and Focus Groups

The interviews and focus groups provided more detailed information for analysis because they allowed for clarification of participant responses. Based on the overall interview results, Nigerian Americans find their heritage to be important and take pride in it the majority of the time. These individuals also have a clear sense of their ethnic background and what that means to them. While most times they are happy to be Nigerian, it appears that there might be some disconnect in how their Nigerian heritage fits into their identity as a whole. However, the majority of the Nigerians interviewed frequently participated in their ethnic holidays, which are usually tied to religion.

For some of the participants being in public among non-Nigerians while wearing their ethnic clothing causes discomfort. Thus, they are frequently questioned by those who are curious about the unique garments. For the most part, if they don't have to, participants said they will not wear their ethnic clothing outside of a Nigerian party or ceremony. Public exposure outside of a Nigerian event tends to make them uncomfortable, anxious and self-conscious. Because discomfort and self-consciousness are indicators of embarrassment, participants were asked if, in fact, they were embarrassed to be seen by non-Nigerians in their traditional clothing. Participants resoundingly denied embarrassment; rather claiming it was "annoyance". One individual, Michelle, said it is not discomfort, but that they [Nigerians] get tired of the constant barrage of questions, unwanted attention, and demands for explanation. "Just the other day, someone told me that 'I love your kente cloth'. It is annoying. They do not understand and it gets tiring trying to explain it". However, one interviewee did say that she was so embarrassed by the traditional dress of a fellow Nigerian that she refused to go into the grocery store with him for fear of being seen by non-Nigerians. She, herself, does wear traditional clothing, but in specific situations. She claimed that she was not embarrassed of her culture, in so much as discomforted with the reactions of outsiders to her traditional dress and by the actions of fellow Nigerian in non-Nigerian contexts.

Still others said they simply feel awkward wearing traditional Nigerian clothing in the United States. Perhaps their higher degree of assimilation into American society impacts their perceptions of, and choice to wear, traditional clothing. Hence, some have said:

- I am distant from my home culture. The value and importance of that clothing is no longer relative to me. My family is Texan now rather than African.
- I don't wear traditional clothing because there is no need to. I don't feel the need to wear it at all. I know who I am, and I don't need clothes to express it.
- I don't wear it because the modern style fits my age group and my style.
- The only time I would wear ethnic clothing is when I travel back to Nigeria.

These individuals, when asked, felt they were rather assimilated to American society, more so than the other interviewees. This was also evidenced in their choices to forego usage of traditional Nigerian names in favor of more westernized names. The majority of the individuals who had negative or impartial views of traditional clothing were college-aged or young professionals in their twenties and thirties.

In contrast, the other interview participants felt a mild to strong connection with ethnic dress and a pride in their Nigerian heritage wherein they began to wear ethnic dress like that of their parents and others in Nigeria. Yet, when they did wear ethnic clothing, most preferred more modern styles as opposed to a more traditional look, and they especially liked how the contemporary African designers have modified silhouettes. Thus, most agreed that they like wearing the more modernized versions of Nigerian dress because it is not as “indigenous” as what people wear in Nigeria. Again, a disproportionate amount of the interviewees were younger and drawn to contemporary western clothing. Overall, this segment of interviewees has an affinity for ethnic dress and believes it to be symbolic of their ethnic identity. Furthermore, the younger participants said that they see themselves wearing traditional dress with more frequency as they get older, thereby associating age with traditional dress preference, rather than viewing it as a level of assimilation. Accordingly, some said the following:

- I enjoy wearing the clothing. It makes feel closer to a home I am not always at.
- I love both traditional and modern ethnic clothing they are both beautiful and can be worn for different occasions.
- Although there are more traditional styles of clothing, Nigerian fashion has progressed just like American fashion does.
- The patterns on the clothes are unique and the color contrast makes the clothes more appealing. It's not only about the clothes, but the head wrap, the matching shoes and purse.

Discussion

As a group, Nigerian-Americans have a high ethnic identity and a high usage rate of ethnic dress. However, they reserve their use of traditional ethnic dress for very specific community-related occasions, and wearing the ethnic dress outside of the boundaries of the community can actually cause a sense of unease. The subjects in this study consistently agreed that wearing their Nigerian dress out in public was not an appealing idea because the barrage of questions, puzzled stares, and comments made them uncomfortable. There is a sense of safety that comes with being indistinguishable from others (for Nigerians, there resemblance to African Americans is helpful in reducing a sense of unease). However, once they put on the ethnic dress, they view themselves as visibly different and thus identifiable as outsiders like any other less socially integrated minority and is often misinterpreted as a lack of desire to assimilate.

Undoubtedly, Nigerian Americans are contending with the competing forces of a strong traditional heritage and the compelling need to fit into American society.

According to psychologist, Erik Erikson, the “identity crisis” concept is a product of the immigration experience and Americanization. Because it is considered offensive in the U.S. for people to feel obligated to identify by social characteristics, and the notion of ethnic identity as complicated (Petersen et al., 1982). In the U.S., high ethnic affiliation, or ethnic pride, is a concept not generally acknowledged; rather it has developed a pluralistic identity that includes acceptance of elements from other cultures not our own (Petersen et al., 1982). Consequently, Americans tend to view individuals who restrict their interactions to only their ethnic group as socially and possibly psychologically, isolated.

Yet, despite the pressure to assimilate, traditional Nigerian dress is a prevalent feature of major Nigerian events and parties and there is an immeasurable amount of respect and pride for the Nigerian culture, as long as it takes place within the confines of the Nigerian community which is exhibited visually through colorful Nigerian dress. While wearing their ethnic clothing, participants claimed that they feel “excited”, “complete”, “good”, and “fun”. Segun Gele described his traditional dress as having implicit control over his behavior. He said that when he puts on his Nigerian dress, his behavior changes significantly, carrying himself in a more “well-mannered way”. Thus for him (and perhaps others), ethnic dress serves as a material embodiment of his collective ethnicity which commands respect.

