

BLACK AFRICANS AND AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

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Abstract

Black Africans and African Americans share ancestral lineage yet are said to have tepid relationships. Few studies have examined the cause of this discordance between Black Africans and African Americans. Cohesiveness between these two groups can facilitate productive and harmonious relationships. Using three dimensions of variables: (a) cultural orientation, (b) racial orientation, and (c) value orientation and worldviews this study aimed to measure differences and similarities between these two groups. The result was that most values were shared and differences measured were small.

Keywords: Africans, African Americans, relationship, racial identity, worldviews, Afrocentrism, differences and similarities.

Introduction

Tepid relationships between Africans and African Americans are prevalent in the United States. This phenomenon was observed by the author and also noticed by other scholars, including Thornton and Taylor (1988), McAndrew and Akande (1995), and Harris (2000). The observed relationships were contrary to the Afrocentric values of oneness and cooperativeness (Asante, M., 2003, 2011; Mazama, A., 2001; Abraham, K., 1991) that other scholars claim should be the prerogatives of black Africans and African Americans, given their common ancestry (Tishkoff, et al., 2009, Bryc, et al., 2010; Zakharia, et al., 2009), yet diverge because these groups are not monolithic.

There are distinct groups of blacks in the United States: (a) those whose ancestors were involuntarily brought into the United States from the 16th to the 19th centuries, (b) those who voluntarily immigrated to the United States from the Caribbean after 1808, when the slave trade became illegal; and (c) those who emigrated directly from Africa.

Culture plays an important role in understanding diverse populations (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993) and in making sense of the complexities of human psychology, feeling, cognition and behavior, and interactions between people and their environment. People from different racial or ethnic groups or cultures have different or varying interpretations of self and others and the interconnectedness of humans (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In the 16th century, African Americans were separated from Africa at the *cultural surface* level, which included their original ways of life such as customs and languages; however, they have retained their worldviews which have been anchored by their *cultural deep structure*, or their philosophies of life (Myers, et al., 1996). Although small in comparison to the number of Asian, European, and South American immigrants, the number of African immigrants to the United States is steadily growing. As of June 2015, 3.8 million black immigrants were living in the United States. Historically, the majority of black immigrants emigrated from the Caribbean, but recent migration growth in the country is being driven by African immigrants (Gambino, et al, 2014). Between 2000 and 2013, the number of black African immigrants living in the U.S. rose 137% from 574,000 people to 1.4 million (Anderson, 2015). In 1980, African immigrants represented seven percent of the total foreign-born population compared to 36% in 2015. As these trends continue, the likelihood of encounters between African Americans, Africans, and other immigrants will increase. These shifting demographics will also impact interpersonal relationships between African Americans and many foreign-born population groups. Using goals of cultural psychology, which attempts to record and recognize group differences in cognition, emotion, motivation, and healthiness of life, the purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship differences and similarities between sub-Saharan Africans and African Americans in America. The hypothesis is that differences in culture, racial identity, value systems and worldviews, and the interactions of these factors are responsible for the observed lukewarm relationship between Africans and African Americans in United States.

Most of the empirical analyses attempting to account for race/ethnic differences in the United States have focused on health status (Williams, et al., 1997; Laumann & Youm, 1999; Read & Emerson,

2005), the criminal justice system (Blumstein, 1982), religion (Taylor et al., 1996), race (Shipler, 1998), socio cultural, or economic issues. However, few efforts have been devoted to the study of within-group characteristics of the black population. There is a need to explore the nature and magnitude of differences and similarities between Africans and African Americans for the purposes of realigning relationships that are perceived to be in dissonance with Afrocentric values, described by Myers and others (1996) as harmonious cooperative relationships with personal and communal significance.

Empirical Analyses of Race/Ethnic Differences

Culture is everything. Culture functions as the basis for ethnicity (Nagel 1994) because it defines the boundaries for ethnic groups. However, in studying minority group differences, cultural factors alone may not fully explain the differences or their causes. In a cross-cultural study, the effects of socioeconomic factors and other intervening variables, such as the influence of direct and indirect interactions between groups, should be considered equally as much as the cultural factors in determining whether group differences are the result of cultural influences and/or included effects of socioeconomic factors (Betancourt & Lopez 1993).

