EVOLVING ETHNIC Identity AND RECOGNIZING RELATEDNESS: 
AN EXAMINATION OF ETHNIC AND FAMILY Identity DEVELOPMENT AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS REUNITING WITH EXTRA-EXTENDED RELATIVES FROM AFRICA

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Abstract

African Americans are increasingly using genetic genealogy to go beyond the vague estimates of ancestral ethnicities to identify genetic matches with people who are within two generations of migration from Africa or who still live on the African continent. An African and African American genetic match engaging with one another as relatives presents an emerging situation that challenges our understanding of families and identity. African Americans engage in genetic genealogy for African ancestry, genealogical research, and formation of ties with African ancestral homelands. Ethnic identity develops through ethnic socialization and periods of ethnic identity exploration and commitment. As relatives from Africa share knowledge about their ethnicity with African American relatives, African Americans have new agents of socialization and new information to inform their ethnic identity. Family identity as a psychological sense of belonging to a specific family group develops through family socialization and internalizing a family heritage which gives them a social location within the family narrative. Notably, existing studies on family identity development focus on adolescent populations rather than adult populations. This study used grounded theory methods to develop a grounded theory on family identity development and ethnic identity development among African Americans who engaged in social interactions with their extra-extended relatives from Africa. The objectives of this study are to examine (1) the familial and ethnic meanings of relatedness with an African genetic match, (2) the processes of family and ethnic identity development within the context of ancestral family reunification, and (3) psychological outcomes associated with family and ethnic identity development within the context of ancestral family reunification. Examining the collective experiences of the participants of this study, participants felt (1) a sense of lack in African ancestral history and (2) an evolving ethnic identity while (3) recognizing relatedness, and (4) managing many emotions associated with the experience. New family forms are taking shape through emerging African transnational families which provides a new social context for the ethnic identity development for African American adults.
Dedication

#WalterScott

I had a nightmare last night related to Walter Scott and woke up in tremors; I woke up trembling. We ask, "what if there was no video" because we know that the voices of sole African Americans are not believed or not valued by the majority in the U.S., but I think we also ask because of a persistent belief in the American justice system, the American people, and the American way of life. And I believe that this absurd belief persists because we think that we have no other options. Walter Scott, I dedicate my project to you.

LaKisha T. David, Facebook Post, April 8, 2015
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Chapter 1: Introduction

African Americans are part of an African diaspora whose ancestral displacement was due to the Transatlantic Slave Trade. African family connections were lost due to imposed disruptions of familial ties during the U.S. slave era (Butler, 2001). Nevertheless, African Americans are increasingly engaged in social interactions with Africans who share DNA with them (henceforth, “genetic matches” or “extra-extended relatives”). African Americans use commercial genetic genealogy testing services such as 23andMe and AncestryDNA to identify and interact with previously unknown African extra-extended relatives. That is, African Americans are finding living African genetic matches with common African ancestors. Suppose biologically related Africans and African Americans engage in social interactions as a family. In that case, it will present a monumental transformation in the meaning and experience of family that family scholars have yet to examine sufficiently.

Research on genealogy finds that African Americans initially engage in genetic genealogy to discover their African ancestors' ethnicities. This type of information, even when vague (e.g., learning that their maternal lineage is similar to the Akan people of Ghana today), gives them a sense of completeness (Nelson, 2016). However, genetic genealogy testing services also enable testers to identify individual extra-extended relatives from Africa from among the other testers within the company’s database. African Americans are increasingly going beyond the vague estimates of ancestral ethnicities to identify genetic matches within two generations of migration from Africa or who still live on the African continent. Skilled family genealogists provide strong evidence for relatedness using the genetic genealogy tools that allow comparison at the chromosomal level. However, studies on genetic genealogy have yet to examine kinship meanings associated with African American use of genetic testing to identify and engage in social interactions with African extra-extended relatives.

Some scholars situate African genealogies within a broader context of social justice. They recognize genetic genealogy use among African Americans as an attempt to restore an identity lost due to the slave trade. At the African Genetics and Genealogies: Looking Backward to Look Forward symposium sponsored by the Center for Bioethics of the University of Minnesota in 2002, Annette Dula stated that “[t]racing genealogies is important philosophically, ethically, and politically…It is an attempt to reclaim history, to regain culture, and to gain knowledge and a sense of place that has been denied us” (Dula et al., 2003, p. 134). Although Dula objects to using genetics to reclaim identity, she acknowledges that genetic genealogy testing can provide information about ancestral ethnicities (Dula et al., 2003), information that could not be obtained any other way.

Dula asserts that there remains a need for healing from slavery that has mostly been ignored by institutions of the United States—healing that could be facilitated by the work of African genealogists (Dula et al., 2003). From the same symposium, geneticist Charmaine Royal suggested that because of the
psychological weight that some African Americans attribute to genetic genealogy, “we must give this information as much care as we do any other genetic counselling” (Dula et al., 2003, p. 137). She asserts that it is imperative to understand the motivations and expectations of genetic genealogy testing (Dula et al., 2003).

Although scholars recognize the potential psychological impact of African genetic genealogy for African Americans, they generally speak against pursuing genetic genealogy, citing its potential for furthering the divide between groups of people based on racial or ethnic differences and genetic associations with diseases and behavior. They proclaim that identity, after all, is a psychological construct that cannot be discerned from genetics (Dula et al., 2003). However, their objections do not take into consideration what family scholars have long ago established: that a person’s awareness of their family history has a profound effect on their sense of continuity, sense of self, and psychological well-being (Epp & Price, 2008). As with other types of archives, persons can discern information about their family history from the archive that is in the human genome.

An African and African American genetic match engaging with one another as relatives presents an emerging situation that challenges our understanding of families and identity. For example, are African matches regarded as living artifacts that can provide African Americans information about their shared African family history? Are they merely relatives who are part of a network of loose bonds or family members who share a mutual understanding of obligations toward each other? This new situation may also influence family form and composition. What are the family group values and expectations associated with extra-extended relatives? Additionally, these unions may influence family processes such as socialization and the provision of emotional and financial support. This ancestral family group may be an emerging social context that extends our understanding of the family.

The significance of understanding the meanings that African Americans associate with reunification is indicated by the key roles that family members play in socialization, identity development, resource management, decision-making, and psychological well-being (Belgrave & Allison, 2009; Bennett, Wolin, & McAvity, 1988). Given that reunification with African relatives is occurring at the instigation of the general African American population, family and identity scholars need to have a better understanding of associated benefits and challenges to inform policy makers, practitioners, and other researchers. Policy makers involved in immigration and citizenship should take note of the special circumstance surrounding African Americans requesting to have their African relatives visit or relocate to the U.S. or African Americans pursuing dual or multiple citizenships in the African countries where their relatives live. Practitioners such as genetic counselors need to update their practices to support the benefits and minimize the challenges associated with African family reunification. Researchers should take note of a new context in which ideas about family and identity are drawn.
**The Current Study**

This study examines family identity among African Americans who are engaging with extra-extended relatives from Africa identified using autosomal genetic genealogy testing. This study also examines ethnic identity within this genetic relatedness context. The central aim of this study is to develop a substantive theory on family and ethnic identity development with extra-extended relatives from Africa for people of African descent whose ancestors were displaced from their ancestral homeland through the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Specific objectives are to capture (1) the familial and ethnic meanings of relatedness with an African genetic match, (2) the processes of family and ethnic identity development within the context of ancestral family reunification, and (3) psychological outcomes associated with these processes of family and ethnic identity development. I examined these research objectives using informed constructivist grounded theory methods (CGTM) (Charmaz, 2014; Thornberg, 2012) and interview data from African Americans living in the U.S. who have identified and engaged in social interactions with their African genetic matches.

**Overview of Dissertation Chapters**

This introduction chapter serves as a primer to the African American adult experience of using autosomal genetic genealogy to identify and socialize with extra-extended relatives from Africa. This chapter concludes with the language policy used for this study.

Chapter 2 is a review of relevant existing literature on genetic genealogy, family identity change, and ethnic identity change. There are several key events that occurred leading up to the current popularity of using autosomal genetic genealogy to explore the African past. Alondra Nelson’s groundbreaking ethnography was heavily relied upon to review the known motivations, interpretations, meanings, utilizes, and outcomes associated with genetic genealogy. Although her work engages with autosomal genetic genealogy, it primarily centers on African American experiences with mitochondrial DNA and Y chromosomal DNA genetic genealogy testing provided by African Ancestry, Inc. Understanding social aspects of genetic genealogy among African Americans helps to contextualize theories of family identity change and ethnic identity change. The review on ethnic identity change briefly reviews ethnic socialization, ethnic identity development, and the use of genetic genealogy as ethnic identity exploration before summarizing processes of ethnic identity shift. The review of family identity changes summaries the family identity framework (Epp & Price, 2008) before delving into processes of family identity shift.