In her book, *Black Style*, Carol Tuloch (2004) quoted an African weaver’s comments about the significance of local cloth. The sentiment of this individual exemplifies the Nigerian view of traditional dress:

[I]t [the cloth] makes people feel proud of our past. They remember their forefathers, their ancestors, where they came from. It’s not really easy to wear this cloth...you have to stand upright, you have to assume a dignity to keep it from falling off...I have to keep checking on it, adjust it ...and that keeps reminding me that I’m not a Frenchman at all, or an Englishman. It’s African. (Tuloch, 2004, p. 45).

Accordingly, a salient situational ethnic identity forms a resiliency to pressures of conformity, and respectively generates an elevated self-esteem. The Nigerian American’s ability to identify so closely with an ethnicity in the U.S. and the inconsistency with which they perceive their dress can be approached in several ways. Hence, one way is through situational ethnic identity formations based on the idea that particular contexts may “determine which of a person’s identities or loyalties are appropriate at a point in time” (Stayman, 1989, p. 362). The situations Stayman speaks of can be temporal, social, and physical, however, in the case of this research the situations is social wherein Nigerian American ethnic identity is best predicted by the social situations (weddings, parties, religious ceremonies, etc.) they find themselves in, and according to Stayman (1989), situational ethnicity is a better predictor of behavior than non-situation specific ethnicity.

Diasporic Identity

The diasporic identity is created in those individuals, generally minorities, with a concept of a recreated or imagined homeland (Anderson, 2001). These individuals are usually part of a group that shares a common origin and common experience. As immigrants begin to acculturate or assimilate to the mainstream, they are only able to maintain ties to their homeland by reproducing the image of the country at the time they left it. According to Daniel Naujoks (2010), immigrants usually conform to the mainstream within two to three generations. The later generations are left with little knowledge of their ancestral origin, except possibly a “symbolic ethnicity” which is really a “nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation” (Naujoks, 2010, p. 9). For the succeeding generations their diasporic identity, as a form of constructed collective ethnic identity, is associated with a country that some of them had never even seen. Frequently is it material culture, such as dress, that signifies the socio-cultural tie to the homeland. For Africans and African Americans, style is closely connected with the African Diaspora. However, the African diasporic identity is constantly reproducing itself as time passes and new people enter the United States, diversifying the African immigrant population, producing endless reinventions of African American style and the African diaspora aesthetic.

Interestingly, this research has shown that there is a strong ethnic identity among a rather young generation, many of whom were not born in Nigeria. They have formed for themselves a diasporic identity. For these individuals, their recreated homeland is Nigeria. The question is why do they create this identity? It is possibly fueled by confusion as to where they fit exactly in the social structure of the United States. They are not White, nor are they Black in the same essence as African Americans who share a separate but similar diasporic history. One, or both, of their parents may not be U.S. citizens and they may speak a language other than English at home. Socio-cultural ambivalence compels this group to construct an identity that serves their particular circumstances. This phenomenon can also be explained as a post-modern revival of ethnicity; or a reaction to mass culture and translocalism, which is the movement that addresses how global culture is destroying traditional cultures and de-emphasizing ethnic identification in favor of broader alternative ideas (Anderson, 2001). The post-modern revival is evidenced with the younger generation of Nigerian Americans via their use of the gele and modified/reinvented Nigerian clothing.

Future Implications

This study did not specifically discriminate between naturalized and native-born Nigerian-Americans. It is possible that the length of exposure to American culture has an effect on ethnic dress usage, ethnic identity, and self-esteem. Acculturation is a process that varies depending on several contextual factors, which should be taken into consideration when analyzing a group of immigrants (Cabassa, 2003). These contextual factors will affect the rate of and degree of acculturation of a group of people. For this particular immigrant group, it would be beneficial to look at the age of each individual at time of settlement, residency status, reason for immigration, and the settlement context (i.e., societal attitudes towards immigrants) (Cabassa, 2003).

The information from the interviews provides implications for future research on shame as associated with ethnicity and ethnic dress. Future research could incorporate the use of Cook's Internalized Shame Scale to measure levels of an individual's feelings of shame, which could be cross-referenced with their levels of ethnic identity and self-esteem. Shame is undeniably a variable that deserves future attention because research has shown a strong correlation between the degree of acculturation, self-esteem and shame (Cook, 1994; De Hoyos & Ramirez, 2006; Gonzalez, 1990). For example, low acculturation lowers self-esteem. High levels of shame will also serve to shield the individual against exposure, and conjure up feelings of insecurity and inferiority, thus lowering self-esteem (De Hoyos & Ramirez, 2006).

A measure of shame would be of particular interest to subsequent studies because of the perceived shame that was observed during interviews with regards to ethnic dress and the contradictory high self-esteem scores of the Nigerian subjects. There was an apparent denial of shame, but valid data can only come from future empirical research on this matter. One of the 6 leading indicators of shame traits is "feeling exposed", which is what interview subjects in the present study alluded to when discussing their discomfort with wearing traditional dress outside of the Nigerian community. They vehemently claimed that it was not shame, but rather irritation at the constant unwanted attention to their noticeable sartorial differences. And finally, the majority of the respondents were from the 18-24 years of age cohort. For future research a wider age span could provide a more comprehensive look at the Nigerian immigrant population in Texas. The majority of subjects were also female which might have skewed the results. Therefore, for future research endeavors we will try to recruit more males to take the survey and interview.

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