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THE DEVELOPMENT AND LIVED EXPERIENCE OF AFRICAN CENTERED IDENTITY:

A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

by

OBARI CARTMAN

Under the Direction of Roderick Watts

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore cultural identity within African Americans. The primary construct of interest is African centered identity, which is comprised of two parts: 1) cultural values with origins in African cultures that have been unintentionally retained, and 2) a social and political ideology that intentionally incorporates elements of an African worldview. This study utilizes qualitative research methodology to investigate the lived experience of African centered identity, and incorporates a developmental perspective.

Semi-structured interviews of 14 adults are analyzed using a grounded theory approach. The results reveal many themes in the participants' lived experience of their cultural identity that are consistent with prominent descriptions of African centered worldview. Less consistent results regarding participants' development of their cultural identity are discussed within the framework of racial and ethnic identity stage models. Finally, respondents' narratives are discussed with regards to their implications for identity measurement, the social construction of identity, and the influence of environment on identity development.

INDEX WORDS: Cultural identity, Nigrescence, Afrocentric worlview, Identity stage development, Grounded theory

THE DEVELOPMENT AND LIVED EXPERIENCE OF AFRICAN CENTERED IDENTITY:

A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

by

OBARI CARTMAN

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Georgia State University

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by

OBARI CARTMAN

Committee chair: Roderick Watts

Committee: Julia Perilla

                   Ciara Smalls

                   Makungu Akinyela

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

December 2011

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents: Carla Jean Holmes and Thabiti Hanif Nizam Cartman.

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Chapter 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

The evolution of African-American identity over generations is reflected in the changing labels used to describe this group collectively. In more than a superficial way, transitions from Negro to Colored to Black to Afro-American to African American have coincided with broader social, political, and economic events that have influenced their collective consciousness or sense of self. Accordingly, psychological research, theory, and practice have shifted in their approach to self and identity. Research by and about African Americans have set precedents for psychology's interest in matters of race, ethnicity and culture in the United States. Consistent with the hyphenated identity reflected in this group's current label "African-American", psychologists have begun to ask the question: What is "African" about African Americans' experiences and identity? The aim of this study is to contribute to psychology's deeper understanding of African American cultural identity and its development.

<u>Definitions</u>

Psychological literature has vague and often conflicting conceptualizations of what culture is, and frequently uses the terms race, ethnicity, and culture interchangeably. *Race* typically refers to a group of people who share biological and phenotypic characteristics that signify group membership but also the social meaning of such membership in the larger society (Jones, 1997). More recently, theorists have argued that race is a social construction typically used to create and justify social and political hierarchies that maintain status quo for the dominant race (Smedly and Smedly, 2005; Helms, 1994). *Ethnicity* refers to an embodiment of values, institutions, and patterns of behavior which incorporate a group's historical experience and worldview (Deng, 1997, as cited in Chang and Dodd, 2001), and is typically used to distinguish groups within a particular region.

Despite the advances made in the psychological study of race and ethnicity, less consensus has been reached on the definition of culture (APA Multicultural Guidelines, 2002). Frisby (1992) identifies reasonably clear definitions of culture provided by fields such as anthropology and sociology. He argues that the problem is the variable connotations associated with the word 'culture' in popular use. For instance, a person is described as *cultured* if they attain a certain level of technical or artistic sophistication in a society. For this study, culture is based on definitions by Betancourt and Lopez (1993) which include two distinct components. The first is material, which refers to objects such as clothes, art, tools, etc. The second is psychological and sociological—it includes elements such as social norms, roles, beliefs, and values. "These social and subjective cultural elements include a wide range of topics, such as familial roles, communications patterns, affective styles, and values regarding personal control, individualism, collectivism, spirituality, and religiosity" (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993, p.26). Some describe the complex pattern of all these elements as "worldview" or "ethos".

Although theorists have attempted to differentiate the terminology, considerable conceptual overlap exists between the terms culture and ethnicity. The key distinction is that ethnicity focuses on the interplay among groups in a larger shared environment. Concepts of race, ethnicity and culture are intertwined. One important distinction is that in the United States (US) race is a social marker that European Americans wove into the social fabric during the slavery era to promote White superiority and Black inferiority. For over 300 years this entrenched concept has shaped how Black people see themselves. Thus, it serves as a "mark of oppression" (Kardinal & Ovesey, 1964) and social caste rather than a statement about their cultural heritage and worldview. Although culture is the focus of this study, it cannot be fully separated from the impact of racial oppression on African Americans' worldview.

<u>Identity</u>

Notions of self-concept and identity are some of the most widely studied topics in psychology. Many researchers have developed arguments about the importance of identity for healthy human functioning (see Zaff, 2003 for review). Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory suggests that humans develop social identities to enhance their self esteem. Other research suggests that ethnic minority groups without intact cultural identities have lower self esteem and a greater risk of experiencing adjustment problems (Phinney & Chavira, 1992; Hattie, 1992). Belgrave and Allison (2006) add that ethnic identity provides a sense of belonging, protects individuals from the stress of racism and discrimination, and acts as a link between them and a larger social group.

Identity research with African Americans has a long history in the social sciences. Psychologists often used African Americans as exemplars to explore and explain universal aspects of group identity. The majority of early research focused on the impact of African American stigmatization within American society (e.g. Clark and Clark, 1939, as cited in Sellers et al., 1998). The advent of the 1960's brought in a new wave of psychological inquiry in which research began to integrate the uniqueness of African Americans' oppression and culture (Gains & Reed, 1994). Throughout this history of African American identity studies social scientists have always acknowledged that identity is not static. Many researchers have attempted to understand how identity changes throughout life.

Identity Development

Identity development has been conceptualized by many psychological scholars as a dynamic process that is influenced by a variety of psychological and contextual factors. Salazar and Abrams (2005) suggest that "development is seen as an evolution of consciousness, a

growing awareness of oneself in relation to self, to other, and to society, and a process of overcoming internalized oppression" (p. 51). Several important models of identity formation have been proposed in psychology (e.g. Erickson, 1968). According to Marcia's (1966) model, identity is defined through several stages or statuses: *diffused* (no identity, and no concern about not having one), *foreclosed* (committed to an identity created by others), *moratorium* (active process of searching for an identity), and *achieved* (committed to a specific identity). Phinney (1989) later created models of identity development specifically for ethnic minorities. She proposed a three stage process of ethnic identity development: *unexamined* (no exploration of ethnic identity), *moratorium* (exploration), and *achieved* (resolution).

Sue and Sue (1999) also offer a generic, yet popular, model of racial and cultural identity development. Their Racial/Cultural Identity Development model began with the *conformity* stage in which individuals regard the dominant values of a society superior, while internalizing self deprecating views of themselves and their racial or cultural group. The second stage, *dissonance*, is when an individual's life experience causes them to begin questioning the values and practices of the dominant society. Thus, they enter *resistance and immersion* which is characterized by strong emotions such as anger, and individuals at this stage tend to surround themselves with people, information and artifacts from their own culture or race. The *introspection* stage finds individuals directing their attention inward and contemplating deeper meanings of self in social and political contexts. The final stage is *integrative awareness* and here individuals find a sense of peace and balance that includes a greater appreciation for self and others.

Salazar and Abrams (2005) suggest that across theorists there is a moment or circumstance of implied motivation for the beginning of the developmental process. They describe the catalyst for marginalized individuals to begin to shift their belief patterns as a

cognitive dissonance producing event. In other words, an individual will hold harmful, stereotypical beliefs about his or her group until they receive some new information that contradicts their previously held beliefs. An example Salazar and Abrams offer is a Latino person asking "How can we be lazy and yet we seem to be the only folks who are willing to do some of the work in the tomato fields?" (p.50). This cognitive dissonance producing event then leads a person to gathering more information and questioning formerly internalized messages.

A variety of additional identity development models have been proposed for specific groups such as feminists (Moradi et al., 2002), biracial individuals (Poston, 1990), Latinos (Torres, 2004), whites (Phinney, 1989) and homosexuals (Cass, 1979, 1984). More research is beginning to emerge that investigates the interaction among several identity categories (Finley, 1997). However, much of the empirical and theoretical literature on identity development in psychology is based on African-Americans.

African-American Identity Development

The worldview of African Americans is an amalgamation of dynamic meanings of race and culture. There is typically a race/culture distinction that is reflected in the identity literature, beginning with the work of Cross (1971). He created the most prominent and influential model of racial identity development for African Americans. This model preceded the other commonly referenced models of racial and ethnic identity development. Cross' theory of Nigrescence, meaning 'to become Black', originally consisted of five stages: Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization, and Internalization-Commitment. During the *Pre-Encounter* stage, African Americans affirm Whiteness and devalue Blackness, until they experience an episode or series of events that challenge their beliefs about race in American society (*Encounter* stage). The *immersion-emmersion* stage begins with a complete indulgence

into Black life, romanticizing Black people, while unapologetically degrading white people. The immersion-emmersion stage ends with individuals becoming more calm and rational in their evaluation of racial concerns. Intellectual and emotional acceptance of being Black occurs at the *Internalization* stage, and involvement in social change or civil rights activities marks the *Internalization-commitment* stage (Vandiver, 2001). A panoply of empirical studies have been conducted using Cross's Nigrescence model (see Cross, 1978 or Vandiver, 2001 for review), and similar models of African American racial identity have also been developed (e.g Milliones, 1976).

Since its conception Cross's model has been critiqued (Azibo, 2004), revised (Cross, 1991) and expanded (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). Parham (1989) suggests that Cross's Nigrescence stages can be cyclical. He argues that people cycle through the stages at different points in their life in response to meaningful events such as marriage and career changes. Cross' current conceptualization of the model includes four, instead of five stages; *Internalization-commitment* was omitted. The Pre-encounter stage consists of three identities: *Assimilation* (pro-American reference group orientation), *Miseducation* (describes a negative stereotypical mindset), and *Self-Hatred* (view themselves negatively). The Immersion-Emmersion stage consists of two identities: *Intense Black Involvement* and *Anti-White*. And the Internalization stage includes three identities: *Black Nationalist* (focus on empowering Black communities), *Biculturalist* (simultaneous acceptance of Blackness along with one other cultural orientation such as gender or sexuality), *Multiculturalist* (focus on two or more salient cultural orientations).

The biggest change in Cross's model is from a developmental-stage theory to one that explains overarching themes in social attitudes (Vandiver et al, 2002; Worrell et al., 2006). Furthermore, "the revised model no longer links mental health outcomes with the various stages,

although the description of the latter stage suggests that it is less reactionary, more cognitively complex and, by implication, more desirable" (Cokley, 2002 p.476). Cross and his colleagues are currently moving towards developing racial identity attitude profiles (Worrell, Vandiver, Schaefer, Cross, & Fhagen-Smith, 2006). There is empirical support for the revisions to Cross's theory (Cokley, 2002) and this model continues to be used in research to examine the relationship between racial identity and psychological health outcomes (Whittaker and Neville, 2010).

Despite revisions, researchers and theorists continue to raise concerns about Cross' Nigrescence theory. Azibo (2005) asserts that Nigrescence and other such theories are fundamentally flawed as long as they are based on a reaction to racism and oppression. In other words, the source of African Americans' ideas about their self should be rooted in something more organic than imposed or inherited sociopolitical realities. Thus, Azibo (2005) and others (Nobles, 1989) argue that the correct approach to understanding African American identity development is grounded in a cultural perspective.

Sellers' multidimensional theory of racial identity is relatively new to the literature but it now sees frequent use by researchers (Sellers et al., 1997). The current prominence of this multidimensional theory reflects the direction of identity development literature in way that is consistent with Cross's departure from stages to overlapping, non-linear identity themes (Worrell, Vandiver, Schaefer, Cross, & Fhagen-Smith, 2006). It also offers some new elements not present in the work of Cross, such as the idea of racial "centrality" that describes the extent to which race is fundamentally meaningful or central to an individual's self-concept (Sellers et al., 1997). Particularly relevant to the research proposed here, is his introduction of the idea of a racial "ideology" as a part of identity. The four components of Sellers' explanation of ideology

are similar to the three variations of Cross's Internalization stage described above: (1) a nationalist philosophy; (2) an oppressed minority philosophy; (3) an assimilation philosophy; and (4) a humanist philosophy (Sellers et al., 1997).

African American Cultural Context

Defining African American culture is difficult and complex, particularly when comprehensively considering social, political, educational and historical contexts. Beginning in 1511 with the first arrival of enslaved Africans to what is now U.S. soil (Taylor, 2007), Europeans were intensely deliberate in their efforts to obliterate the various cultural expressions of African people. As a part of enslavement, Europeans attempted to strip Africans of their language, customs, religion, family structure, art, music, worldview, and all the things that constitute a healthy cultural identity. This process lessened the possibility that Africans would become defiant, disobedient and unproductive slaves. Nonetheless, at every point of the process from their initial removal, through the middle passage, to resistance, revolts and escape during slavery, African people retained as much of their culture as they could. On the other hand, internalizing the cultural values and customs of their European captors has served as a seemingly necessary strategy for the mere survival of African people. Presently, African Americans continue to reap certain benefits, such as status, money and a sense of security from embracing the cultural dictates of modern European American society.

Slavery, Jim Crow, and present-day racism can be understood as attempts to destroy an African cultural heritage and worldview and replace it with a race-based caste system, while instituting a European/American cultural worldview as the standard. The resulting cultural dilemma for present-day African Americans is described by DuBois (1903) as *double*

consciousness, or as Boykin and Ellison (1995) suggest "African Americans are pushed towards accepting such mainstream American cultural values as upward mobility, acquisitive individualism, and the paramountcy of material well-being, but other forces push them towards such mainstream Afrocultural principles as communalism, spirituality and the like" (p.95). According to Hermans and Kempen (1998), this tension between cultures results in a *cultural hybridization,* with flexible borders. Consequently, different dimensions of culture within a person can be activated by social or environmental cues (Sussman, 2000). African-Americans are neither African nor American, but both. Thus, even if the resulting sense of self for African Americans only includes pieces of their original African worldview, Europeans' attempts to completely eradicate African culture were unsuccessful.

African Retentions

For African American psychologists it has been apparent that race and discrimination are an insufficient basis for understanding African American identity. As Parham, White, and Ajamu (1999) note, being black is more than being oppressed. To address this issue, several theorists have suggested that certain aspects of contemporary African American culture have been retained from African ways of life prior to enslavement (e.g. Ani, 1980). Most African Americans do not associate these elements of their worldview with any particular place of origin (e.g. Africa), but they are common aspects of most African Americans' lives nonetheless. For instance, Richards (1997) interviewed African American parents about their perspectives on raising their children and she discovered that certain "principles have been maintained and are a significant part of the mind set and overt actions of African Americans who may not be aware that they are practicing cultural remnants of African ancestry" (p.45).

Jones (1997) created a model that outlines some of the elements of current African American worldview that have links to cultures in Africa. This model is known as the TRIOS model, which includes five essential factors: Time, Rhythm, Improvisation, Oral expression and Spirituality. *Time* refers to cultural differences in perceiving and experiencing time; for instance, African notions of time are based on the beginnings and endings of social and environmental experiences. Whereas, dominant US cultural norms utilize points of reference such as the clock in order to keep time. African orientation to temporal factors provides a more non-linear understanding of time than the more linear conceptualization of mainstream American culture. *Rhythm*, refers to a call and response relationship with one's environment. The process includes a synchronicity between self and the environment. This influences how African people organize behavioral patterns within a given situation or time period. *Improvisation* encourages mastery of the function of a task as well as creative and intuitive application of knowledge and skills in response to the demands, challenges, and feedback. Improvisation promotes flexibility over structure. The model also recognizes that in African cultures, *oral expression* is a preferred means of exchanging social and historical information and expressing social intelligence. It is not just what you say, it is how you say it—style and substance (i.e. Griots, rappers, preachers, political leaders). Jones describes the fifth element, *spirituality* as the "belief in nonmaterial causation" and "measure of accomplishment not on earth" (p.39). These particular individual elements do not distinguish African American culture but rather the unique pattern they form as a whole.

Africentric Worldview and Ideology

The TRIOS model and other theorists (Boykin, 1997) describe ways in which African Americans have unintentionally retained elements of their ancestral African worldview. This is

in large part due to African descendants living in isolated communities and passing down traditions across generations. There are also schools of thought that are intentional in their focus on understanding and incorporating African culture into African Americans' lives. Asante (1980) coined the term 'Afrocentricity' to describe African Americans' connection with pre-colonial African cultures. He describes it as a worldview and analysis centered in traditional African values and philosophies. Nobles (1998) adds, "African-centeredness…represents the intellectual and philosophical foundations upon which people of African ancestry should create their own scientific and moral criteria for authenticating the reality of human processes" (p.190). According to these theories, African-centeredness represents a core and fundamental quality of being.

A number of characteristics of African centered value systems have been offered, several of which overlap with the work of Jones and others to create a fairly consistent picture of what could be called an African centered worldview. Kambon's (1996) discussion of some of the central elements of an Africentric (used interchangeably with Afrocentric and African centered) worldview include *harmony with nature*, *survival of the group/group synthesis*, *cooperation/collective responsibility*, *complementarity/ commonality*, circularity/reciprocity, and *spirituality*. Nobles (1991) adds the concepts of *death and immortality* which include ancestor realms that impact physical realities past the point of a physical death. Akbar (1984) includes *morality* as an acknowledgement of a natural order and individuals' responsibility to maintain balance with that order. Meyers (1988) has expanded the African centered worldview to include the following values: reality is simultaneously spiritual and material, the highest value is placed on positive interpersonal relationships between men/women, self knowledge is the basis of all knowledge, one knows through symbolic imagery and rhythm, and logic is based on the union of

opposites. Some theorists juxtapose African and European cultural worldviews, compare the two, and emphasize their incompatibility (Kambon, 1996). For instance, an African worldview promotes harmony with nature while Europeans values control over nature, or Africans value spiritualism while Europeans value materialism (Kambon, 1996). Others argue against such comparison and instead suggest that "The Africentric model must be viewed as a perspective independent of the Eurocentric model; otherwise, it too will become merely reactive and therefore persistently dependent on the European model" (Akbar, 1984, p.399). In addition, McLoyd (2004) urges social scientists to move away from talking about culture in terms of generic dichotomies such as individualism versus collectivism and move toward a more accurate complex, dynamic and dialectical understanding of culture.

Two of the most consistent components of an African centered worldview are 1) spirituality and 2) an extended sense of self. Ani (1980) suggests that an understanding of the essentially spiritual nature of human existence is the most common feature of African people's worldview. She argues that spiritual power has enabled African people's survival through such tragedies as the American institution of slavery. According to Nobles (1998) referring to African descendants as spiritual is a misnomer when used as an adjective to describe an aspect of their experience. Instead, he posits, "spirit is the energy, force or power that is both the inner essence and the outer envelope of human beingness", thus "for the African to be human is to be a spirit" (p.193).

The concept of *self* forms the second prominent theme consistent across African centered theorists, and is critical for this proposal as the study will explore individuals' experience of their cultural selves. According to Azibo (1966) an African centered sense of self incorporates family, community, ancestors, children yet to be born, and divine spiritual entities. Parham, White, and

Ajamu (1999) insist that the unit of analysis from this perspective is not the individual; instead, fundamental human operations function to ensure the survival of the group. This perspective emphasizes interdependence, rather than independence, and interrelatedness, rather than separateness and it is captured in the West African saying "I am because we are and because we are therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1970). Therefore, people within a family or community are accountable for one another and share in group accomplishments and failures. Boykin, Jagers, Ellison and Albury (1997) created a measure of this African-centered notion of communalism based on five core components: (1) primacy of social existence, (2) sanctity of social bonds and relations, (3) transcendence of group duties and responsibilities over individual concerns, (4) anchoring of individual identity in the group, and (5) an emphasis on sharing and contributing in support of the group.

African centered interventions

Beyond theory, African centered values have been applied to a burgeoning number of psychological interventions. Although the empirical support for this work is limited, the literature offers conceptual frameworks for the application of African centered worldview. The framework has been useful in developing interventions to promote family connections, pride, and spiritual healing in their service delivery.

The ways in which African centered worldview is integrated into programs has varied. Many interventions were designed to promote confidence and skills in youth. These interventions which focus on preventing dysfunction and promoting competencies include educational settings (e.g. Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994) and various rites of passage programs that promote resilience in at-risk youth (Harvey & Hill, 2004), reduce adolescent male substance abusers (Moore, Madison-Colmore, & Moore, 2003), prevent youth violence (Whaley, 2003),

and increase coping for young men in the juvenile justice system (Aminifu & Coleman, 1997). In some instances African centered worldviews intend to enhance culturally competent delivery of social services such as mental health treatment (Gregory & Harper, 2001; Taylor, 1999), empowerment focused social work (Schiele, 1996; Manning, Cornelius, & Okundaye, 2004), stress reduction for women (Jackson & Sears, 1992), HIV prevention for women (Prather et al., 2006; Foster et al., 1993), family therapy (Stewart, 2004), treatment of obese and overweight women (Davis, Clance, & Gails, 1999), treatment of female substance abusers (Roberts, Jackson, & Carlton-LaNey, 2000), and pregnancy prevention for women (Dixon, Schoonmaker, & Philliber, 2000). The majority of this literature discusses the application of African centered worldview at a conceptual level, and offers few details about how their programs operate, what activities participants engage in and which aspects of an African centered worldview are intended to enhance particular outcomes for their participants.

Some applied researchers present empirical support for success in their interventions when African centered values are included. Incorporating an African centered worldview has been shown to promote healthy self image and interpersonal relationships (Robinson and Hamlin, 1994), increase physical appearance self-concept in preadolescent females (Belgrave et al., 2000), and increase self esteem and school behaviors in 5th and 6th graders (Cherry et al., 1998). As the interest in African centered worldview grow among researchers and practitioners, social science literature would likely benefit from a deeper understanding of the lived experience of African centered identity.

African-centered Ideology as a Political Declaration

One consequence of Europeans' attempt to separate Black Americans from African culture is that it was more difficult for Black Americans to transmit their pre-enslavement culture

across the generations. In some respects, contemporary re-constructions of culture that include information about ancient African ways of life is a re-imagination of African cultures, or a hybrid of common and selected aspects of African cultures that are integrated with the sociopolitical realities of African American life in the US. Echoing the introduction of the term "ideology" in Seller's (1998) racial identity theory, in this study, the term *African centered ideology* will be used to emphasize the explicit political and cultural focus it advocates regarding the meaning of being African American in the US. African centered ideology includes but extends African retentions and the values of African centered worldview described in previous sections. This use of the term ideology is consistent with its use in other social science literature (e.g. Weiss & Miller, 2002; Jost, 2006).

While an African centered worldview can be limited to lifestyle and outlook on the world, African centered ideology is the application of African centered values to resisting oppression and seeking liberation. There have always been African Americans who have resisted their oppression and the cultural hegemony of Europeans. In many ways African-centered ideology is an outgrowth of the Black nationalist perspectives of Marcus Garvey, Maulana Karenga and others. Accordingly, African-centered theorists encourage African-Americans to actively define and claim their culture for themselves in alignment with social and political solidarity. One prominent African-centered theorist, Akbar (1984) represented this political thrust in an article titled, "Africentric Social Sciences for Human Liberation". In it he argues that mainstream psychology operates out of a particular cultural ideology based on European priorities and "the uncritical acceptance of Western science by African people is to participate in our own domination and oppression" (p. 395). In addition, African centered ideology is similar to the *Pan-African* perspective of WEB Dubois, and John Henrik Clarke, who

emphasized the commonalities across diverse cultures on the continent of Africa and in places in the world where descendants of Africans inhabit.

The distinction in the present study between an individual's latent worldview and their more intentional ideology parallels scholarly literature in Black/African studies. Tillotsen (2011) posits that "In terms of critical understanding it is vitally important to illuminate the distinctions between Afrocentricity and the African-centered worldview." African centered worldview typically indicates a more organic value system while "Afrocentricity must be understood as a robust response to exclusion, western hegemony and anti-egalitarian structural, institutional and systemic practices" (Tillotsen, 2011, p. 158). Offering even more nuances, Adams (1991, as cited in Mazama, 2001), organized schools of thought within African centered ideology writers along their varied emphases: 1) *Nile Valley Afrocentrists* gather around Molefi Asante and focus on the ancient civilizations of Kemet (Egypt) and Kush (Ethiopia), 2) *Continental Afrocentrists* do not pay particular attention to Kemet, 3) *Afrocentric Infusionists* are most concerned with incorporating African cultural and social experience into formal and informal educational curriculums, and 4) *Social Afrocentrists* are superficially interested in Africa but their actual lives are more influenced by European ideals.

Proponents of African-centered ideology maintain that optimal functioning for African Americans must operate out of a sense of self that is fundamentally grounded in African cultural values (Baldwin, 1985; Azibo, 1998). Dr. Asa Hillard made this clear in an address to the Association of Black Psychologists when he poses the question "To be African, or not to Be?" (Nobles, 1998). Some theorists suggest that the absence of an African-centered ideology qualifies as mental health dysfunction for African Americans; such a condition has been referred to as cultural misorientation (Kambon, 1992), alien-self disorder (Akbar, 1996), mentacide

(Wright, 1979), or any number of disorders in Azibo's (1989) nosology of Black/African personality disorders.

Critique of African-centered Ideology

As the amount of African-centered literature has grown in the social sciences, poignant criticisms have also emerged. Mazama (2001) complains that writers often discuss Afrocentricity without seeming to really know what it is or without ever defining what it means to them. During a recent study Cokley (2005) found that most of his participants seemed to have an inaccurate understanding of Afrocentricity. Of the 201 African-American college students surveyed, 84 from a historically Black university and the rest from a predominately White university, only 76 out of 201 students attempted a response to the question: 'What does it mean to be Afrocentric?' Ten percent said they did not know the meaning of "Afrocentric", and 24% gave responses that either associated Afrocentricity with antagonism towards White people ("stay away from Whites as much as possible"), was extremely ethnocentric ("it means to be all for your culture and hate another"), or were very superficial ("..to wear dreads and fros and be natural").

Criticisms have also been raised about the actual premises of African-centered ideology. Scholars of both European and African descent have questioned the scientific and historical merit of African centered ideology (e.g. Oyebade, 1990). They contend, instead, that ancient Egyptians, although African, would not be considered 'Black' in the contemporary sense of the term and that African civilizations did not have the type of world impact that African-centered theories suggest. Critics argue that African-centered writers present a distorted and exaggerated version of history that attempts to repair the bruised egos of Black people. An African American

historian articulates some of these and other points in his book "We Can't Go Home Again" (Walker, 2001). In it he states:

> "Afrocentrism is a mythology that is racist, reactionary, and essentially therapeutic. It suggests that nothing important has happened in black history since the time of the pharaohs and thus trivializes the history of black Americans. Afrocentrism places an emphasis on Egypt that is, to put it bluntly, absurd. Furthermore, Afrocentrism caricatures Africa by homogenizing the diverse experiences of Africans across both time and place."

Partly in response to some of these criticisms African-centered theorists continue to grapple with issues such as: what "traditional" means in relation to African cultures, whether to separate the influence of colonialism, what the distinctions are between traditional and contemporary African societies, how to apply information about historical African societies to present day contexts, and how to deal with more difficult realities of African history and cultures (i.e. African people's participation in the slave trade or female genital circumcision).

African Centered Identity and Lifestyle

This review uses several terms and constructs that should be clarified before moving forward. The interrelationships of these constructs will also be discussed. *Worldview* is used to describe cultural values. *Ideology* includes worldview but adds an explicitly political element. Both *worldview* and *ideology* are used to describe internal ideas or attitudes. *Identity* is the primary construct of interest for the present study, which extends *ideology* into the realm of external behavior. Currently, identity researchers are urging social scientists to be more precise and explicitly define what they mean when using the term "identity" (Cote, 2006; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). For this study identity is the combination of internal ideology and external behaviors and activities. Psychology had established at least a partial relationship between attitudes and behavior, so this study will discuss the manifestation of African centered identity through a cultural *lifestyle*. The difference between ideology and lifestyle is the difference

between theory and actions. Someone can intellectually understand the social, cultural and political values of an African centered ideology, but lifestyle reflects the practice of those values. The term *lifestyle* was chosen because it represents a range of behaviors and activities (e.g. career, recreation, diet, dress, relationships, etc.) that permeate a person's daily experiences.

The present study will use the designation *identity* to discuss African Americans' consideration of cultural ideas in their lives. However, a myriad of terminology related to identity is used throughout psychological literature. Notions such as self-concept, personality, consciousness, and identity are sometimes interchanged even though they have important distinctions. For instance, consciousness is most often associated with an individuals' level of perceived awareness, while personality is considered to be a more innate and lasting aspect of psychological self than any of the other constructs. African centered literature, in particular, uses the terms *consciousness, worldview* and *personality* when discussing African Americans' cultural selves. However, most African centered researchers measure notions of self in a similar manner as racial identity researchers. Measures typically require participants' to endorse value statements that reflect particular attitudes and behaviors. Thus, African centered researchers explore concepts self, values and ideology in a way that is conceptually analogous to race centered research on identity. To maintain consistency, this proposal will discuss the various notions of African centeredness using the comprehensive term *identity,* unless otherwise noted. Several theorists and researchers have addressed explored notions of African centered identity and lifestyle.

Measurement

In his book, The African Personality in America: An African-Centered Framework, Kambon (1992) articulates one of the more comprehensive models of African-centered identity.

His model suggests that an African centered ideology consists of two components; the first part represents the personality oriented dimension of the self because of its enduring quality. The African Self-Extension Orientation (ASEO) is the foundation and it is described as "an innate-biogenetically determined, immutable, unconscious, and deeply rooted physical energy or dispositional potential that exists in all people of substantive African descent" (p.49). The ASEO shares similarities with the notion of spirituality. The second aspect of Kambon's model represents the, more flexible, identity component. African Self Consciousness (ASC) is the "conscious level African survival thrust" (p.54) and it is influenced by social-environmental forces. The ASC includes "awareness of one's African identity and African cultural heritage" (p.56) and it manifests variably among African Americans' lifestyles due to individual differences in experience (Kambon, 1992).

Kambon created an attitudinal measure to assess ASC called the African Self-Consciousness Scale (Baldwin and Bell, 1985). This 42-item measure is based on the following four dimensions: (1) recognition of one's African identity and heritage; (2) ideological and behavioral priorities placed on Black survival and liberation; (3) specific activity priorities placed on self-knowledge and self-affirmation (i.e. African centered values and customs); and (4) a position of resistance toward "anti-Black" forces. Stokes et al. (1994) assessed the reliability, factor structure, and validity of the ASC Scale and the results of their factor analysis was consistent with the initial proposed categories proposed by Baldwin and Bell (1985). Overall, the results provided good support for the viability of the ASC for researching African American self-concept. Other empirical evidence suggests that, as expected, lifestyle experiences such as a predominately African-centered elementary school experience, prior exposure to African/Black studies courses and African culture-centered activities in high school and college predicted high

ASC scores (Kambon, 1992). Higher levels of mother's education, feelings of comfort in African centered social settings, childhood exposure to Africans in municipal leadership positions, and personal experience with racial discrimination also moderately predicted ASC (Cheatham, 1990, as cited in Kambon, 1992). Another investigation of African Self-Consciousness in suburban American families by Richards (1997) found that parents demonstrated a commitment to some indicators of ASC (e.g. African Identity, Black survival priorities, Proactive development of the dignity worth and integrity of all African Americans, and Opposition to Racial oppression), but not others (e.g. African Heritage).

Another measure of African centered identity, the Africentrism Scale, was developed by Grills and Logshore (1996) to assess some of the elements of an African centered ideology (i.e. spirituality, collective and holistic orientation, harmony with nature). More specifically, participants are asked to endorse attitudes based on the principles of the *Nguzo Saba* (also used as the seven principles of Kwanzaa). Those principles are umoja (unity), kujichagulia (self-determination), ujima (collective work and responsibility), ujamaa (cooperative economics), kuumba (creativity), nia (purpose), and imani (faith). The Africentrism scale includes items that measure attitudes in a similar fashion to the ASC Scale, but the Africentrism scale also includes some questions that ask about individuals' lifestyle (i.e. "I make it a point to shop at Black businesses and use Black-owned services"). In a psychometric investigation of the Africentrism Scale, Cokley and Williams (2005) found that the scale is best conceptualized as measuring a general dimension of African-centeredness instead of seven different dimensions.

Caughy, Randolf and O'Campo (2002) created the only African centered measure that exclusively assesses lifestyle. Their Africentric Home Environment Inventory was designed to evaluate evidence of families' endorsement of African centered identity. The instrument

assesses Black artwork, religious figurines, books, music, educational toys, and African prints or clothing in the home (Caughy, et al. 2002). .

Empirical evidence supports the association between African-centered identity and psychosocial outcomes. Persons endorsing a stronger African-centered identity have been found to have higher self esteem (Chambers et al., 1998, Harvey & Hill, 2004; Cherry et al., 1998), greater dyadic adjustment in relationships (Bell et al., 1990), reduced drug use among young adults (Brook, & Pahl, 2005), greater academic success among middle school students (Potts, 2003), better coping strategies among adolescents (Constantine et al., 2002), lower perceived stress among college students (Chambers et al., 1998), decreased behavior problems and delinquent incidents among middle school males (Bass & Coleman, 1997), and decreased minority-status stress among college students at a predominately White university (Hatter & Owens, 1998). On the contrary, Kelly and Floyd (2001) found that couples who endorsed more African centered values perceived their partners to be less dependable and were less satisfied in their relationships.

Research on African centered identity is considerably less advanced than racial identity research. There are fewer instruments and the information that exists almost exclusively relies on snapshots of self reported identity. To date, there are no longitudinal studies of cultural identity for African Americans. In a recent article about the critical issues in measurement of racial and ethnic identity Cokley (2007) recommends that researchers, whenever possible, "should use methods and designs that allow for assessing the changes and fluctuations of ethnic identity over time" (p.231). In a cross-validation of the Africentrism Scale, Kwate (2003) found that the older and more educated individuals in his sample endorsed more Africentrism. Kwate's findings are important because they suggest that cultural identity can grow stronger as individuals become older and more mature.

Culture-based developmental stage theories

As previously discussed, psychologists have conceived a large number of identity development models regarding African Americans that have focused on the influence of race. To complement and extend these models, theorists have recently begun to develop models of identity development that focus more on the cultural experiences of African Americans (T'Shaka, 2005; Myers and Haggins, 1998). Considerably less empirical support exists for this area of study. Myers and Haggins (1998) apply their Optimal Theory to identity development. According to the authors, Optimal Theory "utilizes a worldview emerging from an African American cultural reality that can be identified with a wisdom tradition centered in Africa as the historical point of generation at the beginnings of human culture and civilization" (p.255). Their identity development model proposes seven phases that occur in a "predictable sequence" and "can be conceptualized as an expanding spiral" (p.261). Phase 0, the first step is called *The Absence of Conscious Awareness*. During this phase a person has no awareness of being; this phase is typically associated the beginning of life when transitioning from the spiritual realm into infancy. Phase 1, *Individuation,* is when a person begins to manifest as a unique being, but only has the awareness of self offered by his or her family and immediate context. A person begins to do their own exploration of self during the third stage, *Dissonance*. This exploration includes aspects that are devalued by others, so it may lead to conflict, anger, confusion, and guilt. The next phase, *Immersion*, is when people embrace other oppressed individuals like themselves that are also devalued, and they may also hold negative views about the dominant group. Phase 4, *Internalization*, is marked by feelings of worth about parts of self that were previously devalued. *Integration* is the phase where people change their assumptions about the world. "One begins to understand that all people can oppress and be oppressed" and individuals connect with more

people "because the criteria for acceptance go beyond appearance" (p. 262). The final stage in Myers and Haggins' model is *Transformation*. In this phase "there has been a shift in worldview based upon the realization of intrinsic worth by virtue of oneness through the interrelatedness and interdependence of all things…" (p.262). Myers and Haggins (1998) purport to overcome limitations of Cross's model by having a theory of identity that is more holistic and is not based soley on African Americans' reactions to white Americans. Although their theory is based on African centered wisdom traditions, it aims to be more broadly applicable than other models.

Oba T'Shaka's Model of Cultural Identity Development

Some useful ideas about cultural identity development come from outside psychology. T'Shaka is an African-centered activist who promotes the study of consciousness in Black Americans. He argues that understanding and facilitating cultural consciousness and transformation is critical for successful community organizing efforts (T'Shaka, 2005). According to T'Shaka, "we have to be able to identify the stages that African people go through when they are waking up" (p.33). T'Shaka's stage model, however, is not supported by empirical evidence and although it resembles aspects of early versions of the *Nigrescence* model, T'Shaka does not appear to draw upon more recent advancements in identity research literature to inform his theory. Yet, its contribution to the literature is unique because of T'Shaka's explicit focus on culture in a way that incorporates both worldview and political ideology.

The beginning of T'Shaka's (2005) transformation model is the stage of *Negro Identity* that is a result of "brainwashing" (p.43) during slavery. His *Black Identity* stage speaks to the unique experiences of African Americans dealing with US sociopolitical realities and race consciousness. During the *Pre-Disturbance* stage a person is unable to see himself or his oppressor through his own eyes, until the *Disturbance* stage when a person realized something is

wrong with how s/he was taught to see the world. It typically occurs through an experience with racism or discrimination. The *African Identity* stage is where a person "decides to be Black *and* African, and they begin to deeply study African and African American history and culture" (p.47). During the *Withdrawal* stage a person physically and psychologically removes her or himself as much as possible from the influence of whites. The *Romantic* stage finds Black people glorifying the positive attributes of African history and traditions, which T'Shaka says is necessary in order to reverse previous overly negative notions. The romanticizing occurs until the *Balanced Self-Appraisal* stage when a person accepts both the positive and negative aspects of African civilization and culture. The *Self-Inventory* stage is introspective; a person begins to apply their new or renewed connection to African heritage to their assessment of their authentic identity and destiny. The *Life, Death and Rebirth* stage is officially when the "Negro dies and the African is reborn" (p.58). New goals, values and destinies must now be re-negotiated so that anything that used to conform to Eurocentric values or standards is now discarded. T'Shaka's final stage is called the *Revolutionary African Identity* stage. The person is now fully awakened and can apply their full creative potential towards building a just, balanced society. T'Shaka's model is the most descriptive model of African centered identity development, but there currently is no research to support its premises.

<u>Merging Race and Culture</u>

The social science literature as it has been presented thus far is representative of the partitioning of researchers and theorists that deal with race and culture among African-Americans. These divisions have coincided with researchers growing interest in conceptually and empirically distinguishing these terms (Brookins, 1994; Phinney, 1996; Helms, 1997; Cokley, 2005). Brookins' (1994) analysis of the relationship between cultural identity and racial

identity is based on a study of 171 college students at a predominately white university. His findings suggest that these two constructs are different domains of psychological health for African Americans. The cultural domain is "reflective of a basic humanistic value system" and the racial domain is "related to how one intends to cope with current sociopolitical realities" (p.141).

Similarly, current psychological literature generally conceptualizes race and culture as having distinguishable components or dimensions (e.g. Sellers, 1998) that are also interrelated. Hartigan (2005) regards "the dialectical relationship between race and culture as a basis for devising an effective means for analyzing how social dynamics shape contemporary collective identities" (p. 544). Researchers have also found empirical support for the interrelationship between African-centered cultural identity and racial identity (Cartman, 2006; Cokley, 2005; Allen Bagozzi, 2001).

The overlap between culture and race is also evident in the instruments researchers use to measure ideas about culture and race. Scales that were developed to measure racial constructs include items that are more accurately conceptualized as measuring culture, and vice versa. For instance, Kambon's original African-Self Consciousness scale includes items that measure African centered identity (i.e. "As a good index of self-respect, Blacks in America should consider adopting traditional African names for themselves") and some items that combine culture and race (i.e. "It is good for Black husbands and wives to help each other develop racial consciousness and cultural awareness in themselves and their children") (Baldwin & Bell, 1985). Similarly, Grills and Longshore (1996) created the Africentric Scale which includes some items that would best considered measures of racial constructs (i.e. "I have more confidence in White professionals, like doctors and teachers, than in Black/African American professionals.").

Instruments that have been developed to measure racial attitudes and identities also typically include items that fit better with the literature's discussion of culture for African Americans. Stevenson (1994) developed a scale of racial socialization that measures the type of race-related messages an individuals has received and the type of the race-related messages they believe should be communicated to others. Stevenson includes a subscale in this instrument called "Cultural Pride and Reinforcement" which includes items about teaching African culture and the benefits of spirituality. In Sellers' (1997) measure of racial identity, the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity, he includes the following item under an ideology subscale: "Blacks would be better off if they adopted Afrocentric values".

Despite differences, the literature occasionally reveals an overlap in how researchers conceptualize the influence of race and culture in African-Americans' lives. Salazar and Abrams (2005) come for a similar perspective of looking common themes in their discussion of the overlap among identity development theorists. Salazar and Abrams identify four main themes that are consistent across stage theories of identity development, despite conceptual differences among models. They suggest that all models include the following: "1) beginning with a negative view of oneself; 2) questioning of stage 1 beliefs; 3) immersion in one's own culture; and 4) positive view of self and others" (p.50). As demonstrated in Table 1, the identity development models that describe generic developmental stages for marginalized persons of color, and the African American models that emphasize race or the models that emphasize culture can all be understood within the common themes framework.

Table 1.1 Common themes across identity development models

	Racial Identity	Generic	African Cultural Ideology/Identity

Common Stages	Cross (1971)	Marcia (1966)	Phinney (1989)	Sue and Sue (1999)	Myers & Haggins (1998)	T'Shaka (2005)
1.)Absent or negative view of self	*Pre-Encounter*	*Diffused* *Foreclosed*	*Unexamined*	*Conformity*	*Individuation*	*Negro Identity* *Pre-Disturbance*
2.)Period of questioning one's original beliefs	*Encounter*	*Moratorium*	*Moratorium*	*Dissonance*	*Dissonance*	*Disturbance* *Black Identity* *African Identity*
3.) Immersion in one's own culture	*Immersion-Emersion*	*(Moratorium)*	*(Moratorium)*	*Resistance and immersion* *Introspection*	*Immersion*	*Withdrawal* *Romantic Stage*
4.)Positive view of self and others	*Internalization* *Internalization-Commitment*	*Achieved*	*Achieved*	*Integrative awareness*	*Internalization* *Transformation*	*Balance Self-Appraisal* *Self-Inventory* *Life, Death and Rebirth* *Revolutionary African Identity*

Summary

The subject of racial identity for African Americans has received considerable attention in psychology. Research findings point to a relationship between healthy racial identities and a variety of positive psychosocial outcomes (e.g. Harvey & Hill, 2004; Constantine et al., 2002; Chambers et al., 1998). However, the seminal work of Cross framed racial identity primarily as a political if not an ideological construct, despite the extensive work done since on its role in psychosocial functioning. The research on African centered identity followed a similar path,

except the focus was on a cultural worldview rather than race. Nonetheless, it too has an ideological emphasis, and has been promoted as a psychological tool for affirmation and liberation. Just as was the case for the racial identity literature, African centered researchers have explored the relationship between African centered identity and a variety of psychosocial outcomes.

Researchers and theorists have historically conceptualized identity as a fluid concept whose dynamic process is impacted by a wide variety of psychological, social, political and other contextual factors. Theories are moving away from describing identity stage development that matures linearly through sequential phases from beginning to end. The most prominent racial identity development theory, Cross's Nigrescence model, has been re-conceptualized; the stages now represent attitudinal themes motivated by environmental events and circumstances and is now more consistent with other multidimensional models. Some theorists suggest that these stages, which could also be interpreted as *themes*, are more cyclical than linear (Parham, 1998).

Theorists have presented a variety of models of identity development for specific groups including African Americans. Some of these models are beginning to incorporate culture into their analysis, as well as historical, political and ideological contexts (T'Shaka, 2005). These cultural models, while conceptually rich, often lack adequate empirical support. However, there appear to be overlapping themes across identity development models whether it is specific to African Americans or if the models are geared more generically towards people of color. Accordingly, Salazar and Abrams (2005) suggest that across models of racial, ethnic and cultural identity development there will be mention of a negative view of self, a period of questioning one's original beliefs, an immersion of self into his or her culture, and a positive view of self and others.   Although research rarely confirms stage models of identity, theorists clearly find them

to be use. They are very useful as a heuristic tool for understanding how racial and cultural identity unfolds over time, even if they falter when subjected to empirical study.

Introduction to current study

Nobles (1998) notes a trend in re-Africanization among Blacks in the United States. Therefore, empirical studies that look deeper into this African-centered movement are timely. More recently, Lechman et al.(2004) assert that "more developmental research is sorely needed within cultural psychology to increase understanding of culturally based psychological processes" (p.704).

This study is about identity and its development. Specifically, the study explored an African centered identity within African Americans that is comprised of two parts: 1) cultural values with origins in African cultures that have been unintentionally retained, and 2) a social and political ideology that intentionally incorporates elements of an African worldview. In addition, this study investigated the lived experience of African centered identity. The researcher sought ways that individuals' identity (values and ideology) was linked to specific, observable patterns of behaviors and activities that this study refers to as *lifestyle*.

Most, if not all, of the existing research on African-centered identity and ideology is survey based, which means that all elements of ideology available to the respondents have been pre-defined by the researchers. This trend suggested a need to conduct basic research studies that examine the experience of African centered ideology from the perspective of those who endorse this ideology as a part of their identity. Additionally, the current study examined African-centered identity from a developmental perspective for African American adults. Due to its dynamic construction (Adams & Dzokoto, 2003), identity is often complex, with many

influences, and as such it often manifests variably across individuals and within individuals across situations. This study attempted to capture these nuances of identity construction.

Thus, this study examined African-centered identity in adults using qualitative research methodology. Decades ago, Becker and Geer (1960) explained that qualitative research is oriented toward developing an understanding of a particular phenomenon rather than measuring relationships among variables. Qualitative methodology is also more useful when conducting research on topics where theory and understanding are limited (Miles & Huberman, 1994). African-centered literature to date has not gathered much empirical information about what being "African-centered" means to those who personally endorse this identity. Qualitative methods were used to allow for more thorough representations of the individual experience and social construction of their self concept (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999).

The present study, more specifically, examined for those who consider themselves African-centered, whether their process of coming into such an identity supported T'Shaka's (2005) transformational theory. To date this is one of the most detailed models of African centered identity development. Specific elements of African centered ideology and cultural retentions such as spirituality, interdependence and ancestry acknowledgement were explored. This study attempts to discover if and how prevalent some of these ideological values are among participants lived experience.

The data collection, analyses and findings were guided by the following research questions:

1. How does African-centered identity manifest in individuals' behavior, social roles and lifestyle?

2. What life experiences do respondents see as influential in the development of their

African-centered identity?

3. Is the lived experience of those who claim an African-centered identity consistent with

themes in T'Shaka's theory of identity transformation?

Chapter 2: METHODS

Several researchers have recommended and utilized qualitative methods for discovering important features of ethnic identity development (Kerwin et al., 1993; Phinney & Landin, 1998; Speight, Vera, & Derrickson, 1996). Specifically, a grounded theory approach has been used to learn about new perspectives on identity development (Peterson, 2000), and this method is well suited for investigating participants' lived experience (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1998; Streubert & Carpenter, 1999).

Research Participants

Participant selection followed the guidelines set by grounded theory's *theoretical sampling*, which means "the investigator examines individuals who can contribute to the evolving theory" (Cresswell, 1998, p.118). Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to this process as *criterion sampling*. Grounded theory also offers further sampling guidelines: investigators should begin by selecting a homogenous sample (i.e. adults with African centered identity), and then, from this group, select a heterogeneous subsample as the focus of the research. This permits a better understanding of the conditions under which a model holds (Cresswell, 1998). To achieve heterogeneity, nominations were sought from African or Black Studies departments in local universities, and spiritual, political, and artistic organizations that had an African centered focus. I contacted members of organizations within or surrounding a large metropolitan city in the southern United Stated. I informed members of these organizations that I was a graduate student seeking participants for my dissertation study that met the following qualifications: 1) they would personally endorse having an African centered identity and are currently active in an African centered group or organization, and 2) were not raised in a household that they would describe as African centered. I also sought gender and age heterogeneity.

This dissertation study is based on a sample of 14 adults who all self identify as African centered and indicated that they currently live an African centered lifestyle. Participants range in age from 26 to 67. Half of the participants are below the age of 50. Additionally, half of the participants are women. They represent a variety of types of African centered organizations, including political, academic, artistic and spiritual. All participants reported affiliations with at least two. They also all have at least some college or university education. The participants in this study were selected because they currently self-identify as African centered but have not always done so. There was a point in their adult lives when then they would not have considered themselves to be living an African centered lifestyle or claim such an identity. I ask them to tell me how they got from there to here.

<u>Interview Protocol and Questions</u>

I conducted semi-structured interviews that were guided by the overarching research questions. The protocol consisted of 5 major areas of inquiry: (1) the meaning of African centered, (2) observable manifestation of African centered identity, (3) childhood thoughts and experiences regarding race and culture, (4) adult influences to cultural identity development, and (5) aspects of the gradual process of becoming African centered as an adult. There were several core questions which are outlined in the interview protocol (see Appendix B for details) but I also allowed for the flexibility to pursue follow up and clarifying questions to help elucidate the process and influences to cultural identity development. Given the lack of first hand information on this topic the semi-structured format was the most beneficial way to maintain a "discovery mode" perspective (Guba, 1978).

The interview durations ranged from 51 minutes to 84 minutes with an average of 69.4 minutes. All the interviews were conducted in person, with a digital voice recorder, at various

locations. Most of them were in the participants' home, some in my home and one in a parked

car during a participant's lunch hour.

Each meeting began by obtaining informed consent and discussing the confidentiality

agreement (Appendix E). The interview was preceded by informing the participant of the general

scope of the study by saying something close to the following:

> *Life experiences and culture shape our lives and behavior. Much of the writings on the role of African culture for African Americans are very theoretical. The purpose of this study is to find out what being 'African Centered' looks like in real life. There is no one right way to be African Centered, so I am interested in the diversity of ideas and experiences people have. I don't see any right or wrong answers, and you don't get extra points for being 'politically correct'...Essentially what I'd like to get from you is a narrative of your process of going from not being African centered through the time when you first would consider yourself to start becoming African centered up until now."*

Before they began their narrative, participants were asked to define what being African

centered meant to them. Then I asked them to tell the story as thoroughly as possible, from point

A to point B, including significant events, people and shifts in their thinking. As much as

possible, I allowed them to tell their story without interruption. However, I would give prompts

to encourage elaboration (again, see Appendix B for procedural details), until they could not

recall any more significant experiences.

Data Management and Analysis

After all the interviews were completed, the recordings of the digital voice recorder were

transcribed and the raw data was prepared for analysis by removing all identifying information.

The participant digital voice recordings and transcript data was stored on the researcher's

password protected home computer.

Analytic orientation

One specific aim of this study was to find support for T'Shaka's theory of identity

transformation, however, due to the limited empirical work on cultural identity development, the

design of this study also allowed for new understandings of identity to emerge. The participant's narratives may or may not reflect any of the themes discussed in the literature regarding identity development or African-centered ideology. Thus, the open-ended nature of the grounded theory approach was the optimal methodology because it allowed space for the theory to emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

One of the main features of the data analytic plan was to emphasize the ways in which participants' narratives reflect *process.* From a grounded theory perspective Strauss and Corbin (1998) define process as "sequences of evolving action/interaction, changes in which can be traced to changes in structural conditions (p. 163)." The data for this study was collected in way to encourage participants to think about their African centered development chronologically. Thus, allowing for a particular type of analysis, "coding for process", which Strauss and Corbin define as "purposefully looking at action/interaction and noting movement, sequence, and change as well as how it evolves (changes or remains the same) in response to changes in context or conditions (p.167)."

Establishing Trustworthiness

To counterbalance some of the limitations in qualitative research design efforts must be taken to establish credibility of findings. The first step for this study occurred prior to analysis and is referred to as 'bracketing'. Bracketing is the recognition of my biases and assumptions in advance so they can be referred back to as potential impediment to fair interpretation. For instance, the participants in this study were not raised in an African centered household, but I consider my household to have been African centered. Therefore, I have my own ideas about what in means to be African centered that I have gathered from experiences in my house and in different African centered communities I have been involved with. Thus I have developed my

own sense of a 'credible' or 'authentic' version of African centered that could make me less aware of unfamiliar manifestations of it. In addition, my position that an African centered lifestyle is beneficial to everyone was important to identify because it skews my lens towards the advantages and not the disadvantages. As a result, this process that I am investigating could be unfairly deemed as coming from a less desirable identity to an optimal identity. Due to these biases it was very important to assemble a team of other researchers that would assist in the reading and interpretation of the interviews.

I assembled members of my research team primarily through the Chicago chapter of the Association of Black Psychologists. I wrote a description of the study and tasks for which I was requesting help and sent it in an email to their contact list. Eleven students responded, all identified as African American. I interviewed them all and selected three. The chosen research assistants were all master's level psychology students, two were female. They were all familiar with racial identity literature and one was minimally familiar with African centered literature. We met three times, at least 2 hours each. The first time was to introduce the study, provide background information, and leave them with materials to review. During the second meeting we went over the coding process with a sample interview and I assign them interviews to code. During the third meeting we reviewed their codes, discussed agreements and disagreements and recommendations for revisions to the coding manual. Dr. Sharon Bethea, the current president of the Chicago chapter of the Association of Black Psychologists served as the expert consultant for the study. She has experience conducting research on racial identity and with qualitative methods. Dr. Bethea and my research assistants, in addition to my primary dissertation advisor Dr. Roderick Watts, were instrumental in offering revisions to the different iterations of the coding manual.

The second area of trustworthiness pursued was reliability. Towards this aim I used one of the original research team members and a new research assistant who was also a former student in my African American Psychology course at Georgia State University that recently moved to Chicago to enter a master's program in psychology. We calculated inter-rater reliability using the Coding Analysis Toolkit, an online program designed by University of Pittsburg to calculate reliability statistics for qualitative data. All three of us coded the same transcript the first round, then the two research assistants coded separate transcripts during the second round. Thus, a total of 3 (out of 14) complete interviews were used to obtain a reliability coefficient, which meets the minimum of 10% of the sample that is standard practice for calculating reliability for qualitative data (Lombard et al., 2003).

Lincoln and Guba (1989) assert that the "single most crucial technique for establishing credibility" is to verify findings and interpretations using the original source or people from which the information was drawn (p.238). Towards that end, prior to me conducting the final round of coding for all the data, I sent the coding manual and a copy of the interview to each of the participants via email. In that email I briefly explained the themes and categories that were delineated and how I arrived at them. I also shared my initial research questions and explained their connection to the list of codes. I then asked them to review their interview and to tell me if the themes I identified accurately captured their experiences in response to two questions: 1. How does the concept "African-centered" manifest in lived experience? and 2. What influences a person to become African centered and what is that process like? I also invited them to provide any additional information that they may have neglected during the. Eight of the participant responded via email and I had follow up phone conversations with two of the participants. Their

feedback influenced several changes in the coding manual and was incorporated into the overall interpretation of findings.

Data Analysis

The interviews were content analyzed largely from a grounded theory approach with the hopes that any conclusions drawn are based primarily on the words of the participants (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Towards that end the grounded theory approach urges constant comparison, revisions and conformations throughout the entire analytical process. Once the data was transcribed it was entered and stored into a computer software program, ATLAS. Ti6. This program was designed to support qualitative data analysis. With ATLAS.ti6 I was able to easily search, code and retrieve text segments and I also used the program to document my ongoing interpretations through memos.

One of my data analysis objectives was to see how the data fit pre-existing themes of African centered identity development that had been categorized in stages by authors such as T'Shaka. However, to not miss the opportunity for new theory to emerge I adopted an exploratory approach that combined inductive and deductive strategies to simultaneously assess the utility of T'Shaka's theory while remaining open to organically generated information. Details about the specific stages of analysis, from open coding to axial or focused coding are described below.

Phase 1: Open coding

In grounded theory research coding is the foundation for data analysis. "Coding is the link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data" (Hesse-Biber, 2004, p. 53). Strauss and Corbin (1998) define coding as "the analytic process through which data are fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form theory" (p.3). The first phase of

analysis, open coding, is "the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data" (Straus & Corbin, 1998, p.101). I began open coding by reading through the transcripts line by line and making note of the repeating and/or significant themes. Close attention was also given to *indigenous concepts*, which are terms used by participants (Patton, 1990) that may not have appeared in literature I was familiar with. Then, with my research questions in mind I began organizing the list of themes into a hierarchical "tree" structure based on emerging categories and subcategories (Richards, 2000). Larger constructs (i.e. Values) were represented by the category codes and the specific components were represented by the subcategories (i.e. Spirituality). After reading through all the transcripts several times, identifying themes and outlining a system of codes, I shared them with the research assistants. I asked them to review two transcripts using that preliminary coding manual. At this stage the research team had not been exposed to T'Shaka's cultural identity development model and were mostly unfamiliar with African centered psychology literature. Thus, their feedback contributed to the goal of generating interpretations inductively.

Axial coding

The next phase of analysis was axial coding. At this stageI began to incorporate the concepts from the literature with the data. Strauss and Corbin (1998) assert that the "purpose of axial coding is to reassemble data that were fractured during open coding" (p.124). This stage in the analysis is also described as *focused coding*: "taking earlier codes that continually reappeared in initial coding and using those codes to sift through large amounts of data. It is less open-ended and more directed than line by line coding and is more selective and conceptual" (Hesse-Bieber et al., 2004, p. 53). This phase of analysis has two main objectives, to begin classifying the

components of an African centered identity/lifestyle and to begin constructing theory on African centered identity development.

Some of the terminology and structure that Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) were useful towards organizing my themes into a coding system. *Phenomena* are the most abstract idea, and they are represented by concepts. *Concepts* are the building blocks of theory and are further defined as "labels placed on discrete happenings, events and other instances of phenomena" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.61). In the present study, identity is the phenomenon of interest, and it is represented by concepts such as culture, values, worldview and lifestyle.

I also involved my research team in this stage of coding. My research assistants had already read several interviews so at this juncture I introduced T'Shaka's stage theory and other related literature. Therefore, when I gave them the subsequent interview to code they could do so with T'Shaka's stages in mind. Research assistants were also able to then consider some of the components of African centered worldview presented in the literature.

Inter-coder reliability was also calculated at this stage. Qualitative researchers have not reached agreement regarding the most accurate index of inter-coder reliability. Cohen's Kappa is a widely used index that achieves an acceptable level of accuracy by factoring in the proportion of expected agreement due to chance alone. Use of Cohen's Kappa has received support for its use in research that involved coding of behavior (Bakeman, 2000; Dewey, 1983). Two Master's level psychology students were the research associates whose codes were used to compute inter-coder reliability. One associate had been involved in the review of the first iterations of the coding manual from the open coding phase and the second associate was introduced to the codes for the first time. Moderate to high levels of agreement were achieved for the first associate and

low to high levels were achieved for the second associate. Reliability coefficients for the three

interviews coded are presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Cohen's Kappa indices of inter-coder reliability

Categories	Interview #1		Interview #2	Interview #3
	Coder 1	Coder 2	Coder 1	Coder 2
Values	.89	.77	.94	.85
Activities	.85	.79	.89	.72
Childhood Insights	.75	.58	.71	.65
Childhood Environment	.68	.45	.65	.62
Identity Shifts	.72	.61	.73	.63
Adult Insights	.85	.70	.67	.71
Adult Environment	.80	.61	.70	.68

The other important aspect of analysis at this level involved coding for process. My

interest in understanding development added a temporal dimension. That included an interest in

the relationship between changes in the structures (e.g. family, school, community) and changes

in the individuals. The goal was summarized in a statement from Strauss and Corbin (1998):

"What is important to us is that the process be related to structure, that is, the alignment of

actions/interactions to conditions, how these change from one stage to another, variations within

a phase, and how the outcomes of one set of actions/interactions feed back into the context to

become part of the conditions influencing the next set of actions/interactions (p.169)."

Phase 3: Outline themes and explore relationships

The final step in analysis was to compare the emerging theory with existing literature. I began with the growing body of literature that defines African centered worldview which typically lists values. To conclude my analysis I compared and contrasted the ways the components of African centered worldview listed by theorists were represented by the respondents' lived definition of African centered. I first read the transcripts for themes that the participants organically produce, but towards the end I read the interviews searching for specific values listed in the literature. Finally, the same occurred with the focus on process. With racial and cultural identity stage development literature in mind, T'Shaka's model in particular, I searched the data to verify whether or not participants endorsed important aspects of the stages of development in a way that parallels the description of them in the literature.

Chapter 3: RESULTS

A variety of thematic domains and categories emerged from the data analysis. The format of their presentation is consistent with the outline of the data in the final coding manual (See Appendix C). Themes and categories are divided into two sections based on this study's research questions. The first section responds to the question: How does African-centered identity manifest in individuals' behavior, social roles and lifestyle? The first section addresses the participants' manifestation of African centered identity based on a *values* domain and an *activities* domain. Findings that suggest an interaction between those two domains will be highlighted.

Section two addresses the process of African centered identity development in response to the following research question: What life experiences do respondents see as influential in the development of their African-centered identity? In addition, this section will also address the specific research question about whether the development processes of those who claim an African-centered identity are consistent with the themes in T'Shaka's theory of identity transformation.

Analyses were separated by the contribution of personal insight and the influence of the environment. Personal insight and environmental influences were further examined separately for childhood and adulthood. Throughout the presentation of findings differences between the older and younger generations in the sample will be highlighted. To protect confidentiality, identifying information such as gender or age has been changed or removed from the transcripts.

Lived Experience of African Centered Identity

Values

The growing body of social science literature related to African centered identity lists values that the authors consider to be components of this ideology. However, much of those values do not come directly from the lived experience of those who claim an African centered identity. The participants typically described their African centered perspectives by words, terms or phrases which could be linked to similar ideas described in the literature. Participants reported the values they deemed central to their experience of African centeredness. Those values comprise the first domain of the lived experience of African centered identity. The following are the specific categories that were identified. The names of all the <u>categories</u> will be underlined for ease of reading.

Every participant mentioned <u>spirituality</u> as an important aspect of African centeredness. It was often the first principle mentioned. The primacy and consistency of <u>spiritually</u> as a theme paralleled its prominence in African centered literature. There seems to be something essential and fundamental about a connection to spirit for the African centered individual, as illustrated by the following two statements:

> *"To me, it means, first and foremost, to pursuit of your African spiritual essence. And I say that, spiritual, African spiritual essence because the spirit has no context, I believe. And it's as omniscient as space and time and things that are beyond our comprehension."11*

> *"To me, being African-centered means that you are in relationship with the Creator," 2*

Most mentions of <u>spirituality</u> were not couched in a particular religious context. When people discussed a particular tradition it was typically based on ancient African systems of belief. Otherwise respondents mentioned an Africanized version of Christianity where the characters in the bible are from the continent of Africa and biblical stories are based on much older stories documented in ancient Egyptian writings. Most of the time, however, when

participants discussed spirituality they spoke about it in a way that transcended religious

categories and focused on the presence of spirit:

> *"What I believe is, whether you're Christian, Muslim, Hindu. Uh, whether you're a traditional African worshipper, There are some, there are some core beliefs, that transcends all that dogma. And we ought to be able to sit in a room, and, feel the presence of God, and be touched and be moved. And not worry about, well I got to pray to the East, or I got to do this, or I got to work. You know? You know what I'm saying? So I just think that, it cuts through all those."* 6

Communalism was an equally prominent value expressed by the participants. There were

a variety of ways the importance of relationships was represented in the data. A few participants

endorsed communalism as a rejection of the individualistic nature of mainstream US culture.