In addition, the classification of the groups being compared is an important element. The groups identified for study in this paper were sub-Saharan Africans and African Americans, with both groups belonging to the black race. While African Americans are considered an ethnic group in America, native Africans in United States are comprised of multiple sub-ethnic groups with different national identities, languages, cultural compositions, and characteristics. Moreover, cultural knowing, which refers to the way in which a new localized culture evolves through social interactions between groups, influences the perception of cultural similarities or differences between subgroups or members of the same racial identity group (Weisinger & Salipante, 2000). Triandis (1995) raised a critical issue of "whether perceived similarity will lead to the judgment that one is dealing with 'one of us' (in-group) or 'one of them' (out-group). This is especially important in the case of collectivist cultures ... where the distinction between behavior toward in-groups and out-groups is much more pronounced than is the case in individualistic cultures" (p. 21).

Studies on group differences should avoid disparaging identified human differences as mistakes of measurement or representation of the other as a 'less-than' or inferior version of the self (Harlem, 2009). Whether the comparative study of Africans and African Americans is looked upon as a within-group (in-group) or between-group (out-group) study, the intention of the process should be the contribution to knowledge and identification of other areas that may lead to further research towards a shared vision of the future that is beneficial to the overall black population. Any misrepresentation or misinterpretation of the results of the study would be prejudicial to the intent thereof, and such misconception would be categorized as the distortion of data that Zuckerman (1990) forewarned could be employed to fulfill a racial agenda.

Measuring differences between or within black groups is a complicated process. Similarly, identifying which differences or variables to measure and how to account for the effects of the intersections of the variables of the measurement is a complex procedure. Focusing on one attribute for measurement may highlight the difference, but it may not account for the dominant or complementary causative factors for the difference. For example, the difference in marital satisfaction among African Americans and black Caribbeans was studied by Bryant and others (2008); depressive symptoms of the same groups was studied by Lincoln, et al., (2007); also studied was genetic structure (Tishkoff, et al., 2009), African-oriented world views (Dixon, 1977; Koltko-Rivera, 2004); morality and aesthetics (Soyinka, 1990), color and color perception (Hilbert, 1987), educational achievements and earnings (Dodoo, 1997), and differences in cultural frame (Ogbu, 1993). While these studies were rigorous, the extent of their usefulness to the black population was limited to the narrow areas they covered. For instance, a study on family functioning would have been more relevant if one of the variables used to test the construct of the family was marital satisfaction. The mere use of the marital satisfaction variable would not reveal the complete picture without the involvement of other attributes or variables within the household of *family functioning*.

Racial identity, value systems and worldviews

Racial identity combines race and identity to provide a more complete explanation of individual and group functioning (Thompson & Carter, 2013). Jackson (2013) acknowledged the impact that the culture of the African American community has had on the Black Identity Development (BID) process modeled by Cross (1971). This model cannot be blindly applied to the African-born black population in America without integrating the migration experience and the culture of the black African immigrant community.

Another important variable is the value system. In practice, value systems become relevant when they are measured by their consistency with behaviors. Thornburg (1973) contends that maximum value-behavior consistency represents well-adjusted adult functioning. When there is dissonance between values and behavior, it may lead to anxiety or a shift in values. Also, an African or an African American may hold dual value systems – personal and communal value systems. In his *Agentic Perspective* of social cognitive theory, Bandura (2001) posited that people are functions of things they produce as well as things produced by the social system to which they belong. Personal and communal values are expected to be consistent with each other to produce harmonious functioning of people and community. Where inconsistency prevails, dysfunction in relationships with others appears. Such dysfunction contradicts the basic construct of unity and oneness among the African family locally and globally.

The value system of an individual or community, or the combination thereof, drives the beliefs of that individual or community. The set of beliefs, in turn, influences how that individual or community views the world. Worldviews can be understood as a cognitive perspective that encompasses three categories of beliefs derived from the work of Rokeach (1973): descriptive or existential beliefs, evaluative beliefs, and prescriptive or proscriptive beliefs (Koltko-Rivera, 2004). The African belief system is rooted in long-held African traditions, values, philosophies and epistemologies which black scholars (Diop 1989, Abarry and Asante, 1996; Ajamu, et al. 2015) believe should be the basis for studying black populations and understanding African-centered worldviews. One major attribute of African-centered worldviews is the concept of balance -- balance of man and nature, balance of the past and present, balance of desire and reality, and balance of survival and adverse external threats.

Thus, three dimensions of variables were measured: a) cultural and family orientation, based on cultural value and family value ratings; b) racial orientation, based on racial identity, group orientation, color preference, and ethnocentric scales; c) value orientation and world views, based on time value, life and nature value, and place-focus – America, Africa and Europe. The measurements tested the author's hypothesis that differences in culture, racial identity, value systems and worldviews, and the interactions of these factors, were responsible for the observed tepid relationships between Africans and African Americans in United States.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were self-identified Black or African American students, both graduate and undergraduate, from two Midwestern universities and non-students from a large Midwestern city. Non-students were comprised of individuals with varied backgrounds. A total of 60 subjects participated; including 40 African Americans ($n = 40$) and 20 African residents ($n = 20$). The sample consisted of 36 females and 24 males who ranged in age from 20 to 60 years ($M = 35.4$). Forty percent of the sample were married, 43.3 percent had never been married and 16.7 percent were divorced or separated. Eighty-five percent of the subjects considered themselves Christian and five percent Muslim. The other 10 percent had no stated religious affiliation. The native African subjects were those whose countries of origin are located in West Africa.

African and African American undergraduate and graduate students were recruited through their different campus clubs and associations. Non-students were recruited using community leaders and faith leaders in churches and mosques. Others were recruited through the black chamber of commerce and community organizations providing social services to African Americans and African immigrants. All subjects participated on a voluntary basis without receiving any incentives. A single experimenter with knowledge of the two groups being studied was used to administer the study's apparatus and conduct the follow-up interview, for reasons of uniformity and to keep the environment

as similar as possible to avoid any confounding variables. The survey/interview was conducted on a “one-on-one” basis in one sitting. If a participant did not have enough time to complete the questionnaire at once, an appointment was rescheduled. Subjects were given the freedom to choose the date, place, and time for the interview. This was done to avoid premeditated responses.

Instruments

The principal instrument was a structured interview designed purposely for the study (Babbie, 2007). The principal questionnaire was a 50-item rating scale/questionnaire. The questionnaire also borrowed some components from (a) Belief Systems Analysis Scale – BSAS and Belief and Behavior Awareness Scale – BABAS (Myers, Montgomery, Fine & Reese, 1996); (b) Racial Identity Attitude Scale (Helms & Parham, 1996); and (c) The Development of the Black Family Process Q-Sort (Peacock, Murray, Ozer & Stokes, 1993). The 50-item scale was designed in two versions: one for the African participants, one for the African American participants. All items on both versions were similar except reference was made to the other group when African American was substituted for African or vice versa. The 50-scale questionnaire was to test the variables (see Table 1) in (C), variables in (R) except *color preferences* and only *time value* variable in (V). The questionnaire was complemented by three other scales: a 10-item scale to test *color preference* in (R), a 21-item scale to test *life and nature* in (V) and a 20-item scale to test *place focus* in (V). An additional instrument, *place identification on the map*, was designed to test *place focus* and *racial identification* in (V) and (R), respectively. It took an average of 40 minutes to administer the combined instruments to a participant. Each statement in the instruments on rating scale was a 5-point Likert item from “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree” or their equivalencies.

Table 1: Conceptual diagram of the constructs and components of variable sets used

(C) Cultural & family orientation	(R) Racial orientation	(V) Value orientation & worldviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Cultural orientation •Family orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Racial identity •Group orientation •Color preferences •Ethnocentrism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Time value •Life and nature •Place focus (Africa, America & Europe)

Participants’ responses were tabulated for all the questions. Responses by each subject were recorded into a Raw Data sheet in the presence of the respondent. The Raw Data sheets were later coded and this became the source record from where information for the data matrix was derived. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to generate the data matrix. The same software was used to collate, match, and analyze data and to generate reliability test results. It was also used to calculate the t-tests for groups based on assigned variables, including measuring the difference in the average means and the significance of relationships.

Reliability and validity

Only the 50-scale questionnaire was tested for reliability. Cronbach’s Alpha for the scale ($n = 60$) was .74. Also, as a newly developed questionnaire, items in the scale were reviewed for content validity by five subject matter expert (SME) scholars: an anthropologist, a social psychologist, a professor of African studies, a professor of religious studies and a professor of sociology. Using the Lawshe formula, the mean content validity ratio (CVR) across items was 0.8.

Results

Cultural and Family Orientation

On the variables measuring cultural orientation, no difference was found between Africans and African Americans. Africans scored only two percent higher on being culturally orientated than African Americans did. Both groups' aggregate scores on cultural orientation averaged 50 percent with the ratio being Africans 51% and African American 49%. However, African subjects showed 10% higher commitment to the marriage institution than did African Americans. African Americans' interest in family, family's welfare and children was 6% higher than that of African subjects. Gender wise, 10% more female than male subjects preferred to eat out rather than cook their meal. Also, female subjects were against the idea of polygamy at a rate of 22% higher than male subjects.