Chapter 3 is a thorough description of the informed grounded theory methods used in this study, followed by the findings in chapter 4. The findings begin with a description of participants’ sense of lack in African ancestral history, which includes their developing a sense of lack across childhood and adulthood, looking towards genealogy to mend that sense of lack, and a deeper exploration into uses of genetic genealogy specifically. I then present two primary processes associated with this genealogy
experience: evolving ethnic identity and recognizing relatedness. The findings chapter concludes with a qualitative description of several psychological associated with this experience, including a sense of acceptance, pride, and phenotypical self-love.

Chapter 5, the discussion and conclusion chapter, presents a discussion of the key postulations from the findings. Reference materials are included in the appendices.

**Language Policy**

This language policy highlights four sets of terms for the purpose of clarity in the meanings of their use throughout this study. The first set is the use of *Black, African, African American, and person of African descent*. In this study, the use of *African American* refers to people living in the U.S. who are primarily descendants of ancestors who were taken from their homeland in Africa during the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Whereas some of their ancestors also came from European nations as a result of practices during the U.S. slave era, African Americans typically do not claim a social belonging to those European lineages or family groups. Whereas children born in the U.S. of Black immigrant parents may also be called African Americans in a conflated racial-ethnic sense, I cannot assume that the findings in this study apply to those whose ancestors have also lived in predominantly Black societies (e.g., Jamaicans), in other historical contexts (e.g., Black Brazilians), or both (e.g., Nigerians) despite known shared histories or similarities in experiences. The use of *African* refers to Black people who were born in the continent of Africa or whose parents or grandparents come from Africa rather than being a reference to citizenship, sense of belonging, or culture. Because this study is situated in the context of genetic genealogy and reunification, it refers to shared ancestry, which may or may not be associated with shared history, shared customs, and shared traditions. For similar contextual reasons, I am not referring to White Africans in the use of African in this study.

 Whereas *person of African descent* could technically include Africans themselves, I use it as it is used colloquially to refer to a person who is a descendant of an ancestor who was born in Africa and was separated from Africa for generations due to the Transatlantic Slave Trade (e.g., African Americans, Jamaicans, Black Brazilians). In this context, certain persons from Puerto Rico, Mexico, and South America would also be people of African descent. However, this study focuses on the African American experience, and so the term is used to refer to Black people in the U.S. *Black* is used to refer to a racialized Black population of Africans and people of African descent. Depending on use, it could also refer to those who have a sense of belonging to the racialized Black American population but not to their African ancestral heritage (e.g., Black Americans who do not identify with the population’s African heritage).

The second set is the use of *Africa*. Africa is a continent of over 50 countries and a multitude more ethnic groups and histories. I use the term to refer to sub-Saharan Africa based on historical
relevance unless stated otherwise. With that being said, I also use Africa in a list of geographical areas regardless of scale when relevant. For example, there are histories between the U.S. and Africa generally and between the U.S. and Ghana or the Congo specifically.

The third set is associated with genealogy. I use *traditional genealogy* simply to differentiate it from *genetic genealogy*. Traditional genealogy refers to the practice of genealogy without the use of DNA testing, whereas *genetic genealogy* refers to the use of a DNA test. A *family genealogist* is a person who engages in genealogy for their family and often assists other families as well. *Professional genealogists* engage in genealogy for hire. *Genetic genealogists* refer to family or professional genealogists who use DNA testing in their practice. The DNA test is a *genetic genealogy test*. *Consumers* and *testers* are used interchangeably and refer to people who have taken a genetic genealogy test. One of the products of genetic genealogy is a list of testers within a company database with whom a certain amount of DNA is shared. From the perspective of one tester as the target person, the other tester sharing DNA with them is a *genetic match*. They are genetic matches to each other. Similarly, an *extra-extended relative* is a genetic match whose shared ancestry is four or more generations ago, or people beyond the group typically referred to as extended family members from the perspective of African Americans. I intentionally removed social connotations initially by using genetic match and extra-extended relative because an objective of this study is to understand and therefore highlight participants’ social connotations to these persons and their interactions with them.

The fourth set is about family. In my focus on family meanings, I am, in no way, implying that social families are simply a product of biology. Biological connections and familial connections often do, but not necessarily, overlap. Nor am I using biological connections to compete with social and emotional connections that African Americans have with Africans or Africa. Absolutely not. Nor am I making a claim that biological connections should be used in pan-African or other macro-political efforts despite its use for those purposes by some. My focus is simply on the person and the families they claim. Though I find it difficult to articulate this family focus within the historical backdrop of the way Africa is typically regarded by African Americans, the objective of this study is to do just that.
Chapter 2: Review of Existing Literature

This chapter provides an overview of existing literature focused on social aspects of genetic genealogy and conceptualizations of shifts in family identity and ethnic identity. First, I provide an overview of the practice of genetic genealogy among African Americans. Then, I provide a brief review of the literature on ethnic identity change and family identity change. This literature review will provide a framework to discuss the resultant grounded theory in this study.

Genetic Genealogy

There is an archive within the human genome that can provide information about our family history. Advancements in molecular biology and supercomputing propelled genealogy into the realm of genetics (Nelson & Robinson, 2014). The first genetic testing for genealogical purposes was made available in 2000 by Family Tree DNA. By 2010, 38 companies offered such services (Nelson & Robinson, 2014; Wagner et al., 2012). AncestryDNA, the genetic genealogy product and service from Ancestry.com, launched in 2012 and, by July 2015, tested 1 million people (Swayne, 2015). By April 2017, they tested 4 million people (Ancestry Team, 2017). It is no question that the use of direct-to-consumer (DTC) genetic genealogy testing is rapidly increasing. The type of tests that consumers purchase is associated with the type of information the tests provide and consumers’ motivation for taking the test (Nelson, 2016).

Genealogy is associated with “self-making, self-exploration and self-understanding” (Kramer, 2011, p. 380). In a study examining blog posts about genealogy and responses from an administered survey, Wagner and Weiss (2012) discovered that adults engage in genetic genealogy for genealogical research (92.5%), curiosity (87%), and fun (75%). Notably, 80% of the participants in that study identified as White, and individuals with varied racialized experiences or ancestral histories have meaningfully varied reasons for engaging in genetic genealogy. For European Americans (i.e., White people), genetic genealogy testing is used to reclaim an ethnicity that was abandoned in past generations, to express European ethnic pride (e.g., Scottish, Irish), and to reestablish kinship ties to an ancestral homeland (Basu, 2005; Hirschman & Panther-Yates, 2008). African Americans engage in genetic genealogy for African ancestry (Nelson, 2008a, 2016; Nelson & Robinson, 2014; Winston & Kittles, 2005), genealogical research (Abel, 2018), and formation of ties with African ancestral homelands (Nelson, 2016). Whereas European Americans and African Americans do have common reasons for engaging in genetic genealogy, African Americans also do so in response to an awareness of the nature of transatlantic slavery, personal experiences with racial oppression (Nelson, 2008a), community development; identity development; the senses of continuity, completeness, belonging, and connectedness (Nelson, 2016); reunions and kinship (Fehler, 2011; Nelson, 2008b, 2016); citizenship (Nelson, 2016); recasting history (Nelson, 2016); and reparations (Nelson, 2016; Torres, 2018). With these pointed
distinctions in reasons African Americans engage in genealogy, it would be informative to understand how African Americans use genealogy for self-understanding as family and ethnic identity developmental processes.

Research indicates that African Americans engage in genetic genealogy testing to learn specifics about their African ancestral history (Fehler, 2011; The American Society of Human Genetics, 2008; Winston & Kittles, 2005), which makes the experience an example of both ethnic and family identity exploration. In Alondra Nelson’s (2016) ground-breaking ethnography of participants who took the African Ancestry, Inc. genetic genealogy test, Nelson found that family genealogists of African descent tended to refer to Alex Haley’s Roots television miniseries as the catalyst for engaging in genealogy. The miniseries was based on Roots: The Saga of an American Family, a novel by Alex Haley about his family history from the time of his ancestor Kunta Kinte’s capture in The Gambia in West Africa to Haley’s return visit generations later (Nelson, 2016). The Roots miniseries generated the belief that discovering African ancestral history was possible (Abel, 2018; Nelson, 2016). Faced with many roadblocks in traditional genealogy searches due to having ancestors listed as unnamed estate property, many African Americans began engaging in genetic genealogy with African Ancestry, Inc. in the hopes of learning the African ethnic group of one or more lineages (Nelson, 2008a, 2016; Winston & Kittles, 2005). Although it was later discovered that Haley’s family narrative depicted in Roots was actually a fictional account based on true events, Roots still remains an esteemed cultural symbol by inspiring a generation to engage in genealogy (Nelson, 2016). Genetic genealogy test results from African Ancestry, Inc. that name one or more origin ethnic groups are used by African Americans to claim membership within those ethnic groups and to make a claim of kinship with African members of the specified ethnic group(s) (Fehler, 2011; Nelson, 2008b, 2016).

Some African Americans engage in genetic genealogy to reestablish kinship ties with their African ancestral homelands (Nelson, 2016; Schramm, 2012), another example of the genetic genealogy experience being a vehicle for ethnic identity exploration. These African Americans view genetic genealogy as a pathway to having a sense of completeness and a mechanism to experiencing a sense of belonging both in their country of birth (i.e., the U.S.) and/or in their perceived ancestral homeland (i.e., nations in Africa) (Fehler, 2011; Nelson, 2016). There are multiple cases of African Americans going on ancestral homeland visits based on genetic genealogy results. Two documentary examples include BBC’s Motherland: A Genetic Journey (Baron, 2003), in which 229 persons who had four African Caribbean grandparents engaged in lineage-based and autosomal DNA testing as part of an academic study, and Janice Collins’ Journey to My Mother’s Land: Extending the Gates’ Effect into Africa in which Collins visits Sierra Leone based on the mtDNA results from African Ancestry, Inc. (Collins, 2018). Testers
sometimes make efforts to appear as African when visiting the ancestral homeland. To be mistaken as local is considered an accomplishment or compliment.

Much of the motivations and purposes for engaging in genetic genealogy can be broadly categorized as processes of ethnic identity development or family identity development. The existing literature supports the assertion that genetic genealogy has been used as a tool for ethnic and family exploration among African Americans for decades. An objective of the present study is to illuminate the processes of ethnic and family identity development among African Americans using genetic genealogy to identify and interact with relatives from Africa.

**Ethnic Identity Change**

Ethnic identity is fundamentally a psychological sense of belonging to a specific ethnic group. It is “the subjective sense of ethnic group membership that involves self-labeling, sense of belonging, preference for the group, positive evaluation of the ethnic group, ethnic knowledge, and involvement in ethnic group activities” (Cokley, 2007, p. 225). Recognizing ethnic identity as both a precursor and outcome of engaging with genetic genealogy, the current study explores ethnic identity as a change in the psychological sense of belonging to ethnic African and African American groups.

**Ethnic Identity Development**

Researchers conclude that ethnic identity develops through family ethnic socialization and periods of ethnic identity exploration and commitment (Phinney, 1989, 1993; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020). Within family ethnic socialization, the specific element associated with ethnic identity development is cultural socialization, which is the “transmission of cultural values, customs, traditions, history, and pride” (Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020, p. 245). These cultural socialization messages are typically transmitted from the parent to the child, where parents promote learning ethnic history and participating in cultural holidays and customs (Hughes et al., 2006). In other words, cultural socialization occurs, and thereby ethnic identity develops through narratives and rituals. Immediate and close family members play a significant role in fostering ethnic identity development, particularly during childhood and adolescence, as agents of cultural socialization (Else-Quest & Morse, 2015; Hughes et al., 2006; Phinney, 2006; Phinney & Ong, 2007).

Drawing from a psychosocial perspective of identity and research on identity statuses (Marcia, 1980), ethnic identity development occurs as a person engages in cyclic periods of ethnic identity exploration and ethnic identity commitment until the person reaches the ethnic identity achievement status. Although some ethnic identity exploration occurs throughout adulthood, ethnic identity achievement status is expected to be obtained by early adulthood (Phinney & Ong, 2007).

There is substantial empirical evidence supporting the beneficial role of ethnic identity (Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020). African Americans with a strong ethnic identity tend to have a strong sense of
belonging and positive psychological well-being (Zirkel & Johnson, 2016). Though ethnic-racial identity literature typically does not specify how Africa is conceptualized in the ethnic identity of African Americans, cultural socialization literature that emphasizes African heritage or African values specifically shows that these types of messages are psychologically beneficial for African Americans (Zirkel & Johnson, 2016). In studies featuring Black or African American adult population samples, ethnic identity was positively correlated with self-esteem (Terrell, 2005) and negatively correlated with anxiety, depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (Williams et al., 2012, 2013). With diverse U.S. population samples, the Ethnic Exploration subscale of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R) (Phinney & Ong, 2007) was positively correlated with Purpose in Life and eudaimonic psychological well-being (PWB) (Iwamoto, 2007; Sheldon et al., 2015) and negatively correlated to Positive Relations with Others (Ramsey, 2014). Ethnic Commitment was positively correlated with Self-Acceptance and Purpose in Life (Ramsey, 2016; Sheldon et al., 2015).

As relatives from Africa share knowledge about their ethnicity with African American relatives, African Americans have new agents of socialization and new information to inform their ethnic identity (David, 2017; Hirschman & Panther-Yates, 2008; Wagner & Weiss, 2012). This is the first time in recent history that the African American general population can use genetic genealogy to identify African relatives, linking them to their specific ancestral family groups from before the Transatlantic Slave Trade. While there is a consensus that ethnic identity is associated with positive psychological health outcomes among African Americans, African ethnic identity among African Americans within the context of social interactions with relatives from Africa has not been adequately explored in human development and family science.

Evidence of the connection between genetic genealogy and ethnic identity among African Americans is provided by Lisa Aubrey, a researcher who helped to establish the African Reconnection Program (ARP) of 2010-2011 (Aubrey, 2018). ARP was conceived by a Cameroonian organization (Arkjammers) based in Washington, D.C., and supported by the Cameroon Ambassador to the United States (Aubrey, 2018; Nelson, 2016). The goal of ARP was to help people of African descent with Cameroonian roots based on results from African Ancestry, Inc. to reconnect to Cameroon through homeland visits. The visit includes visiting with members of the ethnic groups represented in the African Ancestry, Inc. results (Aubrey, 2018). Nelson notes that as this trip progressed, African Americans’ self-identity labels changed from African American with Cameroonian roots to Cameroonian American to Camericans (Nelson, 2016).
Family Identity Change

Conceptualizing family identity

From a psychological perspective, family identity is “the family’s subjective sense of its own continuity over time, its present situation, and its character” (Bennett, Wolin, & McAvity, 1988, p. 212). It is “a family’s collective sense of itself” (Bennett, Wolin, & Reiss, 1988, p. 825). From a sociological perspective, family identity is a group identity that involves interactions between the self and significant others (Stets & Tsushima, 2001). It is mutually constructed among family members based on their own views, the perceptions of outsiders, and conventional ideologies (Epp & Price, 2008). These definitions characterize family identity as a collective or group identity.

Other conceptualizations of family identity characterize family identity at three operational levels: the group level, the subgroup level, and the individual level (Epp & Price, 2008; Scabini & Manzi, 2011). Family identity at the group level refers to the family as a whole (Epp & Price, 2008) and the family bonds (Scabini & Manzi, 2011). Family at the subgroup level refers to subgroups within the family group such as couple, parents, and siblings (Epp & Price, 2008). Family identity at the individual level refers to the individual belonging to a specific family group and the various familial roles the individual has within the family (Epp & Price, 2008; Scabini & Manzi, 2011).

The family identity framework explains that at each level, there are three components of family identity: family structure, generational orientation, and character (Epp & Price, 2008). The structural component refers to a family’s historical and contemporary composition, specifically family membership boundaries, roles, and hierarchy (Epp & Price, 2008). The generational orientation component refers to the sense of continuity from past to future generations (Epp & Price, 2008). The character component refers to the family’s shared characteristics during day-to-day life. Characteristics include activities, traits, temperaments, tastes, or values (Epp & Price, 2008).

The family identity framework developed by Epp and Price (2008) complements the relational-symbolic model developed by Eugenia Scabini and Claudia Manzi (2011) by highlighting the social interactions among the family identity levels (Epp & Price, 2008). In the relational-symbolic model, family identity refers to the family’s nature, potentialities, and realization. The relational-symbolic model explains that family identity at the individual level is a social identity based on the individual sense of belonging to a specific family, acknowledging family as having both structural and symbolic elements (Scabini & Manzi, 2011). Individual-level familial roles are based on familial relationships (Scabini & Manzi, 2011). The nature of intergenerational continuity within the family comes into play as children in one family group grow to become parents in other family groups, enabling genes, narratives, routines, and rituals to continue across multiple generations (Scabini & Manzi, 2011). The relational-symbolic model also explains that familial roles are based on role interdependence. For example, being a parent in a
subgroup assumes that there is a progeny within the same subgroup. Being a spouse assumes there is another spouse in the same subgroup (Scabini & Manzi, 2011). Notably, individual members of the family can have differing family identities (Scabini & Manzi, 2011).

Although the family identity framework highlights communicative practices among levels of family identity (i.e., group, subgroup, individual), it also recognizes that family identity at the individual level is not always based on a familial role (Epp & Price, 2008). For example, family identity at the individual level depends on an individual’s commitment to family enactments, personal meanings of family, perceptions of social meanings of family, compatibility between individual identities with family enactments, individual behavior within the social environment, and individual perceptions of personal behavior and others’ appraisals in the situation or interaction (Burke, 2016; Epp & Price, 2008).

**Family Identity Development**

Principally, family identity develops through family socialization. Parents transmit family identity messages to their children by sharing family narratives and promoting participation in family rituals (Fiese et al., 2002; Fiese & Marjinsky, 1999; Kellas, 2005; Viere, 2001). Individuals develop a family identity through internalizing the family heritage, which then gives them a social location within the family narrative (Kellas, 2005; Scabini & Manzi, 2011, p. 573; Zentner & Renaud, 2007). Participating in family rituals (e.g., ceremonies, celebrations, traditions, and routines) creates a sense of belonging to the family at the group, subgroup, and individual levels (Bennett, Wolin, & McAvity, 1988; Bennett, Wolin, & Reiss, 1988; Epp & Price, 2008; Fiese et al., 2002; Kellas, 2005; Sudarkasa, 1980; Viere, 2001).

According to the family identity framework (Epp & Price, 2008), family identity develops through the interaction of forms of communication with symbolic marketplace resources (Epp & Price, 2008). Understanding the forms of communication, such as narratives, among family members would illuminate how family identity changes as a change in narratives that are spurred by interactions with the symbolic marketplace resource of genetic genealogy results. Given that the family is also one of the key agents of racial and ethnic socialization, a change in the family narratives may also lead to a change in the ethnic identity (Else-Quest & Morse, 2015; Hughes et al., 2006; Phinney, 2006). Furthermore, this change in narrative for both the family identity and ethnic identity could result from interactions with the technical and social interpretations of genetic genealogy test results and social interactions with relatives from Africa as new family agents found using genetic genealogy.

Notably, existing studies on family identity development focus on adolescent populations rather than adult populations. Based on existing studies, researchers can expect that changes in significant others or substantial changes in family messages could lead to a change in adults' family identity (Stets & Tsushima, 2001). For the African Americans in the current study, the population narrative of not being able to identify specific family members in Africa due to the Transatlantic Slave Trade no longer applies.
Specifically, interpretations of genetic genealogy test results which lead to substantial changes in the family narrative or social interactions with newly found relatives from Africa may impact an individual’s sense of generational continuity and sense of sameness with members of an African extra-extended family (if, indeed, the relatives from Africa are considered to be members of an extended family). The shift in context includes a new group of people for which to consider personal belonging and familial roles.

Evidence of the social connection between genetic genealogy testing and family identity development among African Americans is provided by a qualitative study examining notions of origins and Blackness (Abel, 2018). Interviewed members of the Family History Center (FHC) in 2014 were primarily interested in uncovering details about recent family history rather than ethnic history. Participants shared experiences about their pursuit of the genetic matches from genetic genealogy testing but did not mention ethnicity estimates because “they had never really paid much attention to them before” (Abel, 2018, p. 8). They were interested in “getting in touch with possible cousins or other living relatives who might be able to help fill in clues about their family histories” (Abel, 2018, p. 8). They complained that their genetic matches tended to have little information about their shared family history (Abel, 2018).

Another example of the connection between genetic genealogy and family identity is in the case of Farmer-Paellmann v. FleetBoston. In this case, lawyer Deadria Farmer-Paellmann used results from African Ancestry, Inc. as evidence in her second claim for reparations from multiple corporations for their economic gains from the unpaid labor of enslaved people. Judge Charles Norgle dismissed the case asserting that “the genetic genealogy tests did not sufficiently establish a relationship between deceased slaves and the signatories to the class-action suit” (Nelson, 2016, p. 134) and that the genetic genealogy test used in the case (i.e., a lineage-based test from African Ancestry, Inc.) could not differentiate between a descent of U.S. enslaved people and a person directly from Africa. The judge further stated that acceptable DNA evidence for reparations would be to show genetic evidence of uninterrupted pedigree from a person of African descent to an enslaved person (Nelson, 2016). The case was appealed and dismissed. Acceptable DNA evidence cannot be provided by the lineage-based tests but is precisely the type of evidence that could be provided using the autosomal genetic genealogy testing services featured in the current study.

Whereas there is evidence that genetic genealogy is used among African Americans for ethnic and family identity development, the specific processes of development or change are not explained. This study contributes to that gap in the research literature by examining those processes as it relates to identifying and engaging with an extra-extended relative from Africa.
This study is designed to contribute to the substantive understanding of ethnic identity development and family identity development among African American adults who interact with extra-extended relatives from Africa.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This study uses grounded theory methods (GTM) to capture the multiple meanings, actions, interactions, and contextual factors associated with the situation of finding a match with a person who appears to be from Africa within the genetic genealogy test results list. GTM is a systematic way of analyzing qualitative data to develop a substantive theory that explains a social process within context (Charmaz, 2014). Process is defined as “ongoing action/interaction/emotion taken in response to situations, or problems, often with the purpose of reaching a goal or handling a problem” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, pp. 96–97). In this study, the situation (also referred to as experience in this study) is that African Americans are finding individual genetic matches in their genetic genealogy test results which appear to share at least six cMs of DNA with them, indicating that they are a potential relative.

Grounded theory draws from the assumptions in the symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective, which assumes that meaning-making through social interactions is taking place (Charmaz, 2014). Another important aspect of symbolic interactionism (SI) for this method is the view of the self. SI views “the self as process and self as object…, both as a continual unfolding process and as a more stable object” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 268). This view of the self within grounded theory methods allows for theoretical examination of the effect of meanings, interpretations, and actions on the participants’ self-concept or identity (Charmaz, 2014).

I specifically used constructivist grounded theory methods (CGTM) (Charmaz, 2014) to shape my research questions, data collection, and data analysis. CGTM is situated within the social constructivism interpretive framework (Charmaz, 2014), which recognizes that people attach subjective meanings to their experiences. There are multiple meanings associated with any experience the researcher studies. My task as a researcher was to take the participants’ perspectives and capture as much of those varied meanings as possible while noting the historical and contemporary context in which the experiences occurred (Creswell, 2012).

Within social constructivism, the interview questions are open-ended and broad so that the participant can express their meanings and the process through which those meanings are formed within context through interactions with other people and norms. This interpretive framework also acknowledges that the researcher’s interpretation of the meanings expressed by the participant is filtered through the researcher’s positionality. The interpretation of the participant’s meaning that is ultimately recorded as data is limited by how well the researcher can perceive those meanings (Creswell, 2012).

This study incorporates four essential components of CGTM: inductive approach, immediate analysis, coding, constant comparison, memo-writing, theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, and a substantive theory (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Sbaraini et al.,
Grounded theory uses an inductive approach to data collection and analysis such that the emphasis of the study may change according to the responses of the study participants.

There are several reasons for choosing CGTM rather than Glasserian Grounded Theory Method (GGTM) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) or Straussian Grounded Theory Methods (SGTM) (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). CGTM recognizes that there are multiple contextual realities. On the other hand, the objectivist view in Glasserian Grounded Theory Method (GGTM) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) operates as if the reality of participants’ experiences can be discovered from an objective position. CGTM researchers also strive to remove the context from the data to develop a universal theory, reducing the usefulness of the theory for everyday life. CGTM takes the view that context is highly relevant (Charmaz, 2014). For example, whereas genetic genealogy is rapidly growing in popularity in the U.S. and more people are learning about their family history from extra-extended relatives, the context for African Americans is that they are recovering their family history after being separated through the mass trauma of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and living in a country that frequently denigrates Blackness. Though a universal theory on extra-extended kinship may be informative, in this situation, context is highly relevant. Additionally, CGTM recognizes that researchers tend to be familiar with the literature related to their research topic and addresses how to use this as extant data through early memo-writing. Rather than attempt to approach this study as a blank slate, I also followed the guidance of informed grounded theory methods by becoming familiar with the research literature and potential initial codes on the topic before and during data collection and analysis. In this way, the final constructed theory will have higher explanatory power than existing theories (Charmaz, 2014; Thornberg, 2012).

Participants

Participants in this study are seven self-identified African American adults residing throughout the U.S. who were engaged in communications with at least one of their extra-extended African relatives, also self-identified through autosomal genetic genealogy testing services. The age range is 27 to 65 years ($M = 40.86; SD = 12.80$), and all except one of the participants are men.

Recruitment and Sampling

The sample in this study is the African American subsample of a previous pilot study I conducted on genetic genealogy testing, ethnic identity, and well-being among people who took an autosomal genetic genealogy test. There were 16 participants in the pilot study, of which eight were first-generation Africans living in the U.S., and the other eight were people of African descent. Among the eight people of African descent, I contacted the participants who were African Americans with the recruitment text for participation in the current study (Appendix A). The pilot study sample was recruited from Facebook groups dedicated to genetic genealogy and through snowball sampling. While using grounded theory
strategies to analyze the data gathered from those efforts, I learned that African American participants spoke about their genetic matches from Africa in kinship terms. I then revised the recruitment text for purposive sampling, recruiting additional participants who are African American and have identified an African relative using genetic genealogy testing (Appendix B).

**Data Collection and Procedures**

Screening (Appendix C) and consent procedures (Appendix D) were conducted online through Qualtrics. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted using an online audio call service. The telephone number for participants to call for the interview was toll-free. Participants were encouraged to interview in a private location of their choosing. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed by NVivo, and entered into QSR International’s NVivo qualitative data analysis program.

**Demographic Questions**

After gathering online consent, I collected demographic information online through Qualtrics (Appendix E). Demographic Questions consisted of name, pseudonym, age, ethnicities, nationality, status as a descendant of enslaved in the U.S., birth countries of parents or guardians, genetic genealogy testing status (i.e., tested or not test, known relative tested or not tested), African relative identified status (i.e., Was relative identified?), African relative contact status (i.e., Was relative contacted?), individual income, household income, number of people in the household, occupation, employment position/job title, education level, and contact information (e.g., email).

**Interview Questions**

After reaffirming understanding of the research study and consent, the interview began with background questions about their interest in genetic genealogy to build rapport and to help participants feel comfortable with freely responding to interview questions (Appendix F). An example question was

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**Table 1**

*Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Household Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carboni</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>$70k or more</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>$50k - $69,999</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwasi</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>$70k or more</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marquis</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>$0 - $19,999</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nechelle</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nzeh</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>GED</td>
<td>$0 - $19,999</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willie</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>$70k or more</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“When did you become interested in genealogy?” The next set of questions were designed to understand the participants’ meaning of family in terms of structure, generational orientation, and character (e.g., “How would you describe your family?”). The rest of the interview was comprised of probes to understand the situation (i.e., the experience) and processes of engaging with extra-extended African relatives (e.g., “Tell me about the first time you discovered an African relative in your DNA results list,” and “How does being in contact with your relative from Africa make you feel?”). I ended the interview with expressions of gratitude and a commitment to follow-up with the analysis or additional questions for clarification as the participant allows.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis included multiple rounds of coding. I completed the initial coding incident-by-incident which consisted of labeling sections of the interviews to describe that chunk of data. Then, I compared incidents to each other to develop a coding system and recoded the chunks according to this coding system, and then compared those chunks by code to develop a set of properties for each code. With constant comparison, the codes are compared with each other throughout data analysis towards explaining all “variation in the data” (Sbaraini et al., 2011, p. 3). When relevant, I used participants’ language as *in vivo* codes (Charmaz, 2014). As I continued to analyze the data, when new codes were developed, I reviewed all interviews so that all codes will be considered for each transcript. After initial coding, I completed focused coding by selecting frequently occurring codes, meaningful codes, and categories of codes that sharpened the analytic direction of the analysis. Focus codes tended to be more conceptual than initial codes (Charmaz, 2014). Related codes were linked and combined into categories and categories into more abstract concepts. Using an interpretive framework, the goal of the resultant substantive theory is “to understand meanings and actions and how people construct them” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 231). Final coding consisted of looking for relationships among the codes, grouping them into processes.

Before coding began, I wrote a reflexivity memo. This memo is a record of my initial assumptions and expectations for the current study to guard against personal biases by ensuring that the data analysis is doing more than simply affirming my preconceived understanding (Charmaz, 2014). Throughout the coding process, I wrote theorizing memos about the interviews (e.g., initial impressions, tone of participants), the participants (e.g., case descriptions comparing multiple interviews with the same participant), and the coding (e.g., new codes, properties of codes). Memo-writing during focused coding included theorizing about relationships between codes. Gaps in the descriptions that began appearing during focused coding memo-writing and data displays (Appendix G) shaped the follow-up interview questions for participants (Appendix H). Although I did not reach the point of theoretical saturation, I was able to develop broad connections among the major code categories.
Table 2

Coding and Memo Example for Lack of information in non-genetic genealogy search

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joseph: And because of my background of my family having been descended from people who were captured into chattel slavery during the transatlantic slave trade. There wasn't a whole lot of records or information available to me in terms of going back before the Atlantic crossing. So that was always something that had always been on my mind ever since I was a child watching Roots.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Availability of information pre-Atlantic crossing: lack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for lack: being descendant of enslaved people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration: a sense of lack since childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompt to feel lack: watching Roots on TV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Memo Excerpt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Memo 8 – Case Study – Joseph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 6, 2019 – November 14, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph has sensed a sense of lack of genealogical information since childhood. This component of his ethnic identity based on family history was not resolved throughout his passage through developmental stages as theorized by social scientists, assuming that he went through developmental stages into adulthood. He does not fault himself or his family for this lack, rather he reasons that his lack is due to being “descended from people who were captured into chattel slavery during the transatlantic slave trade.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After I developed the initial coding system and wrote a few theorizing memos, I consulted with TeKisha Rice, who, at the time, was a fellow doctoral student in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (UIUC). Rice performed the valuable role of the second coder with the interview data throughout the data analysis period. We noted points of convergence and settled points of divergence by reexamining the data and revising the coding to come to a consensus. At critical points during data analysis, I also consulted with Drs. Robin Jarrett and Reed Larson about methods and theorizing. Both Jarrett and Larson were professors at HDFS UIUC who continued to serve as consulting committee members when they entered emeritus status. I also consulted with Dr. Shardé Smith, an assistant professor at HDFS UIUC, who provided on-going consultation throughout the study but principally during the theorizing and communicating stages of the study.
Table 3

Coding and Memo Example for Being a support system

**Quote**
Carboni: It means that I have someone that I can call from another side of the ocean and I can talk with them, and share with them about things that I might be going through personally or things that family are experiencing in positive ways and just sharing it with them…and I can get their perspectives on things from a different side of the ocean perspective

**Coding**
Mechanisms: international phone call
Psychological: Family providing emotional support
Psychological: Being able to talk with family about day-to-day experiences
Social: Being able to hear different perspectives

**Memo Excerpt**
Memo 7 – Case Study – Carboni
October 30, 2019 – November 5, 2019

**Issues of Trustworthiness**

**IRB**
Initial data was collected in a University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the project with objectives that overlap with the proposed study. The original study, *A Qualitative Understanding of the Impact of Autosomal DNA Testing on Ethnic Identity and Psychological Well-Being for Africans and People of African Descent*, was submitted to IRB on November 28, 2016, and approved by IRB before the start of the data collection for that project. That project is IRB Protocol Number 17377 and expired on November 16, 2020.

In the IRB application for the original study, I stated that:

“The objective of this pilot study is to examine the influence that ancestry (autosomal) DNA testing and contact with distant kin (4th to 8th cousins) have on ethnic identity and psychological well-being… Also of interest is understanding the motivation for testing, the meaning that autosomal DNA testers attach to their test results, and the nature of engagement with cross-cultural kin discovered through DNA testing (for example, a Ghanaian immigrant and their African American 5th cousin).”
After testers identify a genetic match from Africa within the product offerings of the company, many go on to test additional people for the express purpose of continuing to identify and confirm relatedness with people from Africa. The tester, believing that the genetic match from Africa in their results is their relative, frequently continues to engage in genetic genealogy for the new primary focus of identifying relatives from Africa. In other words, finding relatives from Africa becomes a primary goal of engaging in genetic genealogy after having initially pursued genetic genealogy to learn about African ancestral ethnic heritage. The discovery of having biological evidence for the identification of relatives from Africa through personal experience or through hearing the stories of other African Americans produces the motivation to actively pursue testing for the purpose of identifying relatives. This is illustrated by Joseph Hightower when he said, “My primary focus at the time was the ethnicity estimate. And then later on, the kind—that kind of kept me coming back was the cousin matching features…Especially if I could find living relatives who were from Africa, that was my greatest hope.”

In the original project, I asked several interview questions specifically about African relatives that were listed in the IRB protocol application and additional probing questions based on participant responses. The study revision (i.e., current study) was approved on May 8, 2019, by the IRB 19755 before additional data was collected. This IRB protocol expires on May 7, 2024.

**Validity**

Initial codes were very close to the data. Codes not directly supported by the data were discarded. Negative cases or data that do not fit the overall pattern are still reported in the findings and considered with the analysis (Creswell, 2012). Member-checking was used to confirm my understanding of focused coding and to solicit additional details from participants (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2012).

**Reliability**

Grounded theories are highly contextual, which influences how well results can be replicated. I maintained a methodology memo to record all actions and decisions made throughout the project to enable my procedures to be evaluated by others. During coding, I reached intercoder agreement with the second coder (Creswell, 2012).

**Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is the practice of examining the researcher’s positionality and views (Charmaz, 2014) to help guard against collecting and analyzing data based on preconceived worldviews or theories and to
assist in critical analysis of the data. I used the Framework of Researcher Racial and Cultural Positionality (Milner IV, 2007) to guide this practice.

**Researching the Self.** I am an African American middle-aged queer woman. My parents encouraged me to take pride in my African heritage in my youth even though we could not specify which areas of Africa were our homelands. I am primarily a descendant of Africans who were enslaved in the U.S. during the slave era. I have felt the longing to know my African past during middle-aged adulthood. It is then that I took genetic genealogy tests from several different companies and engaged in genealogy. This came about during a time when I was being mentally tried during my master’s program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Near the end of my program at MIT, I had the opportunity to explore genealogy through my family’s past enslavement in two courses. Already thinking of pursuing a Ph.D. program, I decided to engage in scholarship examining the role that a person’s sense of identity played in community development based on African Americans who discovered their Cameroonian ancestry through genetic genealogy testing investing in Cameroon. I personally felt that there was an association between identity and community engagement. Much of my passion and insight comes from my personal experiences with genetic genealogy and, eventually, finding relatives from Africa.

Having personal experiences motivated me to pursue this line of research and to work to convince established researchers of its importance before having the evidence of published research within family science. It motivates me to encourage participants to share as much of their experiences as they have time to share so that I can collect rich data for thick descriptions. However, it is also this same motivation that alerts me to the need to critically examine my research process, specifically the wording of my interview questions, the way I analyze the data, and what I choose to disseminate. I am attentive to the need to seek negative cases in the patterns that I identify in the data to question my views.

It is my position that the family theories that are taught to undergraduates are light on the meanings within African American families and place much too much of a focus on responses to discrimination. Though that work is very necessary, it misses the longing and resiliency of individuals piecing together their family identities. I am repeatedly reminded of this in my role as a teaching assistant at a university. And I am painfully aware of it because I passed through the U.S. education system without learning much about African history or contemporary life from instructors except a few passages about slavery. It is the samplings of the lessons from my mother about African heritage in my youth that I have returned to which motivated me in my early research career.

**Researching the Self in Relation to Others.** The participants in my research have similar cultural backgrounds and associations with Africa like me, though some came across information about Africa in different ways. I believe this helps with rapport building and gaining trust as participants may assume that of me. However, because of this similarity, I am alerted to the need to recruit participants
who may not have had positive associations with Africa or Blackness before taking a genetic genealogy test. I will also ask if they have had experiences with a relative in their extended family who did not want to be a part of the reunification experience or who spoke negatively about it in some way.

I am also painfully aware that African Americans are reuniting with their relative from Africa and drawing strength from that experience while living in a country that largely denigrates Africa and Blackness. That contradiction bewilders me even as I am also drawing strength from my connections with relatives from Africa. I do wonder how these contextual factors influence the meanings that African Americans associate with their reunification experiences. Incidentally, this aligns with the goal of grounded theory methods to understand social processes within context. I consider my natural curiosity to be a methodological strength.

Because of my natural curiosities, it is additionally important that I balance my personal and academic curiosities with those of the participants. When our interests are inconsistent with each other, I must make decisions about the research. It is important that the work that is disseminated is meaningful to research participants. For example, I am much more interested in understanding the relationships between African American and African relatives and the influence that has on well-being. However, participants intertwine meanings associated with ethnicity with meanings associated with family. Because it is important to the research participants, it is important that the resultant substantive theory includes the relationship between ethnicity and family. At the same time, I do not want to merely construct a theory illuminating an experience that my participants already know, which becomes useful only to practitioners, policy makers, and researchers. Even though participants in the original study thanked me for talking with them about their experiences and feelings at the end of several interviews, I hope to do more for them than just be a listening ear to them. I will need to understand the problems that they identify.
Chapter 4: Findings

This study originally started as an examination of the motivations and meanings that African Americans associate with seeking, identifying, and engaging with extra-extended relatives from Africa as determined by using autosomal genetic genealogy testing. Initially, the objectives were to capture (1) the motivations for pursuing communication with African genetic matches, (2) the interpretation and meanings of relatedness with an African genetic match, (3) utilizations and outcomes associated with engaging with African extra-extended relatives, and (4) the process of family identity development within the context of ancestral family reunification. However, during the early stages of data analysis using grounded theory methods, I found that ethnic identity development was fundamental and very much intertwined within family identity processes. It became almost disingenuous to continue an analysis on family identity experiences without also including its association with a shifting ethnic identity rather than to continue presenting ethnic identity exploration as simply a motivating factor for communicating with African genetic matches. In keeping with the process of grounded theory methods, I modified the study’s focus to examine processes of both family identity development and ethnic identity development among African Americans who have used direct-to-consumer (DTC) autosomal genetic genealogy testing services to identify and engage in social interactions with persons from Africa with whom they shared some DNA. This study thus examined (1) the familial and ethnic meanings of relatedness with an African genetic match, (2) the processes of family and ethnic identity development within the context of ancestral family reunification, and (3) psychological outcomes associated with family and ethnic identity development within the context of ancestral family reunification. Examining the collective experiences of the participants of this study, I found that participants felt (1) a sense of lack in African family history and (2) an evolving ethnic identity while (3) recognizing relatedness and (4) managing many emotions associated with the experience (S.

A Sense of Lack in African Ancestral History

Participants described developing a sense of lack in African family history through an intertwining awareness of both their ancestral ethnic history and ancestral family history. The sense of lack developed through experiences like watching the Roots miniseries and being assigned a family history elementary school assignment. The sense of lack that developed during childhood lasted into their adulthood and fueled their rationale for using genetic genealogy to find relatives. Participants attribute experiences like seeing their family’s genealogy displayed and being told that they look African for causing them to specifically consider genetic genealogy as a method to address their sense of lack.

Developing a Sense of Lack in African Family History

Developing a Sense of Lack in African Family History describes a loose process of engaging in experiences that participants believe created or deepened their sense of lack in their African family
history. A common experience among participants was watching the Roots miniseries on television as a family. This experience socialized participants to personally claim the population narrative of being taken from their African ancestral homelands through the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The key character in the miniseries, Kunta Kinte, became an African American symbol to represent their own ancestor who was taken from Africa.

As an illustration of this process, Kwasi recalls when he was approximately four years of age joining his family to watch the television miniseries Roots. He says, “I remember when Roots came out in 77… I remember everybody being so excited and me and my family being stuck at the T.V. I remember that.” He adds, “I had always been fascinated by the story of Kunte Kinte in Roots and had longed to find my African roots.” Nechelle explains, “Since watching Alex Haley’s Roots, I’ve always been interested in trying to find my own ‘Kunta Kinte’.” For Joseph, watching Roots left him with a sense of lack from his childhood that endured into his adulthood. Joseph recalls:

> And because of my background of my family having been descended from people who were captured into chattel slavery during the Transatlantic Slave Trade, there wasn't a whole lot of records or information available to me in terms of going back before the Atlantic crossing. So that was always something that had always been on my mind ever since I was a child watching Roots.

Another common experience was an elementary school assignment that instructs children to create a family tree or, in some way, to gather information about their ancestral family history. For example, in the second grade, Joseph was given an assignment to find out if he had ancestors who arrived in the U.S. on the Mayflower. As an African American, his ancestors more than likely did not arrive in the U.S. on the Mayflower or any other willful voyage.

When Joseph’s mother learned about this assignment, she objected, calling it culturally insensitive. As a child, Joseph was happy and proud of his mother’s actions against the insensitivity of this assignment. However, he also was left with unanswered questions about where his ancestors came from. Joseph recalls, “Cause it was like, ‘Okay, I didn't have ancestors that came over on the Mayflower, but when did my ancestors come over? Where did we come from?’ That question still wasn't answered.” Although Joseph’s mother fostered a sense of pride in Joseph, her lack of ancestral family history reinforced his sense of lack in their family’s ancestral history.

This sense of lack developed in childhood also came from comparing themselves to people with other ethnicities who were able to identify their ancestral heritage with specificity. As Joseph explains that when he was a child, he “felt kind of cheated.” He “wanted to reclaim that” for himself. Carboni explains how this sense of lack was salient well into his late adulthood:
After living over 50 years, I could not in my mind know exactly where my ancestors came from beyond my great-great-grandfather. So, I wanted to know, just as other races of people, where my people came from, and that puzzled me, and I had this desire to know.

Looking Towards Genealogy for Ancestral Family History

Participants had several experiences that sharpened their attention on the practice of genealogy for ancestral family history. Moments like seeing family genealogy channeled their sense of lack into an interest to engage in genealogy in adulthood. To illustrate, one participant, Marquis, did not have experiences such as the common family tree homework assignment, and he watched Roots for the first time in his adulthood rather than his youth. His sense of lack of ancestral family history developed in adulthood when he saw the genealogy of a prominent historical figure in religious text. He says, “I wonder how mines would look if it went back that far.” He then adds:

What made me really get passionate about it was a few years later when I saw my mother on a computer writing down the names of her parents, and I think that was about maybe her grandparents, too, possibly. She had missing information, but it was still fascinating.

Similarly, other participants expressed becoming interested in genealogy after hearing a family member discuss their genealogy. Nzeh explains his additional genealogical curiosity of finding ancestors from Africa:

When my elder statesman cousin made the suggestion that it'll be really interesting if we could somehow trace my second great-grandfather, his grandfather, my second great-grandfather's ancestry back to Africa. That's the moment that I thought that it was time to explore genetic testing.

Commercials contributed to the awareness of using DNA testing for ancestry searching purposes. As Joseph explains, “They kind of had just started doing the commercials back then I—"I found out I was 10% German and 12%”—They kind of started just doing that, and so I was really interested in finding out where in the world my genetics originated.” He further explains, “This is what led me to begin to utilize genetic genealogy as a means of learning more about my deep ancestry.” Notably, the commercials stoked a sense of lack that already began developing after watching Roots as a child and subsequently not having much success searching archival records.

The push for the genetic aspect of genealogy also comes from curiosity about similar facial features between participants and Africans from specific regions or other family members. For example, Marquis recalls, “He [African person] actually told me, "You look like you're actually from Senegal." He said, "If you went to my village Senegal, they'll tell you, 'No, you are from here...’" I remember it like it was yesterday.” This was impactful to Marquis because he interpreted it to mean that the African person
was identifying with him. Similarly, Willie recalls his first trip to the African continent exploring his African heritage when, as he says, “they mentioned to me that I looked like relatives that they had, and it just made me have a greater zeal…I actually took the test about a month or so after I got back.” In contrast to being curious about African facial features, Nechelle was intrigued because her light complexion was similar to a known ancestor. Having been born after the ancestor died, Nechelle had very little family information about the ancestor except that “she was mixed raced” whose “father is a confederate soldier.” Nechelle goes on to explain, “I want to learn more about him [her ancestor’s biological confederate European American father]. It has helped me to understand the complexity of the slave issue and Southern states’ point of view.”

Using Genetic Genealogy for Ancestral Family History

The participants in this study then began actively using genetic genealogy to learn more about their ancestral family history. Participants reported three main uses for actively using genetic genealogy: (1) to learn their ancestry composition in general, (2) to learn about their African ancestral ethnic identities in particular, and (3) to further their genealogical research in family mysteries. This process is a cycle unto itself such that the results from on-going engagement in genetic genealogy are the same as the hopes that led them to engage in genetic genealogy.

Participants typically tested to learn more about their ancestral composition. Participants used genetic genealogy to learn about their biogeographical ancestry estimates (BGA), commonly referred to as ethnicity estimates, as an admixture. It represents their ancestral history specified by geographical region. Example admixture results for an African American person may be 70% Cameroon, 10% Ghana, 30% France. As Kwasi explains, “I was just, ah, anything that they’ll tell me about my ancestry. All of it, you know, the composition, the ancestry composition.” Willie explains a similar desire, “It was more so about me just understanding my ethnic breakdown based on results.” However, Joseph’s primary purpose for engaging in genetic genealogy was to learn specifically about his African ancestral origins. As he explains, “my primary focus was trying to find out where in Africa did my genetic makeup originate? What regions? If I could find out a tribe or two or ethnic group.” Similarly, Carboni explains, “I just really wanted to know where my ancestors came from.” As Kwasi explains, “to connect to my African roots through DNA.”

Whereas participants were curious about the homelands of all their biological ancestors, the greater overall interest was in learning more about the ethnicities and homelands of their ancestors from the African continent. They were attempting to uncover the names of their African ancestral ethnic groups when their ancestors still lived as members of families and communities in Africa. They begin engaging in genetic genealogy with an awareness that most of their ancestry stems from multiple ethnic groups across multiple regions in Africa.
Participants also engaged in genetic genealogy to solve family mysteries. For example, Kwasi explains, “People who are related that I didn’t know that are related due to, you know, families being separated during slavery and those things.” Nechelle also explains, “It's exciting because one thing about DNA testing as an African America, it gets me beyond the 1870's or the 1850's brick wall…which I was most excited about because as an African American, it's very hard to get beyond slavery.” As Carboni explains:

I continued because my mother and father, having their moms and dads from both sides and trying to trace the line that with so many relative connections upward ancestrally. So, I wanted to feel in a comprehensive way of exactly where my family came from up the chain. Like grandmom was. Two grandmas, two granddads, four great-grandmoms or great-granddads and going up the line. I was just curious about knowing this.

Family mysteries included detailing their African genealogy as well. Nechelle explained, “Oh. Oh my gosh. I was excited just learning about the Fantes, and that was exciting because it's like I found our Kunta Kinte, or I'm getting close to finding my own Kunta Kinte.” Genealogy includes living relatives as well. As Marquis explained, “when I took the test, I was CRAVING to meet [genetic] matches from Africa.”

Typically, the more information they found, the more they wanted to find. The desire to learn more details about how they are related and to develop meaningful kinship relationships with his relatives from Africa keeps participants engaged in genetic genealogy. This included testing multiple people in the known family to provide additional details about how the relatives from Africa were related to known family members. It also provided additional evidence that the relatedness was true.

Nzeh recalls testing multiple people in his family:

I got my mom, two aunts done--That's three. Then I got my elder statesman cousin done, there's my grandfather's first cousin, I got him done; that's four. I got my mom’s two first cousins done back to her mom's side; that is the sixth. I got my grandfather's first cousins done, that is, what, seven, eight. I got my grandmother done; that's nine. On my dad's side, that's nine. I got my biological father's DNA done, that's 10, and then I got myself done; that's eleven. I think that's all.

Testing multiple people is necessary to help place previously unknown relatives in their positions on the family tree. Willie explains:

But these African matches, even when you find out they're related to you, there you want to take it even deeper. You want to have that same relationship that you have with your American cousins as you do your African cousins relative to how I'm related to you. It's a beautiful thing when you test your parents, and it's like a double confirmation, which side
of the family you're on, and you're able to exchange information with them….to go
search deeper and really have that even more of a meaningful relationship, in terms of
how you're related to them, on what side of the family, et cetera.

Nechelle explains selecting a specific family member to strategically test to learn more about her
African genealogy:

If I get him, which is like on my great-uncle's line, it goes back to the same ancestor; it
will go back to my second great-grandfather. I do believe it was through that second
great-grandfather where the Ghana connection is. I'm finding out all other connections
that is in other collateral lines that I didn't even realize. I'm like, oh okay, this name and
even though the collateral name is like, what, but not the one that I want. Recently
contacted by a fifth cousin—Is this the African ancestor?!?

In addition to testing multiple people, participants also tested with multiple companies. Joseph
explains, “I decided to do the second one because I wanted to see what the features of 23andme were as
compared to Ancestry.” And Kwasi, “I’ve taken all three, um, AncestryDNA, 23andme, and Family Tree
DNA. And I’ve also tested both of my parents with all three.” And Willie, “I took ancestry.com first—no,
second, and I took Family Tree DNA first.” And Nzeh: “Yeah, I've tested with the 23 and Me, I've tested
with the—Family Tree DNA through African DNA, which is a subsidiary of Family Tree DNA…How
many have I done on ancestry…and then I got myself done.” Carboni recalls, “23andMe, there was
another one I've forgotten the name of it. I have forgotten the name of it. But there were two that I took.
[Confirmed that the other one was with African Ancestry].” Marquis took one and explains uploading his
DNA file to other companies, “AncestryDNA…and I transferred the raw data to GEDMatch and then two
other sites, which is My Heritage and Family Tree DNA.”

Marquis provided his rationale for testing his parents, “Yes, just to confirm and to further study,
kind of, what do you call it? Not criticize, but investigate how true the results are, and whether they would
even match, and of course, yeah, they did, a lot.” Joseph also talks about testing his parents:

I'm actually expecting to have my mother's DNA test back. And I got my father a DNA
test as well, which will probably be coming within the next few weeks; the results come
back for that. Trying to get as much genetic information as possible to figure out who all
these cousin matches are. Who's on my mom's side, who's on my dad's side, answer a
couple of mysteries that are still kind of lingering out there.

Despite the multiple testing, Nechelle explains that learning more information through genetic
genealogy is not associated with a lasting sense of euphoria. She explains, “finding the connections when
you break down the brick wall you think there's this euphoria, but then there's always more questions.” In
contrast, Marquis does have a sense of euphoria associated with the desire to know more. As he explains:
Every time I would go, it was wonderful. Just the fact that history is actually a whole lot more exciting and alive than people will even know. That is the main thing that had me kind of digging into it for myself, and then you couple that with, which it is related, this growing pride in who I really am,...I can only say a sense of euphoria and a little bit of completeness, and that type of pleasure that part of you is complete. Then, of course, that feeling, of course, sparks curiosity, more and more curiosity.

Evolving Ethnic Identity

Initial Racial-Ethnic Identity

Participants entered the genetic genealogy experience with various ethnic and/or racial labels such as “African,” “of African descent,” “African American,” and “Black.” They believed that some, if not most, of their ancestry came from Africa. The reunification experience did not create a sense of being of African descent. It affirmed it. To illustrate, Joseph entered this experience with a generalized pan-African ethnic identity. He viewed all Africans and people of African descent as “Africans” and “all together” and felt that all Africans should love each other. He identified as being African and being Black equally:

I would say that for me being Black and African were always co-equal. I was aware of the differences between myself as African American and Continental Africans, but my upbringing taught me to minimize those differences as much as possible.

Nzeh viewed himself as African American, but it was an identity that encompassed his generalized African identity. He explains, “before, I said that I was African, but it was easy because I was indiscriminately African. I didn't know where in Africa I was from. I was African American.” Kwasi explains, “I've always been proud of being a person of African descent. So, DNA just offered the confirmation.”

In contrast, Marquis entered the genetic genealogy experience with a racialized Black American identity devoid of an African ethnicity. As he explains, “as Black people, we're taught a Black and White view. "Oh, you're Black, you're not African.” I don't know how that happens.” Marquis, a young man with a very dark brown complexion, recalls that during adolescence, he hated his skin color. “I wanted to be white so bad, and I looked in the mirror, and it was just like, ‘Ugh.’” He grew up in an environment of colorism. “The lighter skin tribe members would be honored, even my brother, for example, he's very light. Just raised with this, pretty much a white supremacist, almost self-hating thing that was passed down to me.” Marquis describes, “I grew up with the inherited prejudice against myself. …I would avoid the mirror…Then, when I see the mirror, I'd be like, “Oh, man,” and be kind of hurt by it. My lips were kind of thick, my color and everything…Like painful lack of self-esteem.” Marquis explained that it was through researching African history that he grew from such thinking. At some point, he began to become
more informed, which created a desire to defeat colorism and internalized racism. “I don't know how my eyes became open to it, but there were little things, little documentaries and stuff that made me actually have a hunger to defeat that inside of me and all around me, but especially inside of me.” Marquis explained, “by the time I got DNA tested, I had already done a whole lot of research on life philosophies and such.”

**Reviewing Test Results**

All participants looked at the admixture results first. Two participants explicitly explained that they viewed their admixture results first because of how prominently the admixture results were displayed. Kwasi explains, “It was probably the first thing I saw because it's typically what is easily presented first when you open your DNA results on their website.” And Nechelle said that she viewed them first, “because Ancestry had such information most visible/salient.” However, based on the process of dealing with a sense of lack, an implicit reason for viewing the admixture results first may be because learning about their ancestral ethnicities from Africa is the most common reason for taking the DNA test in the first place.

Based on participant recollection, at the moment of viewing admixture results, participants’ ethnic identity, both from previously known information and from new information learned from the admixture results, was salient. Participants explicitly reacted to (1) having a high proportion of total African ancestry within whole ancestry composition, (2) knowing a specific African region or country associated with the highest single African proportion in their admixture, and (3) having specific African regional results confirm prior expectations. To illustrate, on seeing the admixture results, Willie said:

> It was a true shock. …my results came back on Ancestry at 91%.”

> “Man! It showed 37% Nigerian or something. And I told my family, and some of them hollered, "Oh, we're Nigerian?" To see that it was like, “wow!”

Marquis explains:

> Seeing all these regions, especially Senegal, and Nigeria, were all expected because I saw many folks, especially from the top regions, that looked a lot like me. It was vindicating; it felt great. I'll tell you, for weeks, I was on a high from that.

In contrast, Nechelle initially was not excited to see her African admixture: “I never felt excited about African [ancestry] until my DNA match.”

After viewing their admixture results, participants viewed their genetic matches, which sometimes provided an additional source of ancestral ethnicity information. Genetic matches are a list of DNA profiles within the company’s database who share DNA with the participant, indicating possible relatedness. Participants recalled having a heightened emotional response to seeing genetic matches who appeared to be from Africa. Willie explained, “It was really amazing because, first of all, to be able to see
someone that had nothing but ethnic background from Africa based on the countries was a really beautiful thing.” Nzeh recalls, “And I was like, ‘Wait a minute! Hold on! They’re getting matches?...it says that there’s family from the Congo, specifically from this group! From Niger, huh!’” Nechelle states simply, “Honestly, identifying relatives from Africa was serendipitous.” Marquis is unique because when he found a relative from Africa for the first time, he was actively looking for African-looking names in his results.

**Refocusing Ethnic Identity Exploration Based on Genetic Relatedness**

When relatives from Africa who tested with the genetic genealogy company responded to the initial contact from participants with information about their ethnicity and birth country, participants were able to research a more personalized African ancestral history using the kinship evidence of their genetic relatedness with that person from Africa. To illustrate, based on Kwasi’s genetic relatedness with a relative from Madagascar, he refocused his family research. As Kwasi recalls, “He [the relative from Africa] said, ‘yes, both of my parents are from Madagascar’...I started reading about Madagascar and the African connection between America and Madagascar...So, I was like, ‘wow!’”, one of those ancestors must have been mine.” Carboni explains:

That was very important to me because the moment that I would discover this information [African ancestral ethnicities], I would begin to reach out to ethnic tribes in that particular country and began to learn more about their culture, way of life, and visiting them, and living with them. That was my deep motivation.

Sometimes participants’ relatives from Africa spent time sharing information as engaged agents of ethnic socialization. For example, Willie learned about his own ancestral ethnicity and family history by listening to his relative from Africa talk for hours about his ethnicity and family history. Willie explained:

He took selfless time out of his schedule to just educate me on the Mandinka culture and his mother and his father and things of that nature, how he grew up, and how he transitioned out of the country of Guinea to Senegal. I mean, we spent hours and hours.

Carboni describes his immersive learning experience in a homeland visit:

The reunion took place in December, and of course, that was one week. But I actually stayed there [in Ghana] seven more weeks and traveled throughout the entire country. Every part of the country learning more about culture and things of that sort, and one of the relatives had actually traveled with me.

Participants emphasized that there was a key difference in engaging in ethnic socialization with living relatives from Africa who are members of the ancestral family group as opposed to gleaning information from the results of a genetic genealogy test. As Nzeh explains:
You can walk around and say, you know, ‘I'm Yoruba.’ Well, I know the word Yoruba, but I don't know anything else about Yoruba…But then when you meet your relatives, it's a whole other level. Oh man, now there's an exchange that takