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University of San Francisco

# **Narratives of Black Identifying Newcomer Youth**

A Thesis Proposal Presented to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in International and Multicultural Education

By  
Saniyyah Lateef  
May 2020

# **Narratives of Black Identifying Newcomer Youth**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

by  
Saniyyah Lateef  
May 2020

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project (or thesis) has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

*Jessie Blundell* EdD  
Instructor/Chairperson

18 May 2020

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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I first want to thank my ancestors for guiding me through my educational journey. They have given me the strength, courage, and wisdom to excel and succeed. The last two years have been some of the most difficult, emotional and transformative years in my life. I want to begin by giving my family and friends a huge thank you for supporting me and giving me encouragement throughout my journey. I want to thank my partner, Anthony, who went through this program with me and helped support me through the toughest times. Last, but not least, I want to give a special thank you to my newest ancestor, my grandmother Janice who passed away earlier this year. She inspired me to continue my education to the highest degree and to work hard for whatever I believed in. And to the students who let me hear and share their stories and experiences, I want to thank you deeply with all my heart for trusting me with your knowledge and stories. They are valid, your experiences are valid, and I am doing this work for you.

## **ABSTRACT**

This study seeks to explore and understand the unique and individual experiences of Black identifying newcomer youth in the United States. Current research related to the experience of newcomers is limited in regards to Black identifying newcomers. Through narrative inquiry methodology, this study seeks to share the experiences of Black identifying newcomer youth. It does this while recognizing that the omnipresence of racism in the United States, and acknowledging the influence of life prior experience on identity development. The intent of this study is to help educators and community members better understand the integration and assimilation processes of Black identifying newcomers. This research showcases the necessity of understanding the individual and collective needs of Black identifying youth in regard to peer support, language acquisition and identity development.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In 2018, there were an estimated 44.5 million newcomers to the United States, with research showing that in 2018, 22,491; and of those 44.5 million newcomers, Black identifying newcomers made up only nine percent of the population (Zong, Batalova & Burrows, 2019). While the percentage is small, the number of Black identifying newcomers coming to the United States is rising (Zong, Batalova & Burrows, 2019). While most research related to immigration focuses on Latinx and Asian newcomers, there is hardly any research on Black identifying newcomers and their children (Amthor & Roxas, 2016, p. 157). In addition to this gap, very little is known about the specific experiences of Black identifying newcomers and their children in the context of education (Block et al., 2014, p. 1338).

Studies show that in order to better understand the assimilation and integration process, it is important to understand and utilize the complex ways in which newcomers create and come into their ethnic and racial identities in new settings (Awokoya & Clark, 2008, p. 59). Some research has critiqued multicultural education and stated that it needs to become more inclusive for all immigrant and refugee students, while other research has analyzed and applauded the existence of schools that provide holistic education and services for newcomer youth (Amthor & Roxas, 2016; Bajaj & Suresh, 2018). Regardless, there remains a gap in the research that specifically explores the unique and individual integration processes and experiences of Black identifying newcomer youth. Little is known about how this translates to community building outside of school, or to academic success and achievement.

## **Statement of the Problem**

According to the Migration Policy Institute (2019), in 2017, 4.2 of 44.5 million immigrants to the United States were Black identifying (US Census, 2018); of those 4.2 million Black identifying newcomers, 600,000 were undocumented (McKanders, 2019). Although one of the smaller demographics of immigrants arriving in the United States, Black identifying individuals are one of the fastest growing populations of newcomers (Capps, Fix & McCabe, 2012). While Black identifying newcomers only make up nine percent of the newcomer population, not much is known about the individual and unique experiences they have in the United States.

Understanding the diversity of newcomers in general, and Black identifying newcomers in particular, is important in educational settings such as schools. Research conducted by Block, Cross, Riggs & Gibbs (2014) demonstrates a need for inclusive and supportive school settings for the rising number of newcomer students, specifically those who are refugees. Taylor and Sidhu (2012) highlight the need to build social capital among newcomers. Additional research illustrates the need to develop a more inclusive and culturally-relevant curriculum that integrates the experience of newcomers (Amthor & Roxas, 2016; Oikonomidou (2015). This must include the cultural knowledge and identities of Black identifying students, which is often not understood or celebrated in the classroom (Allen, Jackson & Knight, 2012).



The need for research on Black identifying students is essential. According to Thomas, Chiarelli-Helminiak, Ferraj and Barrette (2015) it is important to understand the ways in which Black identifying newcomers are able to develop social capital, which is vital to the integration of newcomers into their new spaces. According to Mwangi and English (2017), it is also important to understand the identity building and cultural competence that Black identifying newcomers develop in the classroom, as well as in their new country of residence. Research on these topics may contribute to the academic success and social integration of Black identifying students, as well as to their success in the greater community (Rong & Fitchett, 2008). In sum, it is imperative that research on Black identifying newcomers be conducted in order to better understand their identity and social development, as well as their educational successes and challenges.