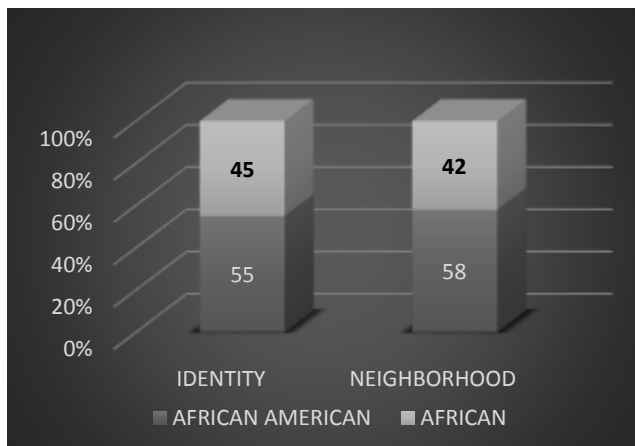


Figure 1: Percentage scores on measures of racial identity

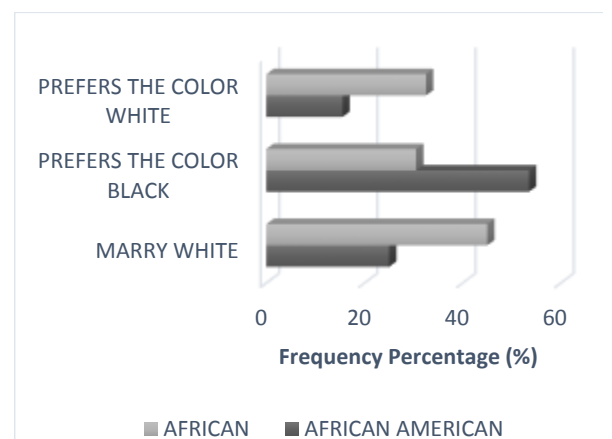


Figure 2: Scores on color preference

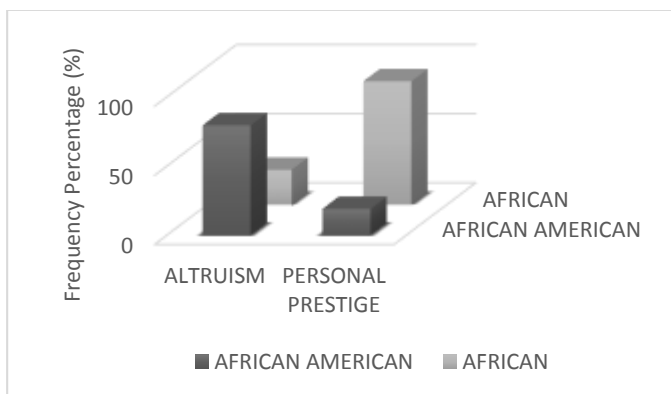


Figure 3: Percentage scores on measures of altruism and personal prestige

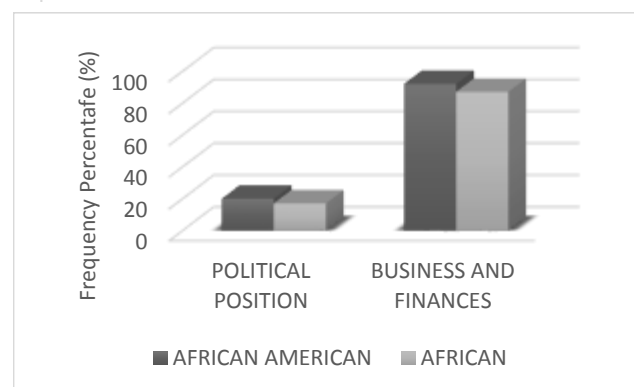


Figure 4: Percentage scores on desire for political and business positions



Percentage scores on Place Focus and Allegiance/Patriotism		
Variables	African	African American
Focus on Africa	74	78
Focus on America	91	70
Focus on Europe	49	32
Patriotism & allegiance	93	56

Figure 5: Percentage scores time value and life/nature

Table 2: Percentage scores on place focus and patriotism/allegiance

Racial Orientation

When asked about living in a neighborhood comprising Africans and African Americans, African American subjects supported the idea 16% more than African subjects did. African American subjects also scored slightly higher on racial identity scale than Africans (*Figure 1*). This score is correlated with African American subjects score of 14% higher on perception of the color black. African subjects scored 20% more than African American subjects on the choice of marrying a white person and embracing the dominant culture; they also scored 20% more on the perception of the color white. Overall, the percentage of subjects who chose the color black as a favorite color was 84% in contrast with 66% for the color white (*Figure 2*). Scores on all attributes for ethnocentric construct showed a similar pattern to scores for color perception.

Value Orientation and worldviews

The study found that African American subjects showed a value of nature at 84% that was 14% higher than seen in African subjects at 70%. Generally, both African and African American subjects placed more focus on the future and less on the past. On the value placed on altruism, African American subjects scored 80% compared to 25% by African subjects. On the value placed on personal prestige, African American subjects scored 20% to the African subjects who scored 90% (*Figure 3*). Both groups scored less on value placed on political office: Africans at 18% and African Americans at 20%. In comparison to the value placed on business ownership and financial independence, African subjects scored 89% and African American subjects scored 91% (*Figure 4*). Regarding where the subjects would like to visit, African subjects focused on American cities 21% more, and on European cities 17% more than the African American subjects did. There was little difference on the choice of Africa as a place to visit. Also, the degree of patriotism and allegiance by African subjects was found to be 37% higher than that of African American subjects at 93% and 56%, respectively (*Table 2*).

The similarity on the aggregate score on cultural and family orientation indicated that the two groups are bicultural. However, upon further examination of individual items on the scales, African Americans would be more highly distressed than Africans if their spouses failed to contribute money to pay bills. Africans still preferred to make their meals at home irrespective of the discomfort this might cause, whereas African Americans would rather eat out than make home meals if they had the choice. African Americans subscribed to the modern philosophy of equality of husband and wife more than Africans did. Moreover, Africans were somewhat reluctant to condemn polygamy, which was an issue most African American subjects strongly opposed. Most subjects claimed to know their cultural history and were proud of their cultural heritage.

The difference between the groups' responses to items measuring cultural and family orientation, time value, value on life and nature, and place focus on Africa was very small. Items measuring racial identity, group orientation, ethnocentrism, color preferences, value of altruism, personal prestige, political office versus business ownership and, place focus on America and Europe

approached statistical significance (alpha level of .05). The sample size for the study was small ($n = 60$), and a larger sample size might have produced different results than reported.

Discussion

The interesting finding in this study was that most values were shared and differences measured in cultural and family orientation, worldviews on Africa, and time value were quite small. This result only partially supported the author's hypothesis that differences in culture, racial identity, value systems and worldviews, and the interactions of these factors were responsible for the observed tepid relationships between Africans and African Americans in the United States. While every difference noted in this study is worthy of further analysis, the discussion will focus on color preference and value orientation, particularly the value placed on altruism, personal prestige, business ownership, and implications for competition.

Racial identity and color preference

In all indices, African subjects, scored higher on the preference of the color white and marrying a white person than African American subjects and scored lower on the idea of living in a neighborhood comprised of mainly Africans and African Americans. Do these results indicate that Africans are more integrative into the white dominant culture than African Americans are? In a study conducted on the attitudes of minority and majority members towards adaptation of immigrants by Oudenhoven and others (1998), the immigrant subjects reacted positively to integration as oppose to assimilation, separation, or marginalization. The majority members however had positive attitudes towards assimilation. Given that Africans recorded higher scores on traits of patriotism and allegiance, it may mean that white Americans are more receptive to Africans than African Americans because Africans are perceived by the dominant culture to be more conforming to the norms. But similar to the plight of African Americans, African immigrants have reported considerable discrimination in America (Takougang, 1995; Model & Ladipo, 1996; Doodoo, 1997). Another possibility for these results may be that Africans perceive contact with the dominant culture to be more rewarding than contact with African Americans. Rewards do reinforce behaviors and the value attached to any reward depends on the value orientation and preference of the beneficiary. Also, the level of adaptation is the impartial point of reference for judgement made on anything (Helson, 1964). In their adaptation strategy into American society, Africans may have adopted a *color-blind* approach. In an experiment testing the ability of African American and black African men to identify previously seen white male faces, African American participants performed better and had fewer false responses than the black African participants (Carroo, 1986).

The higher scores by African Americans on racial identity and preference for the color black may be the reflection of the slavery and oppression experience which is still central to the way they judge the world (Feagin & Sikes, 1994). They are distrusting of the system of the dominant culture which is regarded as the source of their powerlessness (Mirowsky & Rose, 1983). Distrust as a form of paranoia may occur as a result of people immersed in a culture different from their own (Terrell & Barrett, 1979; Fernigstein & Vanable, 1992). Cultural paranoia has been used to describe this situation (Whaley, 1998). Sociologists and social critics prefer to describe it as the *Culture of Resistance* (Sivanandan, 1990; Mitchell & Feagin, 1995; West, 1990, 1993; Martinez, 1997) and it is regarded as healthy and normal (Keisha-Khan, 2004; Comaraff, 2013).

Acculturation and assimilation

After a length of time of living in the United States, African immigrants face an acculturation effect (Bagley and Copeland, 1994) with African subjects more frequently endorsing the Euro-American values of the dominant culture and devaluing their own race. At the conformity stage of the Racial/Cultural Identity Development model, which is equivalent to the pre-encounter stage of the Cross model, attitudes toward other minorities are discriminatory and attitudes toward the dominant group are group appreciating (Atkinson, Morten and Sue, 1989), and there is a strong desire to assimilate and acculturate into the dominant culture (Sue and Sue, 1990). Despite the need for acculturation to ensure healthy relationships, it is also important to recognize the appropriate point at which interpersonal anxiety acculturation begins to drift into assimilation. Assimilation is the danger that all minority cultures face. It is a process of wiping out the minors to make the major bigger.

Striving for freedom

Both the colonization and slavery experiences of the African and African American subjects may have caused them to be less attracted to aspire to political positions due to feelings of exclusion (Fox and Lawless, 2005; Shah, 2014, 2015). As *figure 4* shows, both Africans and African Americans are interested in business ownership and financial opportunity, perhaps because those areas provide a sense of independence (Morokvasic, 1991) and self-reliance, which most minorities see as the alternative to institutionalized racism (Lazaridis & Koumandraki, 2003).

Altruism and personal prestige

There is a striking difference between Africans and African Americans on the value placed on altruism and personal prestige. On altruism, Africans scored only 25% and 90% on personal prestige. African Americans scored 80% and 20%, respectively. African American subjects interviewed had social ties with non-profit organizations and were involved in one social movement or another. Self-interest and ideal self were motivations to give and volunteer. (Sokolowski, 1996). African Americans would also be willing to give in the form of informal adoption of children of less fortunate relatives as a moral responsibility to protect the community and preserve its next generation (Stanfield, 1993). Generally, African American women respondents were more inclined to give than their male counterparts. This result supported previous research done by Eschholz & Slyke (2002). In comparison, black Africans' giving was in the form of mutual aid linked to their friends and relatives in their home countries (Okome, 2004), or was merely a repatriation of money back home for investment or family projects. African subjects did not indicate making themselves available for volunteerism beyond their ethnic communities or faith communities in the United States. The high score on personal prestige by African subjects may indicate being prideful and confident. African American subjects expressed that Africans may come across as being arrogant. This perception may lead to unhealthy competition rather than cooperation and may partly explain the tepid relationships between the groups.

Competition

All minority groups implicitly make efforts to impress the majority (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996). If one minority group is perceived as having an edge over the other in the scramble for remnant wealth, there comes a sense of competition, jealousy, accusations and counter accusations, and a we-versus-them mentality among the minority groups (Olzak, 1994). The resultant effect is in-group favoritism and out-group derogation (Hewstone, et al., 2002). This is the state of the relationships of Africans and African Americans. In this state, further intergroup and interpersonal distances are established (Bonacich, 1973). For instance, six of the African American subjects who were interviewed for this paper once worked with Africans for a length of time and lost their jobs due to different circumstances, yet accused Africans of coming to America to take their jobs, even though the effects of immigrant supply in the labor market had a very small effect on the earnings of American-born workers (Borjas, 1987). Much higher earning effect was noted with immigrant entrepreneurs and not with immigrant laborers (Sanders & Nee, 1987).

Conclusion

The implication of this result is that future investigation should be devoted to areas where differences were highlighted. Also, future investigation should look at other possible causes of the observed tepid relationships including the nature of contacts and interactions between the two groups. The similarities of variables across cultural and family orientation and other dimensions suggest the potential for productive relationships and call for renewed relationships between African and African American populations whether in the US or globally.

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- Youth Notes

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