More participants expressed communalism as a connection between US born Blacks and African

people and their descents around the globe:

> *"You know and I think that's important that a critical mass of us, see us, see our connection to the African family world wide or I don't think we'll ever be free. You know, until we see that black people in the United States, and Cuba, and Brazil, and Tanzania, it doesn't matter where you are, that we are all connected. I don't think we'll be free as a people. No matter where we are in the world."* 2

The majority of the time when participants were discussing communalism it was in the

context of working with other people to achieve goals or providing service to other persons of

African descendants. The goal oriented communalism was sometimes small group focused like

an organization or a family who decided to come together for the benefit of that group. Other

times the goal oriented communalism was focused much larger, on the general well being of

African descendents:

> *"...all of my work, everything that I do, at its heart, is about, you know, the lives of African people, Um, and making them better. Um, you know, whether I'm, whether I'm working on something I think is gonna be on the macro level, you know, for like all African people, Or, if I'm doing something on the micro level, which is gonna affect, you know, my family, or you know, people who are in my immediate surroundings, or my students."* 1

The other most common way <u>communalism</u> was expressed was as a motivation for service provision. The motivation was reportedly fueled by a sense of duty to uplifting the whole. In other words, participants were willing to volunteer their gifts or their time or find ways to transfer their professional resources to benefit other Blacks because they saw other as a part of their "responsibility" (5):

> *"So see to me, that's African-centered, how we are committed to caring and um seeing what the person's dealing with and seeing if there's something you need to do to help them. That they aren't always trying to rip off the system, all this old nonsense. And whether they are or not, just think about the children. See that's the holistic view, I'm thinking about the children, whether that person is trying to rip me off or not, or rip off the system cause it ain't my money anyway. So that makes me different from coworkers."*
> *13*

The very term, African-centered, is an appropriate label given the description of the participants' experience of seeing the world through an African cultural lens. That is the essence of the next theme, <u>centered on Africa</u>. For many participants being African centered affected everything from the food they ate, to their daily activities, formation of relationships, what professions they chose, etc. To the participants, to be African centered meant "at your center you're African" (3). They often positioned this theme as a prerequisite, asserting that an African worldview must always be at least as important as any values system from any other culture:

> *"When, African culture, thought, philosophy, religion and beliefs are at the center of, of everything. Um, meaning that you value, um, those principles and those guidelines. They're just as valuable as any other guiding principles. So, seeing things from the eyes, um, from an African perspective." 6*

At the base of being <u>centered on Africa</u> is also the acknowledgement that an individual is connected to the heritage and legacies of Africa. That is then combined with a sense of pride in that knowledge. Finally, participants recognize the importance of applying a focus on African culture in practical ways:

"Even now, you know, with the freedom school. We are definitely an African-centered school. Which means that we teach everything from an African perspective. That's what it means to me. That you are at the center, of your curriculum." 2

One of the more explicitly political values that emerged was the notion of self-determination. Participants mostly meant it in a typically Black "nationalistic" (8) manner. Many participants were interested in a "separate African nation" (6) or "sovereignty in this nation" (9). Some expressed interest in separate Black churches, businesses, schools and residential communities. Other participants clarified the need to focus on political self-determination and be careful not to lose that focus amidst the move towards African cultural appreciation:

"But see I don't separate politics from this either. Because, for me, it's not enough to have the trappings of culture or the rituals, it's about being an advocate for self-determination." 5

Most of the participants mentioned a connection to ancestors/heritage in their interview. By ancestors participants meant different things; most often they were referring to the lineage or family line of most African Americans that can be traced back, beyond slavery, to the people that lived on the continent of Africa. Thus, the range of ancestors considered included immediate family members (e.g. grandparents that passed) to the first members of the human family from centuries ago that inhabited the land we now call Africa. At a minimum level participants mentioned that is was important to recognize a connection to those that came before them and to "reclaiming you roots" (11). The next level of considering ancestors/heritage was a general seeking of inspiration from ancestors and a motivation to continue their work and make them proud:

"And when I, you know I'm a teacher so when I teach, uh, trying to do things in a way that kind of reflect the best traditions of our ancestors" 4

"Um and to really embrace it and get back to that and um, which is all about the nature of Sankofa and just going back and understanding where you were, what you truly came from, and, you know, using that as a tool to move forward" 12

The most inclusive level of considering <u>ancestors/heritage</u> was mentioned by a few

participants who maintained active communication with the sprit world through ancestors:

"Uh, the connection between ourselves and the ancestors and seeing ourselves as a continuation of their work. The belief that the ancestors communicate with you, that they're trying to guide you. I believe all of that is African." 2

It was also important to many participants that as they developed their African centered

identity they simultaneously considered its <u>practical modern application</u>. Oftentimes that meant

trying to figure out ways to merge the African and American cultural realities "cause you ain't

no pure African" (11) as one participant stated. For many of the participants it seemed important

to both go back in time to better understand ancient Africa but to also make it currently relevant.

That sentiment is reflected in the following statement:

"that's one of the things I appreciate about, uh, uh, maybe Kawaida, is they try to make it, uh, where it's real for our situation, our reality, we live in right now. That's one thing I've heard Maulana Karenga talk about that I think is very important. Um, cause I think a lot of us try to embrace a traditions and ways of Africa, but we don't try to make it real for reality we're living in right now. And um, and in a way I think a lot of times we isolate ourselves from the majority of our people. So I, you know, I think we have to construct a Afro-, a African-centricity or African-centered thought that's real and practical and even attractive to our people, our people want to embrace." 4

For others <u>practical modern application</u> was an important value because it repairs damage

lost over time. During the "Maafa" (the European capture, trade and enslavement of Africans,

and continued terrorizing with Jim Crow and other form of racial oppression) the descendants of

those Africans that remained in the Americas lost some of their connection to specific lands and

ethnic groups. Therefore, respondents reported that part of the African centered agenda is to re-

create and add to those connections. Additionally, <u>practical modern application</u> sometimes

carried new labels with it:

> *"For Nu African, well, we have our history and we have our legacy and we have everything that is ancient for us from Africa. Unfortunately, we don't have that, we couldn't take all of that with us. Some of us are able to get some of it. But when we, when the Maafa happened, we lost a lot of that. So I can't say Dahomey or I can't say Ibo or I can't say any of those things, but what I can say is that everything that we're experiencing here, plus what we know we experienced there, we can combine it and create a new culture. And African people here have a culture. It's a culture with what they're dealing with right here, what we brought to these shores. That was a cultural expression and so that's a new African perspective."* 5

In addition to self determination the other explicitly political value that emerged was

<u>social justice</u>. The importance of <u>social justice</u> was highlighted by a one of the participants who

reviewed the themes I sent during the member check process. He felt that the version of the

coding manual I sent did not fully represent how intricately related his cultural identity was to his

political identity. Likewise, a few of the participants distinguished themselves as a part of a

subset of African centered communities there were more interested in politics:

> *"It was like, the people who were cultural, were into politics. And the people, and when I mean politics I don't mean, uh, America's politics. I mean, um, nationalism, um, struggle, demonstrations, political action, you know. Agitation. They weren't into that, right. We were."* 2

The type of <u>social justice</u> participants reported valuing mainly included eliminating

discriminatory practices motivated by racism and sexism. Participants were interested in seeking

<u>social justice</u> through a variety of means: voting, community organizing, grassroots

organizations, and building coalitions with other <u>social justice</u> minded individuals. Sometimes

the participants focus was on achieving <u>social justice</u> within local politics but more often

participants spoke of a more "revolutionary" (10) scope that challenged "imperialism" (3) and

promoted "human rights" (5) across the globe. For instance:

"But what I'm really trying to say is, is that, we do need reparations, we do need a redistribution of, equitable distribution of, wealth and everything else that embodies who we are, as, as a people on this planet and be aware of all the psychological traps that are placed out there." 5

A small number of participants mentioned achieving <u>social justice</u> for specific

disfranchised groups such as the economically underprivileged and LGBTQ communities.

However, when <u>social justice</u> comments were directed towards equality for a specific group it

was usually about women. Some of the comments were directed at larger political systems but

the following comments represent ideas about <u>social justice</u> that were directed towards smaller

groups such as family:

"We may talk about those things, those are the principles that I would raise my children under. Uh with my husband, I would be centered on not necessarily believing that he has to be the protector or leader of the household, but that it has to be a um, an equality" 13

"Well, it's all about still, looking for a, uh, balanced life, so going back to the Twa and egalitarianism. My household is, uh, is a partnership. My wife has equal voice and I have equal voice. We make joint decisions. Uh, and that's truly African, uh, or at least the best of what Africa has to offer." 5

The values presented thus far have been listed individually but oftentimes participants

described their experience of being African centered using a <u>particular set of values</u>. A few times

the principles were from an organization they were a part of that created its own mission

statement with values listed. Most times the <u>particular set of values</u> were either the "Nguzo

Saba" the seven principles of Kwanzaa (unity, self-determination, collective work and

responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, faith) or the ancient Egyptian

principles of "Ma'at" (truth, balance, order, reciprocity, morality, and justice).

The final theme of the *values* domain is a preference reported by participants for a certain

<u>aesthetic</u> that expressed aspects of African culture. Many of their comments were about

challenging the European-American standard of beauty and appreciating the organic physical

features of Africans descendants such as full noses and lips, dark skin or the range of skin tones

of Blacks across the diaspora. Much of the focus was on hair, as represented by this statement:

> *"I hate to sound petty – I don't want to be in a church full of women with pressed hair and fake weaves and braids and that's the way you got to be to be beautiful. I don't want that. And that's what I saw in most Black churches." 14*

But more than that, respondents made a connection between hair <u>aesthetics</u> and the transmission

of messages about self worth. This is another comment by the same participant:

> *"They've been told from three years old when their mama got that first perm or that first fake braids that your hairs not good enough, you know, and my kids have not had those kind of messages." 14*

<u>Aesthetic</u> preferences also seemed to correspond with the identity shifts that will be presented in

the next section. Several of the women, in particular, told stories about battling for years against

standards of beauty that encouraged them to straighten their hair and in some instances lighten

their complexion. So there was a process of "going natural" (9) that was often connected to the

idea of going back to your roots. Some of the older men also used the phrase "naturals" (11)

when talking about the decision to wear an afro in the 60's and 70's. Thus it seems like the first

level of cultural acceptance for participants was to decide they were content with the <u>aesthetics</u>

that they inherently possess:

> *"I accept my curves, I accept the way that I speak, I accept the type of foods that I eat, I accept that my hair grows up and out and is not meant to grow long and straight and all of that." 12*

The next level beyond acceptance regarding <u>aesthetic</u> appreciation reportedly involved a more

deliberate gravitation towards artifacts of African culture. Sometime participants spoke about it

being a "feeling" (12) or a "rhythm" (12) that was hard to define. Most times participants made

references to specific pieces of art, sculptures, food, language, music, clothing, furniture, visual

and textile patterns, etc.

"Um, so for me like that's a big part of it, in terms, like, um, of that. And then there's the aesthetic. Like aesthetic is huge cause I think that gives, we don't have language, we don't have, um, necessarily like a traditional garb of Africans in America, so the aesthetic – the natural hair, the wearing dashikis, the, um, using Kiswahili terms, and, and uh, Adinkra symbols that I have tattooed – you know, like, those aesthetic things give me comfort, and give me, um, validation in the expression of the ideology." 9

On the other hand, some participants discouraged excessive attention on the observable artifacts of culture:

"And it'll be way past, it's not like, oh, everybody need to have afros, and dreadlocks, and dashikis on." 3

Either way, participants were consistently clear that being African centered was much more than an appreciation for African <u>aesthetics</u> or any of the other *values* mentioned in this domain. Being African centered, they said, was in part attitudes and ideology, but it was also about what you do. African centered identity was reportedly defined by the interaction of values and actions:

"So for me it's all about, uh, theory and praxis have to be all together. It's about how we actually function. So, um, uh, you know, uh, so I use that that term "authentic". I don't even know where I got that from. I mean, so, oftentimes I'm thinking about, um, you know, who 's uh particularly black. I mean, we got folks, as you very well know, who, don the garb, who, are very quote "materialistic" and, and, and, and they're not about African people. It's just, sort of a cultural whatever, whatever, whatever. And then you got people who obviously do things that are very European, aesthetically, both sisters and brothers, who, some of them have consciousness, and some of them don't have consciousness. Uh, and I do think that, you know, it would be ideal to be able to have all of that in one package to where you have the inward African-centered consciousness as well as the outward manifestations of that." 5

Activities

The participants' lived experience of being African centered was separated into two domains: *values*, as presented directly above, and the corresponding actions and behaviors that are referred to as *activities*. As participants discussed their identity development and their ideas about African centered cultural values, I encouraged them to describe ways their ideology

surfaced as patterns of behavior that characterized their lifestyle. They responded with a variety of *activities*.

One of the most prominent *activities* involved different methods of <u>transmission and community building</u> of cultural information or rituals. Several of the participants were teachers by trade or leaders in their respective organizations. In those locations they sought opportunities to incorporate culture into their methodology and outcomes. Participants reported transmitting information mainly to younger people but sometimes also to peers, family members and co-workers. Many of the instances mentioning the importance of cultural <u>transmission and community building</u> seemed motivated by obligation to keep the cycle going; often because someone else passed down knowledge to them. This cycle is exemplified in the following quotes:

> *"But when we started dealing with independent schools, we started pulling in all that information that was necessary in order to educate our children. So it may mean that we get the story books from Africa and talk about – I forgot a lot of the stories and stuff – Jambo Means Hello and all of those kinds of books and giving them a chance to connect to our own African culture. Because we try to teach our children and in order to teach our children we had to learn, more." 13*

> *"So when I look at, for example, of my wife and I don't know how many hundreds of African songs she knows, I applaud her and other African priests who uh, have , uh, have that knowledge and are passing it on to other New Afrikans who wish to partake in some sort of, uh, traditional African spiritual practice." 5*

Also, sometimes the act of <u>transmission and community building</u> meant passing along tangible resources:

> *"And I don't have a lot of books, I don't know where they go. I get them, read them, and some people make sure they keep them in their archives, I'm ain't one of those persons. I keep a few things that I happen to have kept, but I'm not so guarding them books I have. I'm like here "read this book". I've given them to students, I've given them to sisters who I was interested in and wanted them to understand where I was coming from. Even the woman that I married, this is who I am, you know." 11*

Other times it meant passing along a general sense of pride and awareness:

"Years ago one of my students wrote me a letter, he said I never had anybody talk to me and treat me the way you do. Thank you. Just this last year one of my students said thank you for making me proud of my African self." 14

The participants for this study were recruited through recommendations from organizations, so naturally one of the common *activities* reported was to participate in a cultural or political group/organization. Participants typically had a list of organizations they had been members of, affiliated with or had created over the years. The types of organizations included youth mentoring groups, grassroots political organizations, study groups, religious organizations, university based student groups, and rites of passage organizations. To participate in a cultural or political group/organization was associated with several other important themes in an African centered lifestyle. Organizations offered a community of other like minded peers, opportunities to study, and vehicles for service and social change.

Most of the time when participants were involved with organizations they were volunteering their time, but they also saw that it was important for sustaining the interests of African centered agendas by find ways to incorporate African themes intro their professional work. A few of them were able to create completely independent economically viable means of self employment, but most participants sought ways to introduce African centered themes into their existing jobs:

"And what's interesting, you know, even though (name of program) is the furthest from African-centered, like, for me, I found it in there. Because they were gonna be working with (name of city) public schools. That's us. You know? [Laughing] Like most of the schools that we work with are, 95, 98, and my school was 99.9% African American. You know, so for me, it was like, I will be working with my community. Even though it's kind of under this, this visage, of, you know, (name of program). You know. You know for me, it was tantamount that I would be doing something working with my people." 1

When discussing ways they could <u>incorporate African themes into their professional</u> <u>work</u> several participants highlighted the importance to understanding the act of working from an integrated, purposeful perspective. For instance:

> *"Um, and so my work, isn't separate from me. It is literally what I was put here to do. It is my spiritual calling. It is my physical desire. It is my emotional connectedness. My work is what I do. It is me." 9*

In fact, some participants did not distinguish their identity from their work at all. The interrelatedness of African centered identity and work is reflected in the following exchange:

> *OC: Where do you see yourself headed in your evolution?*
> *2: Well, um, well, professionally, I'm trying to get a job. You know, um.*
> *OC: Um hmm. But what about your identity, your sense of self?*
> *2: Well all of that's connected, though. Which is African. It's not segmented. Do you know what I mean? What you do everyday, is what you worship, is what you believe, it's who you are.*

Consistent with the communalism value, a corresponding activity that most participants mentioned was to <u>seek like minded peers</u>. Other African centered peers helped to initiate and sustain cultural interests. A few participants even reporting difficulty being around non-African centered peers once they became more entrenched in the ideology. To actively <u>seek like minded</u> <u>peers</u> was particularly important for participants who did not fully receive support from their family and friends.

Information was a fundamental part of all the participants' lived experience of being African centered. Most of them reported that their emergence into an African centered identity was fueled by information so along the process all the participants engaged in some form of <u>reading/Study about Africa</u>. In this sample the participants from the older generation were more likely to name specific books and authors that impacted them, such as "Chancellor Williams" (6) "Cheikh Anta Diop" (11), "Dr. Ben" (11), "Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*" (4), and "Dubois and Garvey" (5). A few of times a participant would suggest that they'd gotten to a point where they

did not feel compelled to study as much because they have read so much already and were more focused on practical applications of the knowledge. More often participants suggested that they will always continue reading/study about Africa because of the immense amount of knowledge available:

> *"In terms of, like I told you, this study thing, you know, I was in the library, and I told them this today in the professional development session, getting ready for the charter, we're, you know, we're doing more and more research, and I started researching all, you know, just individual African scientists and the things they were doing,man Obari I started crying because it was like, it was so much I did not know. There's just so much out there that we have done, that we have no idea."* 2

In a similar way that participants reported attempts to incorporate African centered ideas into their professional work, participants also spoke about fusing culture into their art. Engagement with the arts was a prominent activity given the vibrant expressiveness of African culture. Using oral traditions such as poetry and hip hop, through dance, music, drawing and painting, film, and theater, participants reinforced their commitment to being African centered. Engagement with the arts was a way participants learned about Africa, formed communities of support, and expressed their developing ideas about African cultural and political realities.

Another *activity* that was reported often was rituals. Participants mentioned engaging in a number of rituals with African centered themes (e.g. naming ceremonies, weddings, spiritual initiations, libations, holidays, rites of passages). The meanings of rituals often varied among participants. For some it was important to begin by thinking critically from a cultural perspective about the holidays and other ceremony's that African American's typically celebrate in America. This type of questioning often led to reservations about the European origins of many of the rituals African Americans had grown accustomed to:

> *"Cause I started, I didn't, I started like, questioning more like, I don't even know how to get married. Like, we, like, there wasn't white dresses and priests over in Africa I'm sure,*

like you know. And then you hear like how people, that's why black people jump the broom. So you can see like the retentions there." 3

Then after questioning and being exposed to more African centered <u>rituals</u> some participants still reported having to learn to become comfortable incorporating some rituals into their lifestyle:

"Because I used to feel uncomfortable about libation. I poured libation because it made sense intellectually. But it was always uncomfortable. You know always like I was worshipping ancestors. You know, in a way it is worshipping ancestors, but instead of worshipping my God, and you could only have God, and God is a jealous God, and you should have no other Gods, and you know I mean just all this stuff, and I finally realized that ain't nothing but white, the white man, that's twisted. You know, so, with that, came more of an acceptance of, you know, our ancestors, and, being African." 2

However, because <u>rituals</u> are such a tangible way to practice being African, participants consistently reported appreciating <u>rituals</u> and often suggested a desire to continue to teach them to others.

Adopting an African centered identity corresponded with changes in <u>diet</u> for about half of the participants. For some of them <u>diet</u> was a part of them considering well being in a more holistic way. To them being holistic meant highlighting the interconnectedness of all things, including the foods we consume. A few of the <u>diet</u> references were about methods such as "when we would have things we would eat with our hands" (13) but for a majority of the conversations about <u>diet</u> the participant was talking about being vegetarian.

Another common characteristic of the participants' *activity* was to <u>attempt to spend time with Blacks/Africans</u>. Almost everyone mentioned at least the desire to travel to the continent of Africa. Some had been several times. A few of the participants, in both the older and younger generations, described growing up in communities that were segregated in a way they preferred. They reportedly would rather spent most of their days in contact with other Black people.

Sometimes participants <u>attempt to spend time with Blacks/Africans</u> was reflected in their enrolling in Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

African culture was repressed for African Americans during the process of enslavement and subsequent racist and discriminatory milieu. As such, most participants regarded their African centered lifestyle a valuable act of reclamation that needed to be protected and maintained. Participants saw the family institution as one of the most effective means of preserving culture so they often mentioned attempts to <u>seek African centered partners and/or raise African centered children</u>. Their dating preferences worked similarly to typical relationship building were individuals are attracted to those with similar value systems. Most of the participants' ideas about romantic partnerships, however, were also related to desire to have children. As a parent and as a grandparent, participants were clear about their commitment to passing on their cultural ideology and lifestyle through their lineage:

> *"Um, cause I said I was gonna like start small with the family, of course, my husband yeah now he'll be black, if it'll be a husband, a partnership. He'll be black, I'll have some little African kids" 3*

> *"So, he gave me a role model of what does an African grandparent look like. You know, um, or African-centered grandparent look like. What type of role does he or she play in the development of the grandchildren." 4*

One very intimate *activity* that every participant engaged in was <u>changing their name</u>. Almost all the participants who received a European/American derived name at birth changed it to a name with African origins. Their original name was often referred to as their "slave name" (3). Some participants picked their own name from a book, some received a name through a rites of passage ceremony, and others had a name given to them by a community. In each scenario <u>changing their name</u> was a significant marker for self identification and commitment to African centered ideology, as exemplified in the following statement:

"At initiation, and you're given, uh, your first name, and then your last name….I think, for me, um, one, just getting it explained that your name propels you to another level, another, um, to a destiny, that, um, that to, to a destiny that either, whatever course, um, school of thought you believe in, or that your ancestors want for you, or that spirits want for you, or that you should be." 10

Participants reported different experiences associated with <u>changing their name</u>. For some it was easy for their parents and family to adjust to their new name. Others had family members that refused. Participants were generally more lenient with family members, as opposed to non-relatives, who did not refer to them by their new chosen names. For some participants it was important to legally change their names. One thing that was consistent across their stories was that participants took <u>changing their name</u> very seriously. Sometimes times they would refer to themselves using their different names as if they were referring to different aspects of themselves. They also paid very close attention to the meaning of their chosen or given names and they incorporated those meanings into their identities. For all of the participants <u>changing their name</u> was a powerful act of self-declaration:

"I mean the names, of course, for you to have some power for yourself, I feel that you have to, um, take that power back. And, having the naming, having you being named, last name that is, after, or upon the namesake of a slaveholder, it sends subconsciously, even if you think so or not, you are still controlled. And you'd be amazed at how much energy and strength comes back to you, If you just take that out and reprogram it, or just, all, it's just all messed up. Just, I mean it's a lot. And so I've done that." 8

The behavioral counterpart for the value of an African centered aesthetic was the act of adorning one's self and one's environment with <u>African décor</u>. Buying African clothing, wearing head wraps, decorating furniture with African prints, braiding or locking hair, wearing beads and other African jewelry are all things participants reported doing more once they became more African centered. Political themes were also represented in participants' <u>African décor</u> with posters, paintings and t-shits with influential figures in Black history such as Malcolm X, Angela Davis, Steve Biko and Harriet Tubman. A few participants said that buying <u>African</u>

décor was motivated in part by a desire to support Black business, while African décor was more often an outward representation of inner consciousness.

The final activity reported by participants to represent their African centered lifestyle was the deliberate use of language to reflect consciousness. This category was evident in a variety of ways. Sometimes the change in language regarded the preferred term for African descendants in the US. The older generation spoke about rejecting the label "colored" and replacing it with the label "Black". A few participants currently reject the label "African American" and prefer a title such as "Nu Afrikan" (8):

> "*Black folks who had came from the continent of Africa, who were Mandingo and Hausa, and Yoruba, and, you know, all these different ethnic groups who had blended together into one ethnic group, or one group because of our slave experience*". 2

Many of the other occurrences of language reflecting consciousness were associated with greetings. Participants generally suggested a move from using typical American or African American greetings and being more thoughtful about how they were interacting with others. For instance, given the participants' increasing consciousness around an African centered value such as communalism, that awareness was evident in how he or she addressed other members of his perceived extended family. The following two quotes help elucidate this point, the first from the older generation and second from the younger:

> "*but uh even in the names would say functionally what happened, there wasn't any more niggers. Although you could get pissed off, it was always brother, sister. That was an era of what was going on. Those were uh greetings around, what's up African?*" 11

> "*Um If a stranger says, hey, how are you? And I'm always a "peace brother". And that's just a stereotypical way of the Afrocentric, but I really don't mean it. "Peace" And if you're Black, I'm going to call you my brother. And if you're a Black woman, I'm going to call you my sister because I really feel like we're a family.*" 12

Finally when discussing ways language reflects consciousness participants reported a desire to learn indigenous African languages such as "Kiswahili", "Yoruba" and "Twi". A few

were also interested in learning the ancient Egyptian writing forms of Mdu Ntr or hieroglyphics. In rituals and celebrations including holidays such as Kwanzaa, participants attempted to infuse as many words as possible from indigenous African languages. Participants occasionally referred to language to highlight the pervasiveness of European-American culture in their lives with a reminder such as "shoot, we're having this conversation in English, right?" *(4)*.

Influences on the Development of African Centered Identity

The second research question concerns the life experiences participants reported as influential during their development of an African-centered identity. The third research question seeks to examine whether the cultural identity development of respondents parallel models in the literature, specifically T'Shaka's model. This section focuses on the development of identity. The following themes describe the external influences to their cultural identity development and their internal reactions to their environments. In this section the *categories* of influence will be presented in italics and their sub-categories will be underlined.

Childhood insights

Participants began their narratives with musings from their childhood. They were often able to recount some of their earliest memories about race and culture. The childhood period was defined from birth through the end of high school. Participants' reflections were grouped into the following sub-categories: personal characteristics, thoughts about being Black, thoughts about Africa, and thoughts about Whites.

The first sub-category illustrated personal characteristics that reportedly have always set participants apart from the crowd. As African centered adults they find themselves in small communities that are in the minority among African Americans, but some participants said that

they have always been a "nonconformist" (5) or the "oddball in the family" (5). Other participants reported their emergence into an African centered identity was a path they have always been on since they were a child, even if they did not call it that or were consciously aware of it. Those participants reported that they have "always been interested in different cultures" (9) or that their work as an African centered adult was a "spiritual calling" (2) that they've been aware of since childhood. Another participant suggested that being African centered may even have in his DNA:

> "I think the question is, where does the motivation come from, or where does the energy come from, or where does the spirit comes from? I'm unclear as to whether or not there's a little something in the DNA that says "you will become consciously aware of who you are and you will become an advocate and a warrior, uh, uh, for our people." I don't know if there's that little gene there, or if there's a cultural message that's within the DNA." 5

In order to understand the participants' cultural identity development it was essential for them to discuss some of their childhood memories about their experience of being Black: how they perceived themselves, how they perceived other Blacks, etc. Participants' thoughts about being Black reflected both positive and negative regard. They were sometimes proud and other times ashamed. The positive spectrum of participants' thoughts about being Black will be presented first. However, it is important to note that statements were not reported such that some participants had positive thoughts about Blackness and others had negative, more often the same participant reported both positive and negative reflections.

More than half of the participants mentioned having some type of positive thought about being Black during their childhood. Some recalled early childhood memories of wanting to play with Black dolls or felt more comfortable playing with Black kids. Several statements were made about participants as a small child remembering a general sense that being Black was special and being proud of that. There were, however, relatively few recollections of positive thoughts about

being Black as children. Their race as a child did not appear to be as salient as it became later in life. Nonetheless, participants were better able to recall more specific positive thoughts about being Black during middle school and high school ages. That was particularly true for the older generation who had yet reached college age while the Black Power movement was thriving. Social messages during that time contributed to positive regard for being Black and they reported specific people and events that resulted in them feeling increasingly proud to be Black. Those environmental influences will be presented in greater detail below.

While reporting negative thoughts about being Black participants were better able to recall details and specific instances. Approximately half of the sample made comments that were considered negative thoughts about being Black. There were still relatively few instances. There were also several statements that were difficult to distinguish between this sub-category and the positive thoughts about Whites sub-category. Nevertheless, some statements clearly reflected sentiments such as shame for being Black, feeling like Blacks were less intelligent than other groups, and wishing they were not born Black. The following conversation reflects embarrassment about skin color:

> *"4: remember um, my cousins were visiting us, and so I had a older sister as I mentioned before, and uh, I think I was one of the darker ones in the family, even though we were all pretty dark but I was one of the darker ones, and they said talked said something about my picture and it being black or something like that. I remember, I tore my picture up. Uh, in fact my mother still has the picture. I think she tried to put the pieces back together. And I see the picture now, you know, I look, I was such a nice, you know, now I'm talking about myself, looking at it now I was a nice looking child. But you know, they had us feeling because of our dark skin*
> *OC: Who's 'they'?*
> *4: Um, they. Uh, on the one hand white America, but we had internalized the stuff 'cause I'm not hearing this from white people. I'm hearing this from my own family members."*

Another statement the reflected <u>negative thoughts about being Black</u> was a participants'

reactions as a child to a prominent Black figure. This is his response to a question about whether

he remembers internalizing any negative messages about Blacks that he was exposed to:

> *"Actually, yeah I did. I mean, because I can remember in high school, man, when Malcolm X was assassinated, we used to talk, our minds were just twisted around. Because when you listen to the media, and you don't have any alternative views, your mind can get twisted around. So when Malcolm X was assassinated, we were actually happy. Because all we knew was that he was a Black Muslim and he was a hater." 6*

One of the features of this study is its focus on the cultural experience of African

Americans. Consequently, to fully understand the development of a commitment to being

African centered as an adult, participants were asked to discuss their <u>thoughts about Africa</u> as a

child. Participants' thought about Africa, congruent with their thoughts about being Black, were

able to be categorized along a dimension of positive/affirming and negative/disparaging.

    <u>Positive thoughts about Africa</u> as a child were mostly explained as a general or vague

attraction to African things. The participants that described this attraction said it was not

something they could articulate well and may not have even been "a conscious thing" (2).

Sometimes they reported that it was just a feeling, or they described continental African people

that intrigued them. Other times, as in the following quote, a participant had a strong attraction to

an item that exhibited an African aesthetic:

> *"So I remember that, But, this is a very interesting time, I remember being in third grade and my uncle had this fly little kente cloth hat, right? So I thought this hat was fly – kente cloth and all. This was a time of cross colors or Nautica and all of that stuff. so I'm in third grade and he wore this hat and I just looked up to him like, oh that hat is so fly! So One day he was asleep and I woke up at 6:00 in the morning to go to school. I snuck his hat, right? So I'm wearing his hat – third grade I'll never forget, third grade i wore his school and they joned* [teased] *me to no end like they had me in tears at the end of the day" 12*

A small number of participants recalled <u>negative thoughts about Africa</u>. Only three statements were coded in this sub-category, and none of them were explicitly anti-Africa. One participant suggested a superficial attraction to Africa, "Even though I probably wanted a African name before that, I didn't really look at Africa in positive terms until I went to college" (4)*. Another participant had <u>negative thoughts about Africa</u> because he assumed that all continental Africans "just didn't like African Americans" (10). And the final participant coded in this sub-category presented an intellectual explanation of his unconscious <u>negative thoughts about Africa</u>:

> *"Well, in my mind, based on the analysis I put forward earlier, they had to be the bad people. You know, but like I said, the term "bad: is not something that is conscious out here so where one can analyze it, it's all in the realm of the subconscious, and therefore having that in the subconscious means that there's some outward manifestations or outward behaviors that reflect black or racial self-hatred or cultural self-hatred." 5*

The participants in this study they were more likely to report an <u>absence of thoughts about Africa</u> than positive or negative thoughts. For the most part, Africa did not cross their minds as a child. They suggested that they may have been mildly familiar with some of the stereotypes about Africa, "lions…walk around" (3), or they remember what they saw portrayed on "Tarzan" (13) but they did not actively think about it any further. Many of them until college or beyond as this quote suggests:

> *"Honestly at that point, up until like 23, 24, twenty, twenty, almost to say even, yeah, 25, Africa was never even on my mind. I mean never. It wasn't. Of course, Dr. Martin Luther King, that's about it. That was, that's the only thing as far as us standing up. Africa was never, it wasn't. It wasn't at all." 8*

Some participants reported a sense of contradiction between their <u>absence of thoughts about Africa</u> and their involvement in socio-political movements that involved African language and African clothes. The problem as they reported it was that they saw a minimal connection to the actual people, history or sociopolitical realities on the continent of Africa. For example:

"To be honest with you, um, Black Power was what was being pushed. You know what I mean? There was some Kiswahili spoken. You remember, [sings] "Watu, Watu, Ri, use Afro-Sheen. Beautiful people, use" – see that's why I wanted an afro. Right? But Africa wasn't pushed, pushed, pushed, pushed. Do you know what I mean? It wasn't central to my life." 2

It was similarly important to gather the participants' reflections about the dominant cultural group in this country so I asked them to recall their childhood thoughts about Whites. The positive dimension of this sub-category, as mentioned previously, was conceptually similar to the sub-category: negative thoughts about being Black. Statements that suggested positive admiration of Whites or desire to be Whites were mentioned by a few participants. One participant as child thought that when he grew up "I saw myself as being white. I didn't see myself as a being black man" (4) because he saw so many images of white adult men on the television. The other two following statements reflected a more conscious idolization of White features:

"So anyway I remember being in the bathtub when I was very young and I had this light spot on my ankle and I thought I was gonna turn white and I just started scrubbing myself. Please, please, please let me turn white, let me turn white. So you know, we went through that. You know, it was like wanting to be white. Seeing white people, seeing white hair. All that was something that happened to me. I never experienced segregation. You know but I remember at that point, that was the only time I really remember wanting to be white." 13

"Oh, I probably enshrined them. Be very clear. Remember I said had a white Jesus, had a fair complexioned grandfather, and a fair complexioned father. Uh, you know. They were my models." 5

It is important to acknowledge that there were several other statements that resembled the tone of White admiration but required careful interpretation to not be considered positive thoughts about Whites in the same way that may reflect a sense of internalized oppression as the others might. Some of those statements were motivated by a realistic understating of social and economic positions of Whites. For example:

"I'm sure there was a time that I wish that I was white. Not that in the purest sense, but I wish I had what they had, probably that more so than I wished I was white. One thing I always thought of, why white folks always got and why Black folks don't never have."11

On the other hand, when discussing <u>negative thoughts about Whites</u> a few more participants were able or willing to articulate sentiments they recalled from their childhood. Most of the negative sentiments were connected to negative experiences they had with Whites. Participants reported not liking Whites because they "were racist" (9) or "mean spirited" (14). Sometimes the <u>negative thoughts about Whites</u> were expressed following a story they experienced or witnessed. Other times it was due to a general sense of inequity, such as "I didn't like white people, but I tolerated, and it was kind of like I kind I felt that white people always had the upper hand and that's why I didn't like them" (12*)*.

Finally, a few participants reported having an absence or only occasional <u>thoughts about Whites</u>. Participants from the older and younger generations mentioned growing up in cities or communities, mostly in the south, where they were exclusively surrounded by other Black people. They described their experiences as "insulted" (14) and one participant reported that he "really didn't encounter white people per se until sixth grade" (8). Thus, as children some of their worlds were not consciously impacted by Whites; they may have seen them on TV but those White people were relegated to the land of make believe.

Childhood environment

The next category, *childhood environment*, is intimately connected to the previous category, *childhood insights*. The thoughts presented above were not conceived in a vacuum nor generated spontaneously in the participants' child minds. Instead, they were associated with events in their environments. Their homes, schools, churches, communities, and their nation were constantly feeding them information about race and culture. The participants were

receiving messages and engaging in relationships that shaped their developing ideas about being Black, about Africa and about Whites. For this study it was important to distinguish the internal reactions from environmental influences because of the personal nature of identity development that involves deliberate reflection and insight. In addition, insight and environment were analyses separately because individuals often have different interpretations of their environment from one person to the next. Furthermore, participants' internal reactions did not always correspond with their external experiences in obvious ways. This example from a light complexioned participant illustrates that point:

> *"I remember walking home, not walking home–you had to walk to the bus. And I had stayed after school for something. I have no idea what. And I do not know why I was by myself, you know, because that, that was very unusual. You know, but I was by myself, walking through* [name of city and state] *at the time, which was all white. And these young white guys in this car, you know, stopped and called me a nigger, you know. Even that didn't bother me because I was glad they could tell I was black." 2*

The ways in which environment and thought are related will become more evident in the following sections. The sub-categories that comprise the category of *childhood environment* are organized to parallel the *childhood insights* category with its division along Black, African and White distinctions.

As one would expect, the participants of this study reported many <u>positive messages about/experiences with Blacks</u>. When discussing this dimension of the sub-category, the older generation participants would describe some of their parents as "race people" (2) who were interested in things like "voting rights" (2). They also mentioned other family, older siblings and cousins, that told them about "the Panthers" (13) and "the US organization" (4) and would take them to places like the "Watts festival" (13). They were near or at their adolescence when "Black is Beautiful was just the call of the day. And black people were very proud of themselves, and talking about it" (11).

Other participants reported getting deliberate <u>positive messages about/experience with Blacks</u> from their parents. They reported having parents that taught them inspiring information about Black history and told them they were beautiful and capable. Sometimes the encouragement of parents insulated participants from negative messages. An example of parents serving as a protective factor is illustrated in by one participant's response to being picked on by other kids:

> *"You know, and I think because of my parent's teaching, and because I was raised in a black church, it didn't devastate me. Like I didn't feel real, real hurt about it. It got to, I mean, it did hurt me. But it got to a point where, I knew that was coming." 2*

The final source of <u>positive messages about/experiences with Blacks</u> reported by the participants was interaction with Black adults they admired and respected. There were several reports of influential teachers, mentors and successful professionals of all types. One participant described growing up around an entire community people that provided <u>positive messages about/experiences with Blacks</u>:

> *"And see I'm telling you, I've got a Black world where I've got a Black grandfather with 60 acres of land and he could probably go to an agricultural school and teach them all kinds of things. I mean My grandfather grew so much stuff that only had to purchase, my mother told me these things and I always forget, but I think flour and one or two other things. Everything else on their farm, they grew. My grandfather was one of many. That whole area where my grandfather lived, they were all brothers and sisters and cousins. So I had a whole community of Black people who were self-sustaining and self-sufficient. So I'm like 'you a lie', this jungle Africa was on TV…" 14*

It is important to reiterate the point regarding the interaction between environment and insight. While they are presented separately, they often coincided in the data. Consider this statement that was coded in the subcategory from a previous section, <u>positive thoughts about being Black</u>:

> *"More than any one big thing, I think there was just a series of little things that happened. I can't really tell you the day or hour or the incident, but I know that I made up in my conscious mind that me, my Black face, my very African face, was the exact*

opposite of what defined as beautiful in this country. And I was either going to live a life of dramatic self-hatred or I was going to learn to love who I was. And I had that thought in my mind and I had to make that decision. Look at me. What am I going to do? I'm going to be mad every single day I look in the mirror and I think a lot of Black women are, but I just made up my mind that I wouldn't do it. I'm not going to accept their definition of who I am." 14

Interpreted alone it is a potent statement about a woman making up her own mind to declare her right to appreciate herself. However, in the interview, that statement is immediately followed by this comment:

"And, another thing is that I attended predominantly Black schools for almost all of my pre-college years and we had outstanding teachers who encouraged us. And so my image of Blackness was always positive. Well, I shouldn't say always. I'm just saying there were smart Black people there and they loved the kids and we were smart and we learned." 14

Therefore, considered in context, the self empowered statement seems to be a part of an interaction with an empowering community environment, which does not take away from her individual insight, but it does shed a light on a relationship that is an equally important aspect of the equation as either of its parts.

Participants were also exposed to a fair amount of <u>negative messages about/experience with Blacks</u>. The types of comments in this subcategory were rather scattered. They derived them from a variety of sources including school, family, and the media. From family, participants recalled messages about hair being too "nappy" (14) and skin being too "dark" (4). They also reported family members who struggled with drugs and alcohol having a negative impact on their image of Blacks in general. From school, participants recalled "having information being shared with was about us being slaves in the Civil War era in America" but there being "minimal information about positive contributions Blacks" (3). From their neighborhoods, participants recalled images of "pimps, prostitutes, whores, you know, all that

kind of, crazy crap if I can use that terminology. Uh, you know, the quote negative underside of our community" (5). From the media, participants reported watching television and seeing that "black people were like Amos n' Andy. And you know, well gosh, that was nothing I wanted to be. Stepin Fetchit and things like that" (4). All these <u>negative messages about/experiences with Blacks</u> certainly had an impact on their thoughts about being African American as child.

Specifically regarding exposure to cultural information as a child, there were a few mentions of <u>positive messages about/experience with Africa</u>. The nature of the messages were very different from one instance to the next. One participant mentioned being exposed to Africa through Islam, another participant saw "a movie about the Mau Maus" (12) in elementary school, another was sent to a summer camp run by people from Cote D'Ivoire, and another was intrigued by members of their dance group that practiced traditional African religions. A few of the <u>positive messages about/experiences with Africa</u> came through family members and teachers who traveled to Africa and brought back stories and artifacts. The participants did not suggest that any of these childhood experiences had a major impact on their adult entrée into an African centered lifestyle.

Participants' <u>negative messages about/experience with Africa</u> were reported with more consistency. The older generation participants were likely to reference images they saw on television and the movies. The most commonly mentioned source of <u>negative messages about/experiences with Africa</u> was the savage version of African depicted in the Tarzan films. Younger generation participants mentioned kids teasing at school with names like "African booty scratcher" (12) and they were also affected by the media. They were more likely to reference <u>negative messages about/experiences with Africa</u> from television such as, "late at night they have those teleprompters where you gotta pay a dollar, or quarter, or penny or something,

and you see, uh, brown-skinned people with flies and everything on them" (3) which promoted ideas about an Africa brimming with "poverty, disease, famine, and all that kind of negative stuff" (9) .

The next subcategory, childhood messages about/experiences with White, includes nuances that were missing from its *childhood insight* counterpart. Previously when reporting thoughts, the positive dimension of childhood thoughts about Whites did not actually represent themes considered good or healthy by the respondents. In fact, the positive thoughts about Whites had negative implications for African American's well being. They were mostly affirmations of Whiteness or desires to have White features, parallel to the sentiments expressed in the negative thoughts about being Black subcategory. Contrarily, the childhood messages about/experiences with White subcategory included recollections of White interactions that were beneficial. For instance, there was mention of a participant's parents discouraging anti-White ideas: "And my parents got on me about it one time too. They said why do you hate white people so much? We never taught you that. That wasn't instilled in us" (11). Other participants recalled positive relationships with White individuals: "There was a white teacher who actually I was real close too; a Jewish teacher who I used to, um, work for…" (4) And other participants reported respecting White public figures:

> *"For example, Robert Kennedy came to our school and we knew that he was an important white man, he was an important political figure, and we were all very happy to see him when he came to visit our school. And we all clapped and waved and cheered him on. I remember enjoying the music of the Beatles." 14*

In the same dimension of this subcategory, positive childhood messages about/experiences with Whites, there were still occurrences that inferred positive idealizing of Whites in ways that can have negative impact. Some of these messages were in a religious

settings ("there always was this picture of white Jesus"-5), and recreational contexts ("the black

dolls still had straight hair, they still had European features"-14). Most of these messages,

particularly from the older generation, derived from the television as illustrated by the following

statement:

> *"And so I have to also notice who were my quote "heroes" on television. I don't think I had any she-roes, but who were my heroes on television. I mean, you had, you know, what The Nelsons, you had Leave it to Beaver, uh, Life of Margie[?]. In other words you didn't see black characters on television at that time. And so um, one of my favorite uh characters was Tarzan the Ape Man. Johnny Wax Miller in particular. Alright. And, as I look back on it, and I've said this years and years ago, having him as a hero, Sky King, you can go on with all those, I mean, I even got some of those westerns on DVD right now just so I can replay them, but you know, everything from the contradiction between Lone Ranger and Tonto, and that relationship." 5*

Towards the negative dimension of <u>childhood messages about/experiences with Whites</u>

the participants' reports were fairly straightforward. There were stories about direct and indirect

experiences of racism in school and community settings. Participants reported being called

names, access being denied, and threats of violence or actual violence. Participants from older

and younger generations recalled regions Blacks did not venture into to avoid being harmed by

"the Klan" (10) or other radical groups. There was more race related conflicts witnessed on

television news ("riots" and "protests" -13) by older generation participants. But prior to

receiving <u>negative messages about/experiences with Whites</u> from the outside world, most of the

participants were warned about racism in White America at home through stories their parents

told them.

In sum, at home, at school, in their neighborhoods or on television, the participants

throughout their childhood were receiving these messages about Whites, Blacks and Africans,

good, bad and ugly. And they were storing them, along with their interpretations and insights.

These experiences and insights formed the foundation for their adult construction, de-

construction and reconstruction of their ideas about race, culture and their developing identity.

Identity Shifts

Every participant in this study alleged significant changes in their identity that led them

to a place they currently regard as African centered. Aspects of those changes are categorized

and described below.

The subcategory presented first responds to the question of a beginning of a process of

African centered identity development. The question was whether there was an encounter, an

identifiable incident, that signified the <u>moment they became African centered</u>. The predominant

response denied such a moment. There were only two potential endorsements by participants of a

<u>moment they became African centered</u> and even they were unenthusiastic. One was followed up

by "I guess if there's a pivotal movement that would probably be it" (6) and the other, "That was

the beginning of it. It didn't really get solidified, now mind you, until…" (11).

There was much clearer support in the data for an <u>absence of a moment of becoming</u>

<u>African centered</u>. Respondents suggested "it's like things shedded away, and then things were

gained, and the whole journey was about that" (2). The participants expressed a gradual process

of learning, re-learning, discarding, challenging and slowly incorporating new ideas into their

identity. They largely denied an epiphany like awakening <u>moment of becoming African</u>

<u>centered</u>. More of the sentiments were similar to the following quote:

> *"But, it took some study, um, it took some um, deep reflection, for me to reorient the way*
> *I would just, to reorient the way you were thinking, the way you see things. You know,*
> *you can't just wake up one day and "Now I'm African-centered." It's a process." 6*

The next aspect of the process of developing an African centered identity, consistent with

the existing stage development theories, was a comprehensive immersion into African culture

and lifestyle than included a <u>period of romanticizing Africa</u>. Most of the participants endorsed

such an occurrence. They recalled spans of time when "I wasn't dealing with anything that

wasn't African" (11) or when " I used to talk about, like everybody else 'My black king, my

black queen' and all that kind of stuff. You know, and ancient Egypt, that was before I knew that

it was called Kemet, or whatever, I mean. Clearly a lot of romanticism" (5). Some participants

even offered that "I might be doing it now" (13). When discussing a period of romanticized

Africa participants typically discussed it as a temporary phase that passed eventually:

> *"Of course! I definitely went through my uh Africa is the best thing ever stage! Yeah, I*
> *did. Um it was a learning lesson. I had to learn a little bit more. It took other people in*
> *my life who knew a lot more than what I did to kind of point me in the right direction of*
> *some literature or just letting me know how things really go down. So I definitely thought*
> *that if it wasn't for white people, Europeans, we would have been just the ultimate*
> *people, like we just would have been great. But I had to learn that we turn on each other.*
> *I had to learn that we enslaved each other and that brought a new light to a lot of*
> *things." 12*

Conversely, information was part of the reason other participants <u>denied any period of</u>

<u>romanticizing of Africa</u> . The following statement illustrates an example of a person that did not

experience this phase:

> *"Unh unh. I never had that. I mean I, I really never had that romanticized view of Africa*
> *because I, you know, once you, once you start studying, and you see things that are*
> *happening, you see Mobutu's, and you see, uh, the neocolonialism that's going on in*
> *Africa, you see all the issues that Africa has." 6*

Other participants similarly reported bypassing the <u>period of romanticized Africa</u> altogether:

> *"And I love being African. If I were to choose, I would want to be born an African. You*
> *know. But ain't nothing romantic about it. I don't know that I did that. You know what I*
> *mean? Hunh? I might have skipped that one. Yeah, or if I did, I don't remember it." 2*

Consistent with this category's interest in *identity shifts*, one indicator of development is

the experience of being <u>critical of previously held beliefs</u>. This subcategory highlighted

moments when participants not only differed in their thinking compared to an earlier time in

their life, but they changed their perspective to such a degree that they look back on their prior

outlook with disdain. For instance, there were several mentions to previous life goals: "but I was

probably still caught up with a bunch that were non African-centered. I wanted to be a

basketball star and all that stupid stuff. That was another joke" (11). Some of the criticism

involved aesthetic qualities such as beauty standards:

> *"I used to wear makeup everyday. My BFF* [best friend] *said that's my destiny child*
> *face. I wore makeup all the time because I felt like that was how I was beautiful and I*
> *would get my hair permed all the time."* 12

However, most of their reasons for being <u>critical of previously held beliefs</u> were based on their

old beliefs stemming from an "American" (3) or "Eurocentric" (5) value system. The following

two statements reflect different ways participants *identify shifts* transitioned from a "White" (11)

or "American" (3) agenda to an African centered one:

> *"I was saying, like, don't hyphenate my ownership to this land, my ownership to being a*
> *citizen cause, our people built this country, so I have as much entitlement as anyone else,*
> *but I was moreso like doing the American way. I was going to school to be an African-*
> *American, or to be an American citizen. You know, I wanted to vote, I wanted to go to*
> *school, become a doctor, get six figures, Buy my first house, meet a husband, have some*
> *kids, very American."* 3

> *"I poured libation because it made sense intellectually. But it was always*
> *uncomfortable. You know always like I was worshipping ancestors. You know, in a way it*
> *is worshipping ancestors, but instead of worshipping my God, and you could only have*
> *God, and God is a jealous God, and you should have no other Gods, and you know I*
> *mean just all this stuff, and I finally realized that ain't nothing but white, the white man,*
> *that's twisted."* 2

The final type of *identity shift* informed by the research questions was whether

participants experienced any <u>change in their relationships with Whites</u> as they became more

comfortable in their African centered identities. As presented above, many of the participants

reported hearing stories about racism and had personal feelings of anger and mistrust of whites in

their pre African centered lives. More participants suggested a <u>positive change in their</u>

relationship with Whites than participants who denied any change. According to the participants

the greatest contributor to positive change in relationship with Whites was interacting with them:

> *"I tell you the truth, now, when my feelings start changing, hmm, toward white folks was*
> *actually when I actually in the movement worked with some white people who like was*
> *supportive of black self-determination, and they did stuff consistently to show that*
> *support. So I started rethinking my feelings." 4*

Over time participants suggested that after having opportunities to "work with White people" (2)

and going to "class" (8) with them that "you just realize people are just individuals and we live in

a different time now. You know sometimes you do have racism that's just out there and

sometimes you have just really good people" (3). Thus, the biggest change in relationship with

White for many participants was learning that you "can't just apply a negative attitude to all

white people" (12).

Participants were less likely to deny any change in their relationship with Whites.

Instead, they may suggest that they continue to maintain "reservations" (4) when interacting with

them. Many of them would endorse an inclusive attitude that enthusiastically rejects hatred

towards Whites. However, in their personal lives they reported many sentiments like the

following that suggests parameters around the level of intimacy they prefer:

> *"But my closest friends aren't white. Even though there are a few white people I would*
> *consider to be friends. But for the most part, you know, I'm uncomfortable around them,*
> *and try not to be around them." 4*

Adult Insights

This next category, *adult insights*, encompasses some of the participants' evolving

reflections about developing an African centered identity as adults. The interview protocol

elicited a description of current manifestations of their cultural identity and also asked

participants to consider the contributions of their past. Thus, it was only fitting to ask them to

express future visions and directions their identity may develop. As a result, still growing in

African centeredness is the first subcategory that was intended to capture aspects of cultural identity development participants could foresee given the trajectory they were on. Almost every participant responded to the question 'Where do you see yourself headed in terms of your identity development?' by suggesting they are still growing in their African centeredness. Everyone had already acknowledged that they were not always African centered, but they also all felt committed enough to think that they will identify as African centered for the rest of their lives. They believed that the changes they had made regarding their cultural identity were permanent and would only be reinforced over time. Some of the ways participants were still growing in their African centeredness included reading and studying more, trying to "be more of an example for other young men" (4), and continuing to work on "some racial and cultural self-hatred that resided within" (14). Most of the other comments were general statements about the process being an ever continuing one.

Participants were also given opportunities to reflect on some of the benefits of becoming more African centered. A variety of benefits were reported. One participant "stopped drinking" (11), others said it helped them stay married because "It's given us something outside of ourselves, to help guide our marriage" (6). For some participants being African centered increased their confidence, helped "balance and maintain that anger" (8) and was reported to improve school performance for a participant who recalled "from my junior year on, nothing but A's and B's" (12). Some participants reported more general benefits of becoming more African centered such as being more "happy" (12) and "peaceful" (10) and suggested that it was "healing" (14). Another participant offered, "once you are grounded in that African spirit, and you are living those principles, the Creator just, God just starts opening ways up" (6).

As with most things there are simultaneous good and bad consequences and developing an African centered identity is no exception. Participants reported a wide variety of <u>regrets/losses associated with African centered identity</u>. Many of them were related to conflicts in family relationships. Several reports of strained relationships were caused by respondents changing either their first or last names. Some family members refused to use the African names participants chose for themselves because they perceived it to be disloyal. The other common source of family strain was participants' departure from the parents' religious beliefs. For instance:

> *"I could just remember talking about the name thing in the car, and, like, somehow the name thing and not really being a Christian, just came out at the same time. It was just like [sighs]. It was just awful. It was just awful. And just, and the stuff that like, you hear from them, it's just like, ugh. It's so, I don't know, it's damning. It's just like Jesus, man like, Could you be here for me for a second, please? Clearly I'm still the same person." 1*

Participants recalled several other types of <u>regrets/losses associated with African centered identity</u>. Some were of a financial nature:

> *"It's just struggling and struggling in one sense economically. What I'm trying to say is, is that, it meant that certain doors were closed, and uh, economically, and other doors were always open." 5*

Some of the women, in particular, had a difficult time adjusting from the hair and beauty aesthetics they were accustomed to:

> *"So I went through a period of, like, oh, this is not cute. This, you know, this, this being African comes with some ugly, and I don't know how I do ugly, cause my, my wrap use to be laid." 9*

And others gave examples of regrets they experienced dealing odd practices under the guise of being African during times when information was more sparse. The following statement is one such instance:

"We was trying to be African. We had brothers around us telling us that African women don't wear pants – they were making up some stuff. Half the women don't wear pants. They walk behind the men. [laughing] We was walking behind them, we were saying [pause] you do not want to be at the beginning of trying to figure out of your culture, nobody else in the community is doing it. So that was African." 13

The final subcategory of *adult insights* is the <u>interaction of African centered identity with other identities</u>. I was interested to know if participants had deliberate thoughts or experiences regarding the ways their African centered identity intersects with their gender, age, regional, differently-abled, sexual orientation, or any social other identities. There were very few comments about the triumphs or difficulties of merging other identities. I did not ask specifically about it in the interview, but there were instances when they emerged organically. The clearest comments about the <u>interaction of African centered identity with other identities</u> regarded a participant's difficulty gaining acceptance in African centered communities due to the number of individuals in those communities that express blatant anti-homosexual sentiments. Other statements expressed a more general experience of <u>interaction of African centered identity with other identities</u>:

"You know, as a black feminist particularly. You know 'cause I'm not interested in the whole liberal white woman thing. But you know, um, you know I am interested, in you know where, where race, class, and gender collide. You know, especially, race, class, gender, and sexuality. You know. They make an interesting intersection. So that's definitely, that's, that's my continuous challenge, I guess. You now, it's continuously my challenge to not let, because I don't ever want to feel like I'm in a position where I'm choosing my people over gender, or sexual oppression, because they don't, I don't, I don't experience them separately." 1

Adult environment

The final category presented is critical for understanding the process of African centered identity development as it outlines the persons, places and things in the participants' *adult environment* that influenced the changes in their thoughts regarding culture and identity. The

following four subcategories are the sources of information and relationships that directed the

course of their consequential African centered lifestyle.

Identity development is certainly a personal affair but it always occurs within

relationships. During every step of the process participants always mention other people

involved. Sometimes the other people were authors of books or other writings, but most times

respondents referred to in person relationships. <u>Cultural or political peers and mentors</u> were

vitally important to participants' African centered identity. Several types of relationships were

reported. On some occasions participants had close relationships with older family members that

were directly influencing them:

> *""Where'd you get all this stuff from?" You know, but it was my brother, You know that would just be feeding this stuff to me. We'd have these conversations and everything, watch movies, I mean, I remember his girlfriend took me to see "The Murder of Fred Hampton." You know, so they were like, feeding me this stuff." 2*

More often, participants met influential <u>cultural or political peers and mentors</u> outside of the

family. A typical narrative was a participant would be in a class, involved in some type of

activity, or at social gathering, and he or she would meet someone who they related with or

admired and that person would share bits and pieces of information about Africa. The following

scenario serves as an illustration:

> *"I started attending *****, which was this black safe space student discussion dialogue…*
>
> *And then like going to the black space, it was with like older college students, and grad students who were majors, And who had gotten their name changed, and who were activist, and they had been to Africa, and just had this like love for blackness, and black identity…*
>
> *So um, so yeah, so in this black, in the safe space *****, I was able to like to then do see like my identity, and cause then like, discussions about black identity, and like, responsibility and obligation, and history was always coming up." 3*

Subsequently, from being introduced to one or several peers that were already interested in culture participants would describe a snowballing effect where knowing one person would lead to meet another and another and they were gradually increasing their network of available peers and mentors who all had different areas of cultural interests and expertise. Then small groups would form who would connect with other groups, and before long participants were surrounded by a network of <u>cultural or political peers and mentors</u> people who were building off each other and reinforcing their knowledge and commitment to African centered ideas.

At some point in every participant's narrative they suggested that their cultural identity development was fueled by having a piece of information that they did not previously have. Therefore, given the centrality of knowledge throughout this process it can accurately be expected that institutions designed to foster knowledge, such as <u>college</u>, had a major impact on participants' African centered identity development. Sometimes it occurred through the sharing of knowledge between peer relationships as described in the preceding paragraph, but participants were also influenced just as much by <u>college</u> courses. There were some generational differences. The older generation participants were more likely to be influenced by student protests, dialogues, and other organizing efforts on <u>college</u> campuses in the 60's and70's. Largely as a result of those student efforts decades ago, younger generation participants reported being influenced by professors and courses in African Studies Departments in <u>college</u>. For some participants <u>college</u> was important because it allowed them to receive accurate information about the continent of Africa that was less corrupted than the information gained from television. For example:

> *"So by this time I'm in my early 20s and I had this class. It was an African history class, but it was in the Art Department, and it was kind of massaging African reality within the African-American reality, so it wasn't pure African-centered class. But it opened by eyes to some things that I was probably dealing with at that time, around Africa. It was really*

the first formal uh process that I ever was a part of that was dealing with Africa or the concept of Africa as an origin for people. And it just kind of got me thinking about it more." 11

Community organizations/activities were also very influential on participants' initiation into African centered lifestyles. Community organizations/activities offered the same critical elements as the previous two subcategories, relationships and information. Two additional benefits of community organizations/activities were that participants usually had to choose to participate in them and also they offered a practical application of African centeredness. The application aspect allowed the relationship between attitudes and behavior to flourish. The types of community organizations/activities reported varied. Some of them were explicitly political:

"I wanted to be a Black Panther. I'm not sure when I joined. I know I sent it in the mail. So that's when I started expressing myself." 13

Others were recreational or artistic:

"I think, to be honest with you, when the interest, the big like insight, insight and interest into the culture came, when um, it had to be African dance" 1

And some were religious or spiritual:

"And uh once we joined that church, then things really began to fall together because the church encouraged people to study and there were other people there who had changed their names to African names and uh they were trying to incorporate rituals into their service and just trying to have a whole different perspective." 14

The final source of inspiration for cultural identity shifts reported by participants was the social climate of their environment. Interestingly, coded references for social climate were made exclusively by participants from the older generation. They reported vivid memories of the social, political and cultural atmosphere of the late 60's and the 70's. Many of their recollections mimicked the following sentiment:

"Well people were introducing ideas about Africa as an entity in the universe. And really, kind of like pumping up the fist, Black and I'm proud; we had music, people like

James Brown; and the Last Poets, I remember them in the late 60s and they were dropping some lyrics around nationalism, Black nationalism, the rallying around. I think that was the first time I started hearing about guys like Marcus Garvey. I had to be like 20" 11

In addition, "there were the Angela Davises and the Black Panthers" (13) and other organizations such as the "Nation of Islam. They just didn't play. They just didn't take no stuff" (11). Participants recalled "all kinds of music that was going around during those times by artists that you wouldn't even expect dealing with nationalism – the Ojs; James Brown; Earth, Wind, and Fire; a number of ours were dealing with things related to uh the idea of Blackness" (14). There were also references to the popular styles of the day: "then of course the Afros were coming up big time right after high school, and that would be like 66-67 people started wearing Afros" (11).

For some of the participants it seemed important to them that they witnessed a <u>social climate</u> that was the beginning of movements such that "during those times they were trying to deal with having Black history month, Kwanzaa had just evolved you know the dap Black folks was doing it probably, was coming through then. But this was like late high school stuff" (11). The shifts in participants' personal identity seemed to parallel the nations' development regarding race and culture. The following statement reflects participants' observations about the beginning of African culture being significant to a national discourse, particularly among African Americans:

" the early seventies were kind of, a little bit different, than the sixties. It was more emphasis on Pan Africanism. So you had like during the early seventies you had the first African Liberation Day, which was one of the major political events of the seventies, and, you had like, I think, about, 75,000 people at a rally in D.C. It don't sound like a lot now, but for the 1970's, that was a large group of people to assemble for that. Then the following year, that was in '72, the next year, in '73, we were organizing African Liberation Days all across the United States".

In summary, a robust image is available through the experiences of the participants of this study of the life of an African centered individual and the communities they are a part of. They have described some of their guiding principles, struggles, regrets, and reflections. They have also described the myriad activities they are engaged in from day to day. In addition, participants have articulated details about a process of arriving at their current identity, a process that spanned decades for some. While each person had a unique story to tell, the combination of them all, with their nuances and the range of experiences, provides a valuable depiction of African centered cultural identity development.

Chapter 4: DISCUSSION

Over the past few decades psychology has become increasingly interested in African centered identity and its application to interventions. Cokely (2005) reiterates this paradigm shift in suggesting that "an understanding of African American identity must focus on an ethnic and cultural identity that is rooted in an Afrocentric worldview paradigm that critically examines and affirms African cultural values (also referred to as Afrocentric values) as forming the foundation of African American identity and culture", p. 518. This dissertation intended to contribute to psychology's understanding of African centered identity by examining its components and its development. To recruit participants, leaders in African-centered communities were asked to recommend active members of their organizations who they considered committed to living an African centered lifestyle. Those participants were invited to share their perspectives regarding the meaning of African centered, how such an identity manifests in observable behaviors, and they were also asked to describe their process of developing an African centered identity. Their narratives revealed rich insights into the lived experience of an African centered identity. The findings will be discussed and interpreted in conjunction with relevant scholarly research.

Defining African Centered Identity

Identifying credible sources for defining African centeredness was the first area that requires clarification. The current literature offers several definitions of African centeredness that enumerate essential values. One approach to establishing credibility could have been to determine if the participants of this study met African centered criteria as outlined by previous theorists. Otherwise, the assumption would have to be made that the participants' self declaration of African centered was a sufficient basis of authority. Given the limited empirical support for the existing theoretical models, the more phenomenological method used in this study offered a

greater opportunity to form inductive conclusions. An exclusively deductive approach would have been too restrictive.

Another perspective to consider, particularly in light of the concern about authenticity, is the approach of social constructivists. They argue that "people often believe, mistakenly, that certain social categories are natural, inevitable, and unchanging facts about the social world. They believe that particular social categories are fixed by human nature rather than by social convention and practice." (Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p.848) Social constructionists posit that social groups are active producers of identity. Goffman (1969) adds that identity is a "matter of performance". There were aspects of participants' narratives that supported this perspective.

The very idea of an African centered identity is based on the premise that African Americans are searching back in time to extrapolate ancient values and re-imagine them through application in the present day. Nobles (1998) calls the process "Re-Africanization". Older generation respondents had the advantage of hindsight and made several mentions of having to figure out, often through trial and error, how to apply African culture to their identity. Their early attempts in the 60's and 70's to imagine a contemporary version of African lifestyle was based on minimal and sometimes faulty information. However, it was an identity they were re-constructing along with other who sought the same goal. These collaborating individuals eventually formed what could be considered "communities of practice". These entities are defined as "groups engaged in shared activities through which learning occurs, shared meanings are constructed, social relationships are negotiated, and processes of shared identification and participation are forged" (Paechter, 2002). Thus, the social constructionist approach would discourage an attempt to discover an achieved authentic African centered identity and instead

attempt to investigate the fluid, contextual nature of identity that is influenced by individuals' active participation in creating self understanding.

The concern of credible definition source was partly alleviated when the findings indicated considerable overlap between the participants' report of African centeredness and the literature's existing definitions. The most consistent components of an African centered ideology cited by prominent African centered theorists paralleled the most fundamental values reported by the participants of the study. *Spirituality* (Meyers, 1988; Ani,1980; Nobles, 1998) and *communalism* (Azibo, 1966; Parham, White, and Ajamu 1999) were two of the more common facets of African centeredness reported by both participants and theorists. However, there were other values that participants found important that also received support in the literature. Table 3 displays the values mentioned by theorists as the components of an African centered ideology along with corresponding supportive statements from participants of this study.

There were several values mentioned in the literature that did not emerge as themes in this study's data. Participants did not spontaneously articulate their African centered values in a way that explicitly suggested a *hierarchical orientation of life-adult/elder orientation* (Mutsiya and Ross, 2005), *morality* (Akbar, 1984), *reciprocity* (Kambon, 1996), or *complementarity* (Kambon, 1996). It is possible, however, that if data collection or analysis was designed to test pre-existing values deductively that there may have been support for the remaining values from the literature. In other words, if the interviewer asked a participant directly if *reciprocity* was an important aspect of their African centered ideology, it is possible that that participant would have had an experience that resonates.

Table 4.1. Comparison of African-centered values in the literature with findings

Values Mentioned in Literature	Related Quotes

African centrality (Asante, 1988)	*Feeling that what I do for people I'm going to think, consider it from an African perspective, or what I know to be an African perspective, or what I feel like my people's experiences are. So when I look at situations I look at it holistically from my own cultural perspective.*
Spirituality (Meyers, 1988; Ani,1980; Nobles, 1998)	*To me, being African-centered means that you are in relationship with the Creator,*
Communalism (Azibo, 1966; Parham, White, and Ajamu 1999)	*I learned later that there ain't no such thing as independence. It ain't even no such thing. I don't even know why they have the words, but I guess some people may have that life.*
Survival of the Group (Kambon, 1996; Azibo, 2004)	*Uh, their job is to fight racism in their community, and our job is to clearly bring ourselves into the level of consciousness where we can become a sovereign people and we can reorganize this world order. You know, we have to reorganize it. I mean, New Afrika has to be free. All internal colonies in the United States empire have to be free. Africa and other portions of diaspora have to be free.*
Acknowledge ancestors (Nobles, 1991)	*Uh, the connection between ourselves and the ancestors and seeing ourselves as a continuation of their work. The belief that the ancestors communicate with you, that they're trying to guide you. I believe all of that is African.*
Self knowledge (Myers, 1988)	*You know, I see myself reading and studying more, you know, so I can know more about who I am as an African woman.*
Nguzo Saba (Grills and Longshore, 1996)	*The principles of Kwanzaa. Um, rather than, um, waiting until the end of year to celebrate that, integrate that in your, internalizing those principles, principles of Kwanzaa,*
Symbols –e.g., of Afri-can identity, philosophy, language, and culture (Mutsiya and Ross, 2005)	*You could tell in almost every aspect of my life. So I got a new apartment and I could have bought any type of furniture, but I bought a lot of Afrocentric furniture, a lot of little things that say, hey, I'm proud to be an African woman, I'm proud to have this kente cloth up or whatever, whatever.*
Twinship of gender (Mutsiya and Ross, 2005)	*All I'm really trying to point out is that there, there wasn't a gender contradiction. That there was gender, uh, egalitarianism, or gender equality…*
African diaspora recognition (Mutsiya and Ross, 2005)	*an acknowledgement of the connection to people of African descent all over the globe*
Scholarship (Mutsiya and Ross, 2005)	*I would read books about our African culture, you know just everything, just the information that was out there. We may go see Ben Jochanen, or John Henry Clark, we may go see scholars and talk about the Nile Valley conference you know, Dr. Hilliard…*
Hierarchical orientation of life-e.g. adult orientation (Mutsiya and Ross, 2005)	*n/a*
Morality (Akbar, 1984)	*n/a*
Reciprocity (Kambon, 1996)	*n/a*
Complementarity (Kambon, 1996)	*n/a*

Identifying its components is one aspect of defining African-centered identity. To fully bring this ideology to life participants were also asked to describe the observable behaviors that accompanied African centered conceptual values. Some authors suggest that action is the best unit of analysis for understating identity because of the way behaviors are influenced by attitudes, and vise versa, and due to the performance-like aspects of identity. For instance, Penuel and Wertsch (1995) suggest that "we must examine how, for example, identity as a self-chosen description of the person takes place within action. Identity formation must be viewed as shaped by and shaping forms of action, involving a complex interplay among cultural tools employed in the action, the sociocultural and institutional context of the action, and the purposes embedded in the action", (p.84). Findings of this study suggest an additional community element to the previous quote. Identity is partly self-chosen but also accepted by a community and fostered within communities. A limited amount of empirical research has examined African centered identity at the action level. One of the few published studies that focused on observable manifestations of African centered identity is Caughy, Randolf and O'Campo's (2002) investigation of artwork, religious figurines, books, music, educational toys, and African prints or clothing in the home. Several of the activities reported in the present study's findings (e.g. *African Décor, Read/Study about Africa, Engagement with arts*) could likely be measured by the Africentric Home Environment Inventory (Caughy, Randolf and O'Campo, 2002).

Observable behaviors are also mentioned in research concerning measurement of African centered identity. Many of the existing scales infer aspects of African centered ideology via expressed activities. For instance, Grills and Logshore's (1996) Africentrism Scale measures the value of cooperative Black economics through an item such as "I make it a point to shop at Black

businesses and use Black-owned services." The detailed description of African centered

activities reported by participants of this study could contribute to scale development by helping

to distinguish race motivated behaviors and suggest activities that specifically adapt African

cultural realities in the US. Further implications of the findings for research and measurement

are discussed in later sections.

Findings Applied to Identity Stage Theories

The other major aim of this study was to examine the *process* of developing an African

centered identity. Data analysis of identity development themes was divided into two categories.

Participants' personal reflections about race and culture (*insights*) were coded separately from

the race/culture messages they received from their family, school, community and the media

(*environment*). However, their identity development is best understood when considering the

interaction of their personal *insight* and their *environment*, which is the same conclusion made by

Penuel and Wertsch (1995). Their analysis contrasts Erickson's writing on identity which

focuses on individual mental functioning and Vygotsky's interest in how social and cultural

institutions shape identity. Penuel and Wertsch (1995) promote a "sociocultural approach to

identity formation [which] views the poles of sociocultural processes on the one hand and

individual functioning on the other as existing in a dynamic, irreducible tension" p.84. The

interplay between personal *insight* and social and cultural *environment* is apparent in this study's

findings when participants report as children feeling proud about being Black as a result of being

exposed to positive Black figures in their families and communities. The integration of their

childhood experiences then informed decision making and opportunities they were open to as

adults. Further, when applying a process dimension, as emerging adults, participants

experienced shifts in their cultural identity due to influential people, places and events in their

environment. This pattern of interacting *insights* and *environment* continued when a situational stimuli would initiate a thought process that led to participants deliberately seeking new *environments* (peers, activities, organizations) that reinforced their African centered *insights*.

Psychological literature regarding identity development has undergone its own development in some ways. Theorists began with fairly static stages, then the stages became less distinct, or interacted with each other, or looped around continuously, or instead were not stages at all but dimensions or statuses similar to the themes identified in the present study. Although stage models preceded and informed the others, the linear organization of sequential steps no longer represent the current dominate approach to understanding identity. As noted earlier, stage models are useful guides for interpreting the process oriented narrative offered by many of the participants. Respondents made several comments about the nature of their cultural identity process that are relevant to development literature. There was not, however, consistent synchronization across participants' narratives that would suggest a systematically shared chronology. In other words, when asked about themes within a particular stage of an identity model, participants often shared experiences that resonate, but they rarely suggested that their endorsement of any given theme was a direct consequence of experiencing themes from a prior stage.

Many of the experiences respondents shared corresponded with themes of the stage models reviewed earlier (e.g. Cross, 1971; Phinney, 1996; T'Shaka, 2005; Myers and Haggins, 1998). Findings of this study support the notion that African centered identity manifests in ways that resemble the broad themes included across the stage theorists as outlined by Salazar and Abrams (2005): "1) a negative view of oneself; 2) questioning of stage 1 beliefs; 3) immersion in one's own culture; and 4) positive view of self and others" (p.50). In other words, participants

shared similar experiences with the concept of *Africa* in relation to their identity as research has suggested occurs with other racial or ethnic reference points. Identity development for African Americans is distinct when compared to other ethnic or cultural groups in the US due to the deliberate attempts to disconnect African Americans from their lineage. Thus, in many ways, African Americans have more re-construction to do before any damage to their identity are restored.

Consequently, as described by the themes in Stage 1, participants were exposed to many negative ideas about Africa being primitive, savage, diseased and poverty ridden. Some of the participants believed the negative messages until later in life when they received contrary information. However, many of them denied giving Africa and its culture much serious thought until they were adults. Therefore, negative thoughts about Africans did not directly affect their sense of self since participants were likely to see themselves as distinctively separate from Africans. Additionally, as suggested by the themes of Stage 2, when participants have more comprehensive information about African history and African Americans' connection to it, they question information they received as a child. Participants question the identity that resulted from prior information and they looked critically at the lifestyle (i.e. language, customs, holidays, relationships, clothes, food, etc.) that they developed based on their faulty ideas about culture. Furthermore, participants reported an intense plunge into African culture that for most of them included a period of vilifying Whites and romanticizing the contributions of Africa to the world (e.g. Stage 3). As a reminder, this African centered "Immersion" is different from a person who may surround him or herself with Black American culture by exclusively listening to Black radio stations, attending a HBCU or Black church, eating soul food and reading Martin Luther King and Nikki Giovanni. Finally, participants report releasing thoughts of disdain for all Whites and

they began to think more critically about the exclusively positive image of Africa. Finally, respondents also reported experiences that resemble the literature's balanced depiction of Stage 4 where participants were more comfortable interacting with other cultures from a place of uncompromising confidence and acceptance of their African centered selves.

Due to its lasting prominence, another camp of identity stage literature to be considered in light of this study's findings is Cross's Theory of Nigrescence (1971). Throughout the years some of Cross's theory's major critiques have concerned his lack of consideration of culture in his analysis of healthy identity development for African Americans. Other researchers interested in culture have examined the relationship between African centered values and the stages of Cross's Nigrescence model and have found few or no consistent relationships (see Ewing, Richardson, James-Meyers, and Russell, 1996). Two potential explanations for this lack of evidence for a connection between culture and Cross's model are that individuals experience of racial identity and cultural identity may be different from each other in unexpected ways, or there may have been a more fundamental problem in the stage centered measurement and conceptualization of identity.

Subsequently, Cross and his colleagues have responded to psychology's evolving racial and cultural identity dialogue. The two main changes reflected in Cross's Revised and Expanded Model, of pertinence to this study are: 1) the nature of process for identity development and 2) the relevance of culture. Participants spoke directly about the need to understand identity as a phenomenon that changes over time, but it was also clear across participants' narratives that that process was very different from one person to the next. In the depiction of their African centered identity development participants rarely described their narrative in linear chronological order. They described periods of advancing towards African centered ideology and lifestyle as well as

periods when "After a while I started getting disinterested in it…. It kind of died down" (13). Some of the insights regarding process from this study's findings are also reflected in the literature. Parham (1989) offered that Cross's stages are cyclical and Helms (1995) maintains that "Although the Racial Identity Development statuses seem to develop sequentially in many people, measurement of racial identity attitudes suggests that these statuses are not mutually exclusive and that a person may display attitudes characteristic of more than one status at a time". Accordingly, Cross's Revised and Expanded model focuses less on fixed linear stages and more on racial identity statuses or profiles (Vandiver et al, 2002; Worrell et al., 2006). Thus, the study's findings support the direction of identity development literature towards a more thematic orientation similar to Sellers'et al. (1998) multidimentional model of racial identity.

The second major change Cross and his colleagues made to *Nigrescence* that is relevant to this study is their conceptualization of culture. "Black nationalism, which was originally theorized as being part of this stage [Immersion], is now viewed as psychologically more healthy for Blacks than Cross (1971) originally proposed. Therefore, Cross (1991) moved it to the internalization stage" (Cokley, 2002, p. 476). According to the Revised model, Cross and his colleagues have suggested that there are three ways an African American can achieve a balanced acceptance of his or her Black identity in American society: as a Biculturalist, Multiculturalist or a Black Nationalist. The Black Nationalist identity is consistent with this study's African centered ideology. Cross (1991) describes it as a "Black American interpretation of what it means to have an African perspective" p. 222. Thus, the African centered identity of the participants in this study would be considered healthy based on Cross's revised model.

The move towards including African centered cultural experiences with Cross's traditionally racial identity model is consistent with the findings of this study. Psychologists

frequently revisit efforts to clarify definitions of terms like race, ethnicity and culture. Many of those efforts seek the distinctions among those terms. Typically, socio-political contexts are linked with race while constructs related to values and worldview are linked to culture. The participants of this study expressed ways race and culture interact that may enhance psychology's understanding those constructs.

Participants most commonly referred to the label Black or African American when discussing race, and they used African centered, Afrocentric or sometimes NuAfrikan when focusing on culture. Some participants clearly distinguished their experience with race and culture. Most often participants expressed ideas about an African centered identity that evolved out of a racial analysis. Sometimes the African centered lifestyle evolved out of an explicitly race-based political activity. Overall, respondents' experience of race and culture suggest that researchers' attempts to distinguish these terms may only be partly accurate due to the variety of ways race and culture overlap and interact based on the findings of this study.

Oba T'Shaka's Model of Cultural Identity Development

The other theory that informed this dissertation's research questions and guided data collection and analyses was T'Shaka's African centered model of identity development (T'Shaka, 2005). T'Shaka created an eleven stage model that describes some of the nuances of identity transitions associated with becoming African centered. T'Shaka presents this theory from the vantage point of a political organizer whereby he is in favor of strategic plans to encourage African Americans to transform their identity towards a liberated African centered one. As such, his discussion of race and culture mimic that of some of this study's participants who saw their cultural identity as intertwined with their political advocacy. T'Shaka model is

not based on empirical data so the findings of this study are an opportunity to see whether there is preliminary support for its premises. Toward that goal, T'Shakas stages will be reviewed against the experiences reported by this study's participants.

T'Shaka's model suggests that individuals can begin the process from one of two phases, The Stage of Black Identity or The Stage of Negro Identity, which already poses problems for a linear chronological understanding of identity development. The Negro Identity stage is similar to Cross's Pre-Encounter in that an individual has at least a partial subconscious desire to be white. The only time when some of this study's participants suggested desires to be white was as children. However, there were statements participants made as adults when they were being critical of previously held beliefs when participants acknowledged having adult desires and goals that were based on Eurocentric or US value systems. More often, the present findings support T'Shaka's Black Identity Stage characterized by a healthy focus on Black US culture. Persons who endorse this stage are not interested in assimilating because they "have drawn upon their race pride to found black businesses, build Black churches, shape Black leadership, forge Black music and dance, and create beautiful poetry and literature" (T'Shaka, 2005, p.42). However, according to T'Shaka that is not enough; these individuals still have a long way to go to reclaim the fullness of their true African centered identity.

The next set of themes is described in The Stage of Pre-Disturbance when internalized oppression, accepting the negative views of Blacks promoted by Whites, leads to depression, drug use or even suicide. The present findings do not lend much support for this level, likely due to most of them having a positive Black Identity as adults. For the following stage, T'Shaka suggests, individuals receive new information that raises their awareness of racism and they see oppressive "Others" who are responsible. This is The Disturbance Stage. One of the differences

for this study's participants was that many of them did not experience a race-based encounter to begin their interest in African centered thought. Most of them were already aware of racism they just had not begun to enter Africaness into their analysis.

The Stage of African Identity is when an individual decides to be both Black and African; they begin to study African history and culture. All of my participants make a distinction between a period in their identity development when they did not incorporate Africa into their sense of self and a separate period when they considered themselves to be African centered. Findings of the present study suggest that participants typically began at T'Shaka first stage, Black Identity, and then later endorse this current stage, African Identity, per the influence of a variety of events, relationships and new information about Africa.

At some point in their narrative most participants also endorsed T'Shaka's Withdrawal Stage, characterized by a psychological and physical retreat from Whites while refuge is sought in all Black spaces. Finding also support T'Shaka's Romantic Stage, when they only see the good qualities of Africa and the bad qualities of anything related to Europe. T'Shaka sees this as a necessary step towards correcting previous negative self concepts, but suggests that individuals eventually move from that phase to the Balanced Self-Appraisal Stage. At this level the romance of Africa subsides and is replaced with more realistic views of the positive and negative elements of African history and heritage. Some of the participants reported bypassing some sort of romantic phase and only endorsed the themes of the Balanced Self-Appraisal Stage, but all of them made mention of having to reconcile some level of critique of Africa's past and present.

The next set of themes is described in the Self-Inventory Stage. It suggests that individuals look through an African centered lens to direct their personal life goals. They merge cultural consciousness with their perceived destiny or purpose. This study's participants did not

articulate this exact experience, but this stage is reminiscent of some of the participants' discussion of work. They reported viewing work as a reflection of identity in a way that could be related to a sense of life purpose. Once the examining during the Self-Inventory Stage is complete it leads to The Life, Death, Rebirth Stage when "the Negro dies and the African is born" (T'Shaka, 2006, p.58). T'Shaka describes it as a symbolic rebirth, which perhaps is akin to the name change that every participant in this study reported. Descriptions of this stage also include a sense of peace rooted in deep self-knowledge, respect and love, which resembles some of the findings when participants described a variety of benefits of adopting an African centered identity.

Based on T'Shaka's (2005) model the previous stage, Life, Death, Rebirth, is the level most individuals will reach because the final stage, The Revolutionary African Identity Stage, is only achieved by a small number of people. At the final stage a person will achieve what T'Shaka calls true revolutionary originality and is able to instigate paradigm shifts by conceiving just societies that are based on the empires of Africa's past but re-imagined within existing social/political structures. There was no evidence in the present study that participants were seeking to reach a stage in their identity that meets this description.

The findings of this dissertation offer some support to T'Shaka's cultural identity development model. The experiences of this study's participants overlaps in many instances with the themes described in many of T'Shaka's stages. The structure of a sequential stage model, however, appears to have the same difficulty as the other linear models. No participant suggested moving along the succession of stages in the same way T'Shaka maps it out. His attempts to predict a straight path of awakening into an African centered consciousness may be more simplified than the twists, turns, advancement and retreats that occur in individuals' lived

experience of identity development. Rather, the contribution of T'Shaka's theory appears most relevant towards illuminating aspects of African Americans' cultural identity, which is useful in a research climate, particularly in psychology, that focuses much more on race.

Implications

The findings of this study have several implications for psychological research and practice. This is particularly true for research that is interested in understanding how culture contributes to the well being of African Americans. The need to focus on application of African centered research is echoed in the following appeal:

> *"It is incumbent on African American psychologists and other social scientists to identify the components of an optimal worldview. Such knowledge is expected to be useful in (a) developing assessment techniques that can assist in therapeutic efforts aimed at promoting and maintaining psychological health, (b) identifying the key psychological variables that should be included in research studies examining the mental health of African Americans, and (c) developing interventions aimed at promoting psychological health throughout the life span." (Brookins, 1994, p.129)*

This author will offer some direction for ways present findings can increase clarity and further psychology's understanding of African centered identity development for clinical/community research and practice.

Research

This study's findings may be useful to several areas of research that concern themselves with matters of culture and identity. For instance, participants' reports about the messages they received from their parents and communities would be relevant to racial/ethnic socialization literature (Boykin and Toms, 1985; Thorton, 1997; Stevenson, 1995; Quintana and Vera, 1999) and what Huges et al. (2006) refer to as cultural socialization. Findings of this study also reveal ways that identity development is best understood as influenced by peer, community and other contexts. Similarly, several researchers have explored the influence of political contexts on

personality and identity development (Duncan and Stewart , 2007; Winter, 2005). Additionally, Ravenna, Stewart, and Ostrove (1995) discussed the influences of peer groups on individuals with their research examining how cohort effects influence identity development, and Ergas (2010) discusses the impact of peer selection on action through the formation of what is known as intentional communities. The common theme across these research areas, which is consistent with the findings of the present study, is that personal development interacts in important ways with environmental contexts.

Additionally, the findings that describe some of the components of an African centered value system could be used to inform the efforts of researchers interesting in measuring African centered identity. Several researchers have designed scales to measure cultural identity and examined the relationship between African centered identity and other variables. Based on a review of the literature it appears that capturing African centered identity quantitatively is a difficult task. Attempts to utilize factor analysis to discern components of African centered identity have produced results that are murky or unable to be interpreted (Cokely and Williams, 2005). Efforts to validate African centered measurement tools by examining their relationship with other racial and cultural constructs have indicated inconsistent or counterintuitive results (Cokely, 2002, Brookins, 1994, Ewing et al., 1996). Conceptual ambiguity in the literature has led some researchers to tease apart different types of African centered ideology. For instance, Spencer (2001) distinguishes a Reactive Afrocentrism that occurs in the Immersion stage from a Proactive Afrocentrism in the Internalization stage. Spencer (2001) describes Reactive Afrocentrism as being associated with poor coping skills and superficial clinging to cultural icons such as Martin Luther King. Based on the findings of the present study this combination of characteristics would be labeled something other than "African centered".

One of the contributions of the present study is that it could provide clarity around the meaning of African centered identity from individuals who deliberately base their lifestyle on an African centered ideology. Much of the existing literature examines only one aspect of African centered ideology, the latent African cultural retentions such as the values outlined in James TRIOS model. Typically, quantitative researchers utilize surveys to indicate how African centered an individual is, but even if a participant endorses item in a way that suggest s/he is high on an African centered ideology dimension, that individual still may or may not label themselves as African centered or even profess to know what the term means. Cokely (2005) asked a sample of college students an open ended question about the definition of Afrocentric and 62% of them completely ignored the question; the rest gave responses inconsistent with the findings of the present study. Prior, Cokely (2002) had expressed similar concern about the measurement of African centered in Cross's expanded theory. The newly included African centered aspect of Cross's Internalized identity was measured by a scale that used the word "Afrocentric" in all the items, which would presume that the average person in the largely college student population would have an accurate concept of that term.

The findings from this study are a potentially useful counterpart to the largely quantitative research on African centered identity. Present findings could offer direction to researchers seeking detailed descriptions of the varied aspects of an African centered ideology. In addition, findings offer suggestions for some of the observable activities that serve as representation of African centered values. The present study may also be uniquely useful due to the added perspective of older generation individuals. College aged samples provide a limited perspective on social and environmental influences to cultural identity and several studies have suggested generational difference in the expression of cultural identity (Kwate, 2003; Sevig,

1993). As psychology continues to maintain interest in the nuances of cultural identity, it will be important to seek effective measurement of cultural ideology for specific groups, such as African centeredness within African American populations.

Clinical/community practice

The current findings reveal information about the meaning of African centered ideology and lifestyle that can be useful for community interventions and clinical settings. Cokely and Williams (2005) argue that "given the varying degrees to which an individual will identify with their cultural heritage, assessment of this level of identification can assist practitioners in determining the suitability of African-centered programs and therapeutic approaches when working with clients of African descent" (p.830). The applications of African centered ideology are relevant to the extent that they are aligned with empirically supported positive benefits. For instance, Ewing et al. (1996) found that African centered ideology, not racial identity, was related to less emotional distress for graduate students. Similar results have been reported suggesting that African centered identity is related to indicators of well being such as improved self esteem (Harvey & Hill, 2004) academic success (Potts, 2003) and effective coping strategies (Constantine et al., 2002). Findings of the present study may help further clarify what aspects of African centered identity or lifestyle are beneficial, further areas of positive outcomes to be investigated, and offer guidance for specific ways to design interventions that foster the positive aspects of African centered identity.

Community psychologists are often interested in system level contributions to individual level ailments. Such an analysis has resulted in some theorists arguing that "because of the negative impact of colonization, African identity revitalization seems to be necessary, especially for Africans who are no longer living in Africa" (Mutsiya and Ross, 2005, p.236). Several

programs that advocate African centered cultural restoration have been presented in the literature (Moore et al., 2003; Whaley, 2003; Harvey & Hill, 2004). Findings from this study could be used to enrich interventions with similar goals. For example, the African centered activities participants reported could guide lesson plans for interventions that incorporate African centered ideology.

Clinical practitioners have also written about the need to incorporate African centered ideology in individual and family focused clinical work (Mickel, 2003; Kwate, 2005). Family therapists could refer to present findings when discussing the benefits of cultural socialization of children (see Boykin & Toms, 1985; Stevenson, Reed, & Bodison, 1996). A better understanding of African centered identity may also be useful for individual therapy. "The ability to assess ways in which African people experience the world can inform more appropriate theory and practice for this population. A paradigm shift from European to African-centered thought can positively affect the delivery of psychological services to people of African descent" (Cokely and Williams, p.828). There were clear ways participants of this study reported the influence of their childhood racial and cultural narratives on their adult well being that may be useful to consider for African American clients.

Limitations

This study included several limitations. One of the limitations was the convenience sample of participants involved. There was minimal exclusion criteria so the selected participants were individuals who self declared to be African centered. With participants who were not selected with a more objective or verifiably method it is difficult to infer that their experiences would transfer to the cultural insights, environmental influences and identity development of other African Americans.

The process of data collection may have also been compromised by the dynamics of the sole interviewer and the participants. Some of the biases of the main investigator were presented previously in the methods section and they mostly stem from his being raised in a family that promoted African centered cultural ideology. However, the main investigator is also affiliated with some of the same African centered communities and organizations that some of the participants were involved with. Thus, there likely were times when participants were less thorough in their explanations of African centered values and activities than they may have been with an interviewer they were less familiar with. This limitation was particularly problematic when members of the research team were interpreting narratives. They often remarked about being unfamiliar with terms, places, and people the participants referred to. Future research would benefit from using interviewers from varied backgrounds.

Another interview related limitation involved the nature of data collection that gathers developmental retrospective information. The present report of past narratives inevitably includes interpretations imposed on life events some time after the events occurred. There were instances when participants made assumptions about their emotional experiences in the past based on a current intellectual analysis.

Conclusion

One of the central elements of human functioning is culture. An individual's language, health, recreation, families, work and relationships interact with his or her culture. Psychology has made great strides in the past few decades towards its growing sophistication regarding matters of culture. Psychology's growing interest in culture is evident in its journals, conference themes, American Psychological Association divisions, and in the attempts of graduate training programs to seek people from diverse ethnic, national and cultural backgrounds. In the United

States, a country that prides itself on the acceptance of different cultures from around the world, it is easy to become lost in the general wave of multiculturalism and miss the specific experiences of the individual groups involved. As demonstrated by this dissertation, specific groups such as African Americans have their own unique story to tell.

This study is about the culture of a group that continues to struggle to find clarity about identity and culture. The process of coming to a level of self acceptance and group acceptance can be a complex matter in a country like the US where the current president could have been legally enslaved because of his racial categorization. Considering the historical and current practices in the US that are harmful to African American's identity, it will also be important to carefully interpret restorative attempts to constrict identities. This study explores what this community is currently labeling "African centered" but it was only a few decades ago when a respondent reminds us that "Nobody was really using the term "Afrocentric". I mean they would use the term, but it wasn't as defined as you see people talking about it today" (4).

Identity is a constantly evolving entity and questions about identity, and the meaning of being Black, or African American, or Afrikan, or Nu Afrikan will likely be questions that psychology will have to grapple with for decades to come. This dissertation was an attempt to contribute to that conversation in a way that is fair, thoughtful and respectful of the people to whom it refers. This dissertation is about understanding the nuances of cultural identity development for African Americans and its connection to their well being. It also intends to serve as a reminder that every group has a cultural story and the interconnected advancement of all cultures can best be achieved by highlighting the unique contributions of a specific group.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

1. What does being African centered mean in your life?

2. How was your view of yourself (your lifestyle, your view of the world) different before you became African centered?

3. What were your attitudes about Black people and what it means to be Black?

4. What sparked your interest in an African centered ideology? OR When did the change in your cultural outlook begin?

5. What was this experience like?

6. What happened next? How did things change? (i.e. attitudes, behavior, views of Blacks and Whites)

7. How do you think about European people AND culture?

8. Have you reached the end of your process?

    a. If so, how do you know?

    b. If not, how will you know?

9. Tell me about your lifestyle and the activities that you are involved in now. Are they different from those days that were typical of your "pre African centered" days?

    a. How would someone know that you are African centered by looking at your life activities?

    b. What would be different in your life if you woke up *non*-African centered tomorrow?

10. All of us move through a variety of roles in any given day. How does being African centered come into play?

Optional probes (to help clarify the above)

11. What roles have race-related experiences played in your developing African centered identity?

12. Was there ever a period in your life when you devalued African people or things? What influenced you then?

13. Was there a period in your life when you thought everything was flawless about African things and people, past and present?

14. How does spirituality affect you life?

15. How do you understand yourself in relation to your family? Community?

APPENDIX B

Table 2. Interview protocol and initial coding scheme

Predicted themes and coding categories	Interview Questions

Cultural Retentions
  a. Time
  b. Rhythm
  c. Improvisation
  d. Oral tradition
 	
Cultural Ideology
  a. Spirituality
  b. Extended sense of self
 	
Political Ideology
  a. Pan-African solidarity
  b. Active resistance of European cultural hegemony
  c. Nationalism
	1. What does being African centered mean in your life?

1.)Negative view of self*
 	
  • *Negro Identity*
 	
  • *Pre-Disturbance*
	2. How was you're your view of yourself (your lifestyle, your view of the world) different before you became African centered?
	
	3. What were your attitudes about Black people and what it means to be Black?

2.)Period of questioning one's original beliefs
 	
  • *Disturbance*
 	
  • *Black Identity*
 	
  • *African Identity*
	4. What sparked your interest in an African-centered ideology? (person, event, experience)
	          -OR-
	When did the change in your cultural outlook begin?
	
	5. What was that experience like?

3.) Immersion in one's own culture
 	
  • *Withdrawal*
 	
  • *Romantic Stage*
	6. What happened next? How did things change? (i.e. attitudes, behavior; views of Blacks and Whites)
	
	6a.Did that experience drive you to do anything?
	
	7. How do you think about European culture? How do you think about people of European descent?

4.)Positive view of self and others	8. What other important experiences happened between the ones you've described from the past and the

• *Balance Self- Appraisal*
 	
• *Self-Inventory*
 	
• *Life, Death and Rebirth*
 	
• *Revolutionary African Identity*
	experiences you are having now?
	How do you feel about yourself now?
	
	9.How do you think about Black people now?
	
	10. How do you think about White and other non-Black people now?
	
	11. How do you think about White and other non-Black cultures now?
	
	12a. Tell me about your lifestyle and the activities that you are involved in now. Are they different from those that were typical of your "pre African centered" days?
	
	12b.How would someone know that you are African centered by looking at your life activities?
	
	12c. What would be different in your life if you woke up non-African centered tomorrow?
	
	11. All of us move through a variety of roles in any given day (examples from below). How does being African centered come into play?
	
	Roles?
	  a. family member (son, daughter, father mother)
	  b. student
	  c. community resident
	  d. employee
	  e. friend
	Goals?
	  a. career aspirations
	  b. choice of friends
	  c. choice of romantic partner
	  d. political and social affiliations
	  e. spiritual practice

Optional probes (to help clarify the above):
- What roles have race-related experiences played in your developing African-centered identity?
- Where/how did you encounter support during this process?
- Where/how did you encounter resistance during this process?
- Was there ever a period in you life when you devalued African people or things? What influenced you then?
- Was there a period in your life when you thought everything about African things, people and

history was flawless?
- How does spirituality affect your life?
- How you understand yourself in relation to your family? Community?

Procedural details

Before they began their narrative, I always asked them to define what being African centered meant to them. Then I asked them to tell the story as thoroughly as possible, from point A to point B, including significant events, people and shifts in their thinking. As much as I could, I allowed them to tell their story without interruption, although I would give prompts to encourage elaboration. I would often interject prompts such as "and then what happened?" or "so how did affect you?", but I resisted introducing themes from the literature until it seemed like they would not volunteer them. I was interested in how their spontaneous self-guided narratives would later correspond to the stages in identity literature during the analysis phase. I also encouraged the participants to reflect on their personal uniqueness regarding the level to which African centered ideas they were exposed became particularly salient to them compared similarly exposed peers ("There were other people in that class, or that were exposed to the larger social movements, what was it about *you* in particular that made this stuff stick?"). Additionally, to gather information about the Lived Experience or Lifestyle aspect of African centeredness, when a participant described receiving new information or having a new though or meeting a new person, I often asked "How did that make your life look different?" or "How would someone from the outside know the difference, what observations would they make?" or "How does being AC now show up in the different roles you find yourself in, as a professional, a parent, a romantic partner, etc.?"

Finally there were several areas of inquiry that I was sure to address with each participant, after paying close attention to whether or not they articulated it unprompted. First, I was interested to see how many elements of African centered ideology literature was spontaneously offered by participants, but if the participants defined African centeredness in vague or general ways I asked them to list specific principles. The remaining areas of inquiry were designed to either seek support or to challenge some of the major aspects of the existing stage models. These major themes in the identity stage model included internalized oppression ("Do you remember wishing you were white or hating being black?"), anti-white attitudes ("Did you go through a period of hating white people?"), evolving ideas about relationship with whites ("How did your thoughts about white people shift as your consciousness shifted?"), an encounter or awakening moment ("Was there a moment that you identify as the instant you became African centered?"), immersion ("Did you go through a period of romanticizing Africa or African things?") and some type of resolution ("What do you see are the next steps of your African centered identity development?").

*Bulleted items are T'Shaka's (2005)African centered identity transformation stages

APPENDIX C
Final Coding Manual

How does the concept "African-centered" manifest in lived experience?	What influences a person to become African centered and what is that process like?
Values (V) 1.Spirituality 2. Communalism 3. Centered on Africa 4. Self-determination 5. Ancestors/heritage 6. Practical modern application 7. Social Justice 8. Mention of a particular set of principles (e.g. Ma'at, Nguzo Saba) 9. Aesthetic (e.g. prefer African physical features)	**Childhood insights (CI)** 1. Personal characteristics 2. Thoughts about being Black (+, -) 3. Thoughts about Africa (+, -, OR none) 4. Thoughts about whites (+, -, OR none)
	Childhood environment (CE)-through HS (family, peers, school, community, media) 1. Messages about/experience with Black (+, -) 2. Messages about/experience with Africa (+, -) 3. Messages about/experience with White (+, -)
Activities (AC) 1.Transmission and community building 2. Participate in a cultural or political group/organization 3. Professional work incorporates African themes 4. Seek like minded peers 5. Read/Study about Africa 6. Engagement with arts (e.g. dancing, drumming, martial arts) 7. Rituals (eg. Naming ceremonies and holidays) 8. Diet (e.g. vegetarianism, holistic health) 9. Attempt to spend time with Blacks/Africans (e.g HBCUs travel to Africa) 10. Seek AC partner and/or raise AC children 11. Change name 12. African Décor (clothes, jewelry, furniture) 13. Language reflects consciousness	**Identity Shifts (IS)** 1. Moment became AC (yes, no) 2. Period of romanticized xperi (yes, no) 3. Critical of previously held beliefs 4. Change in relationship with whites
	Adult Insights (AI) 1. Still growing in ACness 2. Benefits from becoming more AC 3. Regrets/losses associated with AC Id 4. Interaction of AC ID with other identities (e.g. class, gender, sexual orientation)
	Adult Environment (AE) 1. Cultural or political peers and mentors 2. College (course, organization or professor) 3. Community organization/activity 4. Social climate (e.g. books, radio, television)

Definitions of codes for research assistants

V1.**Spirituality**|any mention of spirit, religion, God, higher power, etc.

V2.**Communalism**|mention of community or interdependence, family, village, unity or mention of service to others, volunteering, making people's lives better

V3.**Centered on Africa**|positive expression about being connected to African heritage; proud to be Africa; Africa is a essential part of their analysis or worldview

V4.**Self-determinaition**|advocate for independent, Black owned and operated institutions; sovereignty; independence

V5.**Ancestors/heritage**| mention ancestors; African lineage; reverence for Africans who have transitioned; decendents of Africans

V6.**Practical modern application**| talk about not being back in Africa but having to still incorporate African ideas with current realities; merge African culture/values with American social and political reality; modernize ancient African principles

V7.**Social Justice**| political activity; eliminate discrimination and oppression; equality for all people; reparations; fairness

V8.**Mention of a particular set of principles**|Nguzo Saba (Kwanzaa), Ma'at (Kmt/Ancient Egypt) or principles from a particular program

V9.**Aesthetic**| talk about their being a certain "african" look or sound or flavor; prefer African music, art, dance styles; prefer physical features like dark skin, coarse hair, wide noses, think lips, etc.

AC1.**Transmission and community building**|pass on information about Africa to the next generation or their peers

AC2.**Participate in a cultural or political group/organization**|member or affilate of African centered group that they sought after becoming AC

AC3.**Professional work incorporates African themes**|find ways to merge African value system into a an existing job or create a new job that does that

AC4.**Seek like minded peers**|attempt to spend time with others that share interest in African values and activities

AC5.**Read/Study about Africa**|read books, go to lectures, take classes, watch movies, etc. about Africa

AC6.**Engagement with arts**|dancing, drumming, martial arts, poetry, etc. that involves African styles

AC7.**Rituals**|RITES OF PASSAGE, naming ceremonies, African themed weddings, holidays, etc

AC8.**Diet**|vegetarianism, holistic health|H

AC9.**Attempt to spend time with Blacks/Africans**| travel to africa, go to Historically Black **College, move to neighbood that's primarily Black**

AC10.Seek AC partner and/or raise AC children|attempt to create African centered family, or desire to do so

AC11.**Change name**|from birth name, American name to African name in a way that is meaningful for their identity

AC12.**African Décor**|use African styled clothes, jewelry, furniture, etc.

AC13.**Language reflects consciousness**|desire or attempt to learn African language;disdain for English as the language of our historical enemy; deliberate use of Ebonics because of its connection to Africa

CI1.**Personal characteristics**|always rebellious or different; always attracted to African or cultural things; always saw the world a little different than others

CI2a.**POSITIVE Thoughts about being** Black|remembers thinking foldly about Black people and proud to be Black

CI2b.**NEGATIVE Thoughts about being Black**|remembers being ashamed or embarassaed about being Black; had thoughts about wanting to be something other than Black; thought Black people were less than

CI3a.**POSITIVE Thoughts about Africa**|remembers thinking fondly or Africa or African people; wanted to learn more about Africa; liked the idea of being connected to Africa

CI3b.**NEGATIVE Thoughts about Africa**|thought Africa was backwards or savage or had other undesireable attributes; thought Africans were less than

CI3c.**NO Thoughts about Africa**|Africa rarely or never crossed their mind at all

CI4a.**POSITIVE Thoughts about Whites**|remembers thinking fondly about white people; respected them, admired them

CI4b.**NEGATIVE Thoughts about Whites**|held contempt, dislike, distrust, disdain for white people; did not like being around them

CI4c.**NO Thoughts about Whites**|white people rarely or never crossed their mind|

CE1a.**POSITIVE Messages about/experience with Black**|recalls images and messages from family, peers, school, community and media about Blacks/African-American heriatge being valuable or special or meaningful or useful or worthy of pride; received messages about Black people being smart, talented, capable, beautiful or other desirable attributes; recalls positive personal interactions with Blacks|

CE1b.**NEGATIVE Messages about/experience with Black**|recalls imagaes and messages from family, peers, school, community and media about Blacks/African-Americans being less worthy, or less beautiful, or less intelligent; recalls negative personal interactions with other Blacks|

CE2a.**POSITIVE Messages about/experience with Africa**|recalls imagaes and messages from family, peers, school, community and media about African people and African culture being valuable or special or meaningful or useful or worthy of pride; recalls positive personal interactions with Africans|

CE2b.**NEGATIVE Messages about/experience with Africa**|recalls imagaes and messages from family, peers, school, community and media about African people and African culture being backwards/savage/primitive/poor/dumb/ugly, etc.; recalls negative personal interactions with Africans|

CE3a.**POSITIVE Messages about/experience with White**|recalls imagaes and messages from family, peers, school, community and media about Whites being trustworthy, good allies, or admirable; recalls positive personal interactions with whites|

CE3b.**NEGATIVE Messages about/experience with White**|recalls imagaes and messages from family, peers, school, community and media about Whites being dangerous, untrustworthy, unfriendly, or not worthy of respect; recalls negative persoanl interactions with whites|

IS1a.**YES-Moment became AC**|acknowledged a moment, an instance, an event or interaction that made the difference between them being non-African centered and African centered|

IS1b.**NO-Moment became AC**|denied there being moment they became African centered; instead they gradually evolved in that identity over time|

IS2a.**YES-Period of romanticized Africa**|acknowledged a span of time when they thought everything about Africa was perfect|

IS2b.**NO-Period of romanticized Africa**|denied a span of time when they thought everything about Africa was perfect|

IS3. **Critical of previously held beliefs**|speaks negatively about values, activities, religions, political views, etc they used to support|

IS4. **Change in relationship with whites**|hold a different view of their relationship to white people, particulary going from a position that whites are the enemy to being open to accepting whites as allies and workign together as one people alongside whites|

AI1.**Still growing in ACness**|continuing to learn more about Africa and study more, and find new ways to incorporate African values into their life|

AI2.**Benefits from becoming more AC**|since becomming African centered they express increased happiness, feeling more confident, haveing better relationships, feeling more fulfilled, being more productive, things in thir life working out more often, etc.|

AI3.**Regrets/losses associated with AC Id**| any down side to being AC; since becoming African centered they have experinced increased difficulty at jobs, or have lost friends or strained family relationships, etc.|

AI4.**Interaction of AC ID with other identities**|mentions ways their African cultural identity merges with thier class, gender, sexual orientation or other identities|

AE1.**Cultural or political peers and mentors**|met a peers or mentor that inspired and/or guided their transition into African centeredness|

AE2.**College (course, organization or professor)**|took a class, met a professor, or joined an organization that inspired their shifts towards African centered identity|

AE3.**Community organization**|joined an organization in the community that inspired shifts towards their African centered identity|

AE4.**Social climate (e.g. books, radio, television)**|was influences by ideas they were exposed to from events and mesages in the larger society that motivated them to move towards an African centered identity|

APPENDIX D

Email sent to participants to elicit member checks

Greetings,
I know its been a while since you've thought about this, but I've been plugging through trying to finish this dissertation and am happy to say I'm starting to see the end of this thing.

I finished all the interviews a while ago, and they've been transcribed (with personal information removed) and analyzed by a team I assembled in Chicago.

The goal of the research is to gain some clarity around two main questions:

1. What does this thing called "African-centered" look like in real life?

2. What factors are a part of the process of becoming African-centered?

So, to review, I searched for people who were part of African-centered organizations or programs and asked them if they identify with an African-centered worldview and if they always have. If they said "no" then I interviewed them (you) about the 2 research questions above.

So the document I have attached titled FINAL CODING MANUAL is the answers to those questions, based on me and my team's understanding of the common themes across all the narratives I collected. I'd like you to look at that.

One of the guiding principles of this type of research is that you, the participant, are the ultimate expert in your experience of the topic I want to gain a better understanding of. So I'm asking you to review this document so that I can include your feedback in my final results as a measure of VALIDITY. Only you can provide me that.

Therefore, if you are able to, I would like you to read through the coding manual, consider the 2 main research questions, and think about whether the themes I've identified capture the essence of your experience. If there is something really important to you missing about your lived experience of being African-centered, please let me know. Or if there is some important influence, step or factor missing from my depiction of the process of experience African-centered, please let me know.

And of course, if everything looks fine, like it reflects your experience, then let me know that as well.

Many, many thanks again for your continued support with this.

-"Dr." Cartman

p.s. I also attached the original interview for your review or records.

APPENDIX E

Georgia State University
Department of Psychology
Informed Consent

Title: African American Cultural Identity Development

Principal Investigator: Roderick Watts, PhD
                                    Obari Cartman, MA (Student P.I.)

I.   Purpose:

We invite you to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to explore cultural identity. We invite you because you fuse African culture into your lifestyle. We will recruit 15 participants for this study. Participation will include 1 ½ hours of your time. Later, we may ask for 30 more minutes as a follow up to confirm the findings.

II.   Procedures:

If you decide to participate, the main student researcher will interview you in a private office at Georgia State University. We can also choose another location if it is more convenient for you. The interview will be audio taped. The interview will be arranged at time that fits your schedule. The interview will last between an hour and 1 ½ hours. You may be asked to participate in a follow up interview that. There is no monetary compensation.

III.   Risks
In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV.   Benefits:

You may not benefit personally from being in the study. We hope to learn more about African American culture.

V.   Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and later change your mind, you have the right to skip questions or stop participating (drop out) at any time.

VI.   Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. We will use an ID number rather than your name on study records. Only the Principal Investigator and the Student Principal Investigator will have access to the information you provide. The audiotapes will be stored in a locked cabinet and the key will be stored separately. The tapes will be destroyed once the findings are reported. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we

present this study or publish its results. We will summarize the findings and report them in group form. You will not be identified personally.

VII.   Contact Persons:

Contact Dr. Roderick Watts at (rjwatts@gsu.edu) or Obari Cartman at 404-413-5084 (ocartman1@student.gsu.edu) if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.

VIII.   Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded, please sign below.

_____   _____
Participant   Date

_____   _____
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent   Date