### **Background and Need**

With only nine percent of those who are newcomers being Black identifying, there is minimal research available on them. Due to the gap in this research, there is a need to understand the identity formation process in regards to their integration and assimilation processes (Awokoya & Clark, 2008). Additionally, with this gap in research on Black identifying newcomers, especially in the context of education, being unavailable, many times these students experience racial and ethnic discrimination (Rong & Brown, 2002). While many newcomers face these types of discrimination and have varying experiences that are unique, based on a number of factors, Black identifying newcomers tend to be erased from this narrative; instead, Black identifying immigrants tend to be merged together with African American populations (Rong &

Brown, 2002). This is problematic due to the fact that research is needed to examine the unique and individual experiences of Black identifying newcomers (a) because they make up a rising number of the immigrant youth that we now find in our classrooms all over the United States and (b) the Black experience is not universal (Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017); (Ndemanu & Jordan, 2018).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to conduct narrative research about the unique and individual experiences of Black identifying newcomer students to the United States, in order to better understand the issues and needs specific to the Black identifying newcomers. This research will be conducted through semi-structured group interviews and one-on-one interview sessions with Black identifying students at the newcomer school, this research will critique and analyze the ways in which socialization and identity development affects the unknown and unmet needs of Black identifying newcomer students. In summary, this research will help identify which educational models and resources are appropriate in helping educators better understand the experiences of their Black identifying newcomer students, as well as illuminate the unique issues faced by this demographic of newcomers in the United States.

### **Research Questions/Hypotheses**

The purpose of these research questions is to aid in the conduction of qualitative research specifically on Black identifying newcomer students in the United States, specifically at a school for newcomers. These research questions were influenced by the work developed by Awokoya and Clark (2008) as well as by Allen, Jackson, and Knight (2012).

- 1.) What factors contribute to their identity formation of newcomer Black-identifying high school students?
- 2.) How do newcomer Black-identifying high school students describe the experience of integration in the US?
- 3.) How do newcomer Black-identifying high school students describe the experience of socialization in the US?
- 4.) How do newcomer Black-identifying high school students describe their experiences of discrimination in the US?

Through one-on-one interview sessions with Black identifying students at the newcomer school, this research will critique and analyze the ways in which socialization and identity development affects the unknown and unmet needs of Black identifying newcomer students. The themes that will be explored in this research are culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies, holistic and trauma informed pedagogies, as well as racialization and treatment of Black people in the United States.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This thesis will use Romero's (2008) use of *critical race theory* as an approach to talking about immigration studies topics. Romero's use of critical race theory will act as a lens through which the research for this study will be analyzed and critiqued. In addition, this framework will be used to help with the scaffolding of information and aid in the understanding of the research findings. Romero's (2008) use of critical race theory as an approach to expanding upon topics in immigration is a useful frame for this thesis because she explains how critical race theorists are able to analyze immigration studies through an interdisciplinary lens and to see race and

ethnicity as more than just natural identifiers, but rather as social constructs that were made to be used with negative intent.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The research methodology used for this study is narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is a type of methodology that is known to be an oral or written text that shares the account(s) of an event(s)/action(s) that are connected chronologically (Creswell., 2006, p. 54). According to Clandinin (2006), this type of research seeks to holistically analyze and understand the living and cross-functional timelines that make up ours and others lives. With this study, the research seeks to identify and learn about the unique and individual experiences of Black identifying newcomer youth at a small, cosmopolitan public high school in an urban area of Northern California. The research method being used in this study is interviews. The researcher will develop an interview protocol and each interview will be recorded using the researchers phone or computer, using the ‘voice recorder’ and sometimes the ‘camera’ application (see Appendix X). Participants will receive a transcribed version of their interview, after the interview has been conducted. The interviews will be conducted on the school site during after school hours.

### **Participants**

All of the participants of the study are current students of the high school site. A total of 3 students will be interviewed. Participants will be selected based on their personal racial/ethnic identification and their affiliation to the school site. Though the researcher is not a newcomer, the researcher was able to establish a connection with the students prior to the study through

working daily with these students at the school site and developing a connection with the individual student participants. The researcher herself is an Afro Caribbean, born in the United States to one immigrant parent. The purpose of this study is to help gain a deeper understanding into the unique experiences of the Black identifying newcomers in a diverse school setting and identify the best ways in which to serve these students. The rationale for this sampling method is convenience. This will be done by selecting participants who are currently enrolled or previously enrolled at the school site.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study may be limited by a number of factors including, but not limited to, sample size, duration of the study and the diversity of the sample. The times at which the interviews will be conducted, in addition to the time allotted for the study as a whole, may limit the amount of participants in the study. The narratives of men and women are equally important in understanding the Black newcomer experiences, however, in this study the perspectives and narratives of male students might be greater in size due to the school's population demographics. This, as well as the unique demographics of the school site, will limit the ability of the researcher to apply the conclusions of this study to the larger population of Black identifying newcomers in the United States. Therefore, this study might not reflect how certain pedagogical models and tools can be used to assist in educating and creating community amongst Black identifying newcomers generally.

## **Significance of the Project**

The findings of this study may be applicable to educators in the informal and formal sectors of education within the United States. The findings may also add to the understanding and development of specific pedagogical approaches and educational tools that might aid in the social development and inclusion, academic successes, and cultural importance and celebration of Black identifying newcomer youth. Additionally, the findings might be significant to other researchers who are interested in understanding the multifaceted and complex ways in which Black identifying newcomers are able to create their identities and acclimate to their new environments. This research may also interest students, communities, and other municipalities looking to gain insight into the unique experiences of Black identifying newcomers and their children, in their respective spaces.

## **Definition of Terms**

- **Black Identifying newcomers:** Newly arrived immigrants who identify as Caribbean or of African origin.
- **Newcomer:** A newly arrived person to the United States

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the last decade, the United States has experienced an increase in newcomers. Studies illustrate that to better understand how newcomers create and develop their ethnic and racialized identities in their new environments, it is important to understand the assimilation and integration processes (Awokoya & Clark, 2008, p. 59). This may be accomplished through the lens of critical race theory in order to understand how race and immigration status intersect to create identities in the context of the United States (Romero, 2008). While current research on immigrants focuses on Latinx and Asian immigrants, research on Black identifying immigrants and their children is limited (Amthor & Roxas, 2016, p. 157). Due to this gap, the cultural knowledge and identities of Black identifying newcomer students is often not understood or celebrated in the school setting (Allen, Jackson & Knight, 2012).

This literature review claims that there is a need for research on the experiences of Black identifying newcomer youth in educational settings. In the first section of this literature review, Critical Race Theory is described as a vital framework for evaluating the experiences of people of color. In the two sections that follow, two bodies of research that support the claim there is a need for research on the experiences of Black identifying newcomer youth, are discussed. This includes a body of research that illustrates that there is a lack of evidence and research on the individual and unique experiences of Black identifying newcomers. It also includes a body of research that demonstrates how the unique and individual experiences of Black identifying newcomer students are marginalized in education spaces and research. Side by side reasoning is used to connect these bodies of research because they include the use of various authors, studies,

theorists, experts, and/or statistics to create a cohesive body of contextual evidence. A visual representation of the logic equation is as follows:  $R_1, R_2, R_3 \cdot C$  (Machi & McEvoy, 2012, p. 97).

### **Critical Race Theory**

Within critical race theory, one of its tenets claim that, in the context of the United States, racism is deeply ingrained into the structure and foundation of this country's existence (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This section includes (a) a brief history of critical race theory including Bell's (1995) original scholarship describing the origins of critical race theory, as well as the unique qualities that make critical race theory important (b) the work of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) that conceptualizes education, through the lens of critical race theory (c) the ideas developed by Romero (2008) that illustrates the necessity of looking at immigration through critical race theory lens (d) a discussion of Omi and Winant (2015) who theorize race, as well as racial projects and their formation. This progression of thought is important because it demonstrates the building of a story about race and racism in the United States, and contextualizes the claim that there is a need for research on the experiences of Black identifying newcomer youth in educational settings.

The seminal work that defines critical race theory includes that of Bell (1995). This original scholarship describes the origins of critical race theory, as well as the unique qualities that make critical race theory important. The need for this theory arose from the existing scholarship of critical legal studies and previous civil rights scholarship (p. 899). Bell professes that a critical race theorist's main goal is to achieve a society that is equitable and inclusive of the voices and views of those who are marginalized and excluded.



In the same year as Bell (1995) Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) conceptualized education through the lens of critical race theory. In their scholarship, Ladson-Billings and Tate examined the intersection of race and property, and how that creates inequity in schools (p. 49). In their work, they use the case of desegregation in the 1950s in the United States to explain how the decision to desegregate schools was never to create equity, but rather to benefit the dominant group. Evidence of this includes, as Ladson-Billings and Tate explained, began with the treatment of African slaves by white people during slavery; creating a system that categorized slaves as property. Then leading to the 1960s, in which white people were still able to maintain a superior-subordinate system in education with segregation and the creation of different physical schools. Today, we see this as tracking programs, AP courses, and gifted/and or honors programs.

Ladson-Billings and Tate also build on the ideas of W. E. B. Du Bois who claimed that African Americans consciously experience dual identities as they attempt to navigate their Blackness and their Americanness (p. 50). This concept of double consciousness is one that is connected to the identity formation processes for Black identifying people in the United States. It can be extended to the case of Black identifying newcomers who face the challenge of navigating their Black identity, their American identity, and their newcomer identity. Understanding this helps to justify the claim that there is a need for research on the experiences of Black identifying newcomer youth in educational settings.

Related to this is the contribution to the field of critical race theory by Romero (2008), who illustrates the necessity of looking at immigration through the lens of critical race theory. Romero (2008) describes the beginnings of immigration theory which includes the newcomer

experiences of competition, conflict or accommodation, which inevitably lead to assimilation. Similarly, in my research, the description of immigration theory in Romero's work shares similar ideas with the theory and concepts that are included in black identity development which was introduced by Bailey W. Jackson. Romero claims that immigration studies in the United States may benefit from using a critical race theory lens. This is because critical race theory focuses on the context of the United States and can be applied to understand the individual and complex experiences of immigrants in that context. This is particularly relevant for research that explores the identity formation and integration of Black identifying newcomer youth in school settings.

A final theoretical work that is relevant to research inquiring about the experiences of Black identifying newcomer youth in school settings is Omi and Winant (2015). Omi and Winant explore race, racial formation, and racial projects. Omi and Winant define race as "a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies" (p.110). They define racial formation as "the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed" (p. 109). Racial projects are defined as something that interprets, explains and represents racial identities and their meanings as a way to establish and distribute resources along specific racial lines (p. 125). This addition to the field of critical race theory is important because it explains what race and racism are, and how they are constructed in the context of the United States. In addition, these definitions of race, racial formations, and racial projects can be used to help to frame the experiences of Black identifying newcomer youth in the school or classroom setting. The experiences of Black identifying newcomers who, because they are both Black and newcomers, are often both marginalized and excluded in educational settings.

In sum, critical race theory illustrates that race and racism were socially constructed tools created to assist in creating and reproducing inequity in the United States. (a) Bell's (1995) original scholarship describing the origins of critical race theory (b) the work of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) that examines education through the lens of critical race theory (c) the idea of understanding immigration through critical race theory lens (Romero, 2008) (d) definitions of race, racial formation, and racial projects (Omi and Winant, 2015). Related to this is a body of research that illustrates the necessity of examining the unique experiences of Black identifying newcomer youth, especially in the context of education in the United States. The following sections discuss this research.

### **The Socialization of Black Identifying Newcomer Youth**

Research demonstrates that while it is important to understand the socialization and integration processes of Black identifying newcomers and their children, research on the topic is limited. Research that demonstrates this includes (a) a study by Awokoya and Clark (2008) that illustrates the lack of understanding of Black identifying newcomers experiences in teacher education and educational research (b) a study that claims that the use of multicultural and culturally relevant education may be the best tools in supporting newcomer youth (Amthor & Roxas, 2016) (c) a study that articulates the necessity of analyzing and understanding the unique socialization process of Black identifying newcomers (Rong & Brown, 2002). This is important because taken together, these studies provide a rationale for understanding the unique and individual experiences of Black identifying newcomer youth during their identity formation and integration process.

To begin, research illustrates that in teacher education and academic research, there is a lack of understanding about the unique and individual experiences of Black newcomers. Evidence of this can be found in Awokoya and Clark's (2008) research who claim that certain theories could help to aid in understanding the experience of these students. Similarly, Rong and Brown (2002) demonstrate the same need to study and analyze the experiences of Black identifying newcomers by taking it a step further to understand the complexities of their identity and their experiences by assessing the other factors that might also contribute to the outcomes of their experiences. Rong and Brown (2002) also add that the identities of Black identifying newcomers becomes fluid and is influenced by those with whom they find community. In contrast, Awokoya and Clark (2008) focused on the differences between the Black identifying newcomers and African Americans. In sum, this research articulates that in order for their to be better understanding on how to support Black identifying newcomers, we must first learn and identify their strengths and educational styles.

Related to this, research investigating what the most suitable curriculum for newcomers articulates that multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogies could have positive long-term effects for newcomer youth. Evidence of this can be found in Amthor and Roxas' (2016) work who claim that cross-cultural relationships are built in this environment where multicultural education is taught and celebrated. Similarly, Awokoya and Clark (2008) demonstrate that a similar practice of understanding the appropriate and previously utilized learning styles would be beneficial to understanding how to successfully help Black identifying newcomers in the classroom setting. Additionally, Awokoya and Clark (2008) assess their research through the lens of the Black identifying newcomer only. In contrast, Rong and Brown

(2008) claim that the experiences and outcomes thereof, of Black identifying newcomers is due to their triple disadvantage. That means, they are economically disadvantaged, Black and a newcomer. In total, this research illustrates that not only do Black identifying newcomer youth have extremely unique and varying experiences, the experiences of their families are also contributing factors to the outcomes of their experiences in the educational and classroom settings.

A final body of research claims there is a necessity in understanding the unique socialization processes of newcomers and the positive benefits that could aid newcomers through multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogies. Evidence of this can be found in Amthor and Roxas (2016) research, who claim that the use of multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy can aid in producing cross-cultural relationships in tandem with cross-cultural learning. Similarly, Rong and Brown (2002) demonstrate by giving an example in their research of Black identifying newcomer students engaging with African American students in their journey through identity formation. Amthor and Roxas (2016) add that in building cross-cultural relationships, there is a more positive understanding and educational outcomes due to the sincerity of interest in the students. In contrast, Awokoya and Clark (2008) claim that Black identifying newcomer students have little to non-existent relationships with their classroom educators and this in turn posits a negative effect to the newcomer's experience. When taken together, this research suggests that within the complexities involved in the identity formation and socialization of Black identifying newcomers, their individual experiences can have different effects and potential outcomes socially and educationally.

In summary, research demonstrates that there is a gap in research pertaining to the socialization and assimilation processes of Black identifying newcomer youth. This includes a study that illustrates the lack of understanding of Black identifying newcomers experiences in teacher education and educational research (Awokoya & Clark, 2008), research that claims that the use of multicultural and culturally relevant education could be the best tools in supporting newcomer youth (Amthor & Roxas, 2016), and research that articulates the necessity of analyzing and understanding the unique socialization process of Black identifying newcomers (Rong & Brown, 2002). Taken together, this body of research justifies that there is a gap in research pertaining to the experiences of Black identifying newcomer youth, especially in the context of education. Related to this is the understanding that the experiences between Black identifying newcomers varies greatly. Whether it be their place of origin, their citizenship status, or their economic status; these factors in turn are closely associated with the outcomes of Black newcomer students socially as well as educationally.

### **Unique Experiences for Black Identifying Newcomers**

Similar to the necessity to understand the intricacies involved in the socialization processes of Black identifying newcomers, research demonstrates that there is also a need to understand and evaluate the unique experiences in relation to the varying identities that these students have. In the large group of Black identifying newcomers, each experience is unique. This includes research that illustrates the differences between the experiences of Black identifying newcomers from West Africa in comparison to the rest of the African diaspora (Allen, Jackson & Knight, 2012), research that articulates the necessity of relationship building between Black identifying newcomers and African Americans (Traoreé, 2003), and research that

claims that Black identifying newcomers and African American students are not researched enough, as well as how there is an additional identity that affects assimilation for Black identifying newcomers (Rong & Brown, 2001). This is important because this research reflects the notion that the experiences of Black identifying newcomers and people vary based on a number of factors.

To begin, research often illustrates the experiences of all Black identifying people being homogeneous, however this is not the case. Evidence of this can be found in Allen, Jackson and Knight's (2012) work who claim that more research on Black identifying newcomer students would then maintain the notion that including culturally relevant knowledge has a positive outcome for Black identifying newcomers. Similarly, Rong and Brown (2001) demonstrate the same argument in which they identify that there is a gap in research relating to the unique experiences and differences amongst Black identifying people, especially newcomers. In contrast, Traoreé (2003) claims that as a whole, Black identifying students are not sufficiently researched in the context of education. In sum, this research articulates the importance of individual and personal research due to the unique and varying experiences of Black identifying newcomers and their places of origin.

Related to this, research investigating the similarities and differences between the experiences of Black identifying newcomers and African Americans articulates the necessity of cross-cultural relationship building as well as cross-cultural understanding to better serve the students in the classroom and other educational spaces. Evidence of this can be found in Traoreé's (2003) research who claims that due to the way in which the education system is set up, Black students' cultural knowledge is not valued, and the things they learned were not created

for them. Similarly, Allen, Jackson and Knight (2012) add that the use of culturally relevant pedagogy, with the added and expanded understanding of the cultural knowledge of Black identifying newcomer students would aid in positive experiences and outcomes in the classroom setting. In contrast, Rong and Brown (2001) claim, in agreement with Traoreé (2003), that relationship building and cross-cultural understanding between Black identifying newcomers and African American students is vital to creating inclusivity. In total, this research illustrates the importance of cross-cultural understanding as well as relationship building to aid in the understanding of the unique experiences across those who are Black identifying.

A final body of research claims that due to the gap in research pertaining to Black identifying newcomers as well as African American students, this in turn has created a lack of understanding of their educational needs. Evidence of this can be found in Rong and Brown's (2001) research who claim teachers need to understand and move away from the ideology that race equates to ethnic identity and in turn a homogenous experience. Similarly, Allen, Jackson and Knight (2012) demonstrate the same theory and specifically analyzed the experiences of West African students. In conclusion, altogether, this research suggests that the complexities of each Black identifying student's experience could aid in identifying the educational needs of these students by understanding who they are and where they come from.

In summary, research demonstrates that there is a little research on Black identifying newcomers and their unique experiences in the United States. This includes research that illustrates the differences between the experiences of Black identifying newcomers from West Africa in comparison to the rest of the African diaspora (Allen, Jackson & Knight, 2012), research that articulates the necessity of relationship building between Black identifying



newcomers and African Americans (Traoreé, 2003), and research that claims that Black identifying newcomers and African American students are not researched enough, as well as how there is an additional identity that affects assimilation for Black identifying newcomers (Rong & Brown, 2001). Taken together, this body of research justifies that there is a gap in research relating to the understanding and identification of educational needs of Black identifying newcomer students.

### **Acculturation and Identity Development in a Racialized United States**

Similar to the importance of understanding and researching the unique experiences that Black identifying newcomers have, research demonstrates the need to also examine Black identifying newcomers' experience in the acculturation processes in relation to their racial and ethnic identities. This includes (a) research that illustrates how experiences in the home and school setting influence identity development (Okpalaoka, 2009) (b) research that articulates the implications of homogenizing the Black experience in the United States that negatively impacts Black identifying newcomers (Rong & Fitchett, 2008) (c) research that claims that the identity alignment process is complex and ongoing (Thelamour & Johnson, 2017) and d) research that highlights the understanding of identity development and racial understanding through examining multilingualism (Davila, 2018). This is important because this collective research illuminates that understanding how Black identifying newcomers go through identity development can have various implications in the context of social and academic development.

To begin, research illustrates that experiences and social interactions in the home and school setting aids in shaping Black identifying newcomers identity. Evidence of this can be found in Okpalaoka (2009) who claims that in the identity development processes of Black

identifying newcomers, they are influenced by interactions in the home setting as well as the school setting. Similarly, Rong & Fitchett (2008) demonstrate the importance of educators understanding the Black identifying newcomers identity development experiences in various contexts, i.e. the home, school, and greater society in general. Okpalaoka (2009) adds that when identity development happens, an individual tries to calibrate themselves within a broader social setting in order to assimilate. In contrast, Rong & Fitchett (2008) claim that in trying to find a balance and understanding of their identity, Black identifying individuals may end up in social isolation or marginalization from the difficulty of trying to fit in. In sum, this research articulates that there is a gap in research in examining the social experiences Black identifying newcomers have in their homes and how this might present the implications being seen as socialization happening in the school setting.

Related to this, research investigating socialization and identity transformation processes of Black immigrant students in the US articulates the necessity of conducting research on the various ethnic groups that exist within the larger group of Black identifying newcomers. Evidence of this can be found in the work of Rong and Fitchett (2008) who claim that there are varying differences amongst the larger group of Black immigrants that would contribute to their experiences once in the United States. Similarly, Thelamour and Johnson (2017) demonstrate in their research the way the socialization and identity formation processes work through researching their understanding of acting like the majority (white Americans) or acting like their minority counterparts (Black Americans). Thelamour and Johnson (2017) add that Black identifying newcomers acculturation can come from the influence of culture from Black Americans. In contrast, Rong and Fitchett (2008) claim that it is a disservice to analyze the

experiences of Black identifying newcomers to Black Americans. In total, this research illustrates that there is a need to understand the identity development and socialization of Black identifying newcomers in relation to those who racially identify with and what is considered mainstream majority culture.

A final body of research claims there are various implications that happen as a result of the identity formation process and socialization for Black identifying newcomers through their use of multiple languages. Evidence of this can be found in Davila's (2018) work which claims that students are able to use language as a way to establish and learn identity. Similarly, Rong and Fitchett (2008) demonstrates the necessity to take into account home languages as it concerns understanding Black identifying newcomers varying and unique experiences. Thelamour and Johnson (2017) add that Black identifying newcomer students were more concerned about their physical (racial) differences than they were their behavioral or linguistic differences. In contrast, Davila (2018) claims that the varying linguistic differences in the classroom provides a space for students to utilize their previous knowledge and experiences navigating spaces. When taken together, this research suggests that language is another dimension to consider when looking at the socialization and identity formation of Black identifying newcomer youth.

In summary, research demonstrates that in order to understand the Black identifying newcomer experience, we must also examine and understand the socialization and identity development processes and the implications that result from that. This includes (a) research that illustrates the difference in socialization as it comes to interactions in the home and at school (Okpalaoka, 2009) (b) research that expresses the implications of grouping together the Black

experience in the United States and how that negatively impacts Black identifying newcomers (Rong & Fitchett, 2008) (c) research that claims that the identity development process is complex and continuous (Thelamour & Johnson, 2017) and d) research that highlights the need to examine identity development and identity development and awareness through language (Davila, 2018). Taken together, this body of research justifies that there are multiple dimensions that contribute to the socialization and identity development of Black identifying newcomers that need to be examined in order to better understand their experiences.

### **Summary**

This literature review claims that there is a need for research on the experiences of Black identifying newcomer youth in the educational and classroom setting. Evidence that supports this claim includes research pertaining to critical race theory as a theoretical framework for understanding the experiences of Black identifying newcomers (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995, Bell 1995, Omi & Winant, 2015, Romero, 2008), research that illustrates the unique socialization and assimilation processes amongst Black identifying newcomers (Awokoya & Clark, 2008, Rong & Brown, 2002, Amthor & Roxas, 2016), the unique experiences in educational and classroom settings amongst Black identifying students (Allen, Jackson, & Knight, 2012, Traoreé, (2003), Rong & Brown, 2001) and research that examines the acculturation and racial identity development that impacts their understanding of their race in the United States (Davila, 2018, Okpalaoka, 2009 Rong & Fitchett, 2008, Thelamour & Johnson, 2017). This claim and body of evidence addresses the fact that very little is known about the individual and unique experiences they have in the United States by highlighting these gaps in research and sharing the implications they have on the experiences of these students. With my

thesis, I propose the importance of investigating, understanding, and highlighting these unique experiences of Black identifying newcomer youth in order to better understand their experiences socially as well as the effects they have on these students academically.

## CHAPTER III

### REFLECTION

With an influx of newcomers in the United States in the last decade, 4.2 million of the estimated 44.5 million newcomers in the United States were Black identifying (Migration Policy Institute, 2019; US Census, 2018). Current research illuminates that in order to better understand the ways in which newcomers are able to construct and establish their ethnic and racial identities in their new surroundings, it is important to understand the integration and assimilation processes (Awokoya & Clark, 2008). However, immigration research focuses mainly on Latinx and Asian immigrants, with limited research on Black identifying immigrants and their children (Amthor & Roxas, 2016). As a result of this gap in research, the identities and cultural knowledge of Black identifying newcomer students are neither understood nor celebrated in the classroom or school setting (Allen, Jackson & Knight, 2012).

This chapter includes a partial thesis, a reflective narrative, and a conclusion section. The partial thesis section includes a summary and an analysis of the data collected thus far. This section is organized under two headings: *Moments of Comfort* and *Moments of Discomfort*. Under *Moments of Comfort* positive experiences of peer support are discussed. Under the second heading, *Moments of Discomfort* experiences were shared about. The reflective narrative describes my original research plan, the factors that impacted this plan, insights gathered during the process of navigating the personal and community hardships resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, and a discussion of next steps. The conclusion offers a summary of key findings and insights related to the data that I was able to collect, and my thoughts and reflections including suggestions for future researchers.

## Partial Thesis

### Summary of Collected Data

The data collected for this thesis is taken from two interviews conducted with Black identified students via Zoom. From the two interviews, I was able to collect data and categorize them into two major themes: *Moments of Comfort* and *Moments of Discomfort*, which are discussed below. In the *Moments of Comfort* section I highlight narratives that I understood to be positive experiences of integration and assimilation, focusing mainly on support and community. In the *Moments of Discomfort* section I highlight narratives that I understood to be adverse experiences of integration and assimilation, focusing mainly on language and identity.

#### *Moments of Comfort:*

A common theme in the data was the need for support. The data collected for this study demonstrates that support often came from peer groups. For example, one student shared an experience feeling supported by a student group:

And as we got the group, we can say the other experience of how we feel in the school.

And I think it's really helpful for us to go somebody we can talk to. And we got this when there was like, discrimination going on, so we got to write our reports. We put it everywhere around the school; so they allowed us to do that. And I feel like that makes us [feel] really good that somebody got our back.

Another student shared a similar experience of positive support from the student group. This student shared:

The group talk about like what challenge we're facing in the school. I know like our school like we don't really have that much Black people in our school— so like, when

people first come to our school like they feel lonely and stuff. So most of the time we work in our socializing.

In another example, a student I interviewed shared an experience of finding community in sport.

She shared:

But when I got here. So, you know, I was lonely, me, so I don't know what to do. And I was like, Okay, I'm gonna - I see the girls play. They laughing. They playing all the stuff and also. Okay, I think I can just go to play soccer. So, I was try and go to soccer and making friends, just have fun. I think it really helped me 'cause also I can tell my feelings. I can see somebody who spoke -- like I don't know how I feel. Other stuff.

This data demonstrates that the need for support among Black identifying newcomer youth was often met by other students.

***Moments of Discomfort:***

One theme that came up often in the interviews were memories and moments of discomfort related to spoken language, particularly English. Students shared moments that caused them frustration or dissatisfaction. A student reflected on their school experiences with language, sharing “Cause my English wasn’t that good, but I feel like it doesn’t matter.” She continued, expressing her thoughts on the inequitable language support for newcomers at her school:

They can still supporting me. Because I feel like a lot of Latinos at that school they [students] was speaking English, but they got much support because the workers there are speaking Spanish. And as I see, I don’t see nobody speaking [student’s home language] there, like my language.



Another student shared their experiences of isolation related to language and his interactions with his peers:

I think like when we were like 10th grade, everybody like don't know English and then we don't really talk that much together. Like if you're Latino you speak with the Latinos and then in here. If you're from Africa. You just talk with African people instead.

A final theme that surfaced in the students' narratives were some painful and uncomfortable memories related to their identity development as Black. For example, one student shared a memory in which she felt very confused, stating, "I have one friend. I mean, not my friends. He's my he's my classmate. He from India. He's like kind of dark." She continued, sharing this anecdote of a memory in school:

When we were in 11th grade, we have reading class for another teacher. And this-- this boy was calling him "n\*\*\*a" word And he's like, I'm not Black. And the boys say "You're Black! You're Black!" He's saying, "I'm not Black".. and I raised my hand and I was like "Why do you guys have to say "n\*\*\*a" like, in this class? I feel like you guys are trying to tell me or something by saying the "n\*\*\*a" word. He's not Black, he's not Black." Like he is Indian. He's not Black why you have to call him "n\*\*\*a"?

Another student reflected on a similar anecdote that also took place at school:

I don't know, you know I used to think Black people are like, they're going to be treated like as White, like as everybody. I used to think everybody was equal. But when I came here like there is a difference. I'm like is something I like in my country, I feel like the same as other people. You know when you come here, like everything like [Black identified staff] explained me like I have to be careful what my actions do. I have to be

careful when police near me like, like you have to be careful more than other race because I'm Black and stuff and then make me like feel like “Oh, this is something big” like, I don't like it.

This data demonstrates that some newcomers have negative experiences related to language and their identity development as Black-identifying newcomers.

### **Analysis of Collected Data**

An analysis of this data suggests that Black-identifying newcomer students often face similar issues, or have similar experiences, specifically related to peer support, language acquisition and identity development. In regard to language acquisition the students interviewed often felt that their language needs were not supported to the same degree as their other newcomer peers. Concerning identity, the students expressed varying opinions on what life was like prior to arriving in the United States. However, they seemed to have a relatively similar understanding and awareness of their Black identities after being in the United States. This identity development underscored the need for support, which the student found mainly through peer support.

### **Reflective Narrative**

#### **Original Research Plan**

The original research plan for this thesis included conducting interviews using a narrative inquiry methodology. I specifically wanted to explore Black identifying newcomer youth at a small, international public high school in an urban area of Northern California. The interviews were to be conducted with three students. The students selected would have been recruited through flyers posted at a local community center that serves the high school. Participants were

to be chosen based on their identification as Black and their age. The interviews were going to be one-on-one, in person, and recorded via audio or video. Additionally, the interviews were to happen outside of school hours, at a location convenient to the participants, running no longer than one hour and thirty minutes in length.

### **Change in Circumstances**

Before I began conducting my research, an unforeseeable change occurred which lasted the duration of the semester: the COVID-19 global pandemic. Before I could even begin advertising the governor of our state ordered a shelter-in-place for the entire state. This called for everyone to stay inside their homes except for when an activity, such as grocery shopping or seeking health care, was deemed essential. This presented a multitude of issues that called for my research plan to change. I was no longer able to recruit participants as the community center had closed. I was no longer able to interact with students in-person as schools were closed. The circumstances changed so dramatically that my research plan was no longer actionable.

### **Response to Change in Circumstances**

In response to these changes in circumstance I decided to alter my recruitment plan for my research. I submitted a modification to the Internal Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) that allowed me to recruit via a distance learning platform at my school. Through this process I was able to conduct the interviews from which the data discussed above was gathered. Rather than delay my graduation I chose to complete this revised chapter, offered by my department as a support to students during the pandemic, in order to fulfill the requirements for graduation. My decision to alter my recruitment plan for my research and narrow down my criteria was influenced by a few factors: 1) my motivation to graduate at the

end of the semester, 2) the need to carry out important research and 3) the support of my professors and peers.

### **Insights**

By engaging in this response to the change in circumstances, I gained insight in several ways. For example, prior to the shelter-in-place order due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I never thought about accessibility to the students I was trying to recruit. In my original research plan, I was going to meet with students in person in order to conduct the interviews. Due to the shelter-in-place, the remaining choices were phone interviews or video chats. While this was a feasible solution for me as the researcher, it was not an option that provided an equitable or accessible chance for all potential participants. Students in the population from which I intended to draw my sample do not necessarily have access to the internet or computers; this emergent issue caused me to think about solutions for future researchers should a similar situation like this occur again. These ideas are discussed below.

### **Re-imagining and Next Steps**

This moment may help to reimagine not only equity in education but also equity in society and humanity at large. As an educator, I propose that we provide mutual aid and collective care for our students and in turn, our communities. We can challenge norms by reshaping our lives and creating a semblance of normalcy by refining and reworking the most efficient ways to provide distance learning. For language learners, such as the participants in this study, one way to be mindful of equity issues and access is to understand the needs of language learners in a broader way. For Black-identifying newcomers, this might include language support such as translation, but also consistent support from teachers and paraprofessionals who

speak the same native language. This might also be the social-emotional supports necessary for positive identity development. From the data collected for this study, this might include peer support in a variety of forms as well as mediation for peer conflicts. Finally, it might also include a more formalized system of cultural support that helps students to navigate the complex terrain of racial identity formation in the United States context. We might practice showing care by choosing to support our students, and by extension our communities, in these ways. We can choose to do this in a time when it might be easier for us to hate or be cynical. We continue to show love by providing mutual aid and collective care for our students, especially our newcomers, by understanding and providing for their needs.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, despite a difficult process and many complications, it is possible to identify a few key findings and insights from the partial data I collected. Some key findings include the following:

- Racism in the United States is prominent and Black identifying newcomers experiences tend to be homogenized. As critical race theory states, racism in the United States is a normal, everyday occurrence, and that was apparent in the stories that were shared by the students.
- Additionally, the understanding of one's identity prior to emigrating to the United States potentially plays a role in how a student chooses to assimilate or integrate. Because of this, the experiences of Black identifying newcomer youth is important to understand.

The literature reviewed for this thesis demonstrates that there is a need for more research on Black-identifying newcomer students in the United States. The limited data collected for this

study, during the time of a pandemic, confirms this and shows that a commitment to caring for these students must be embedded in the research process.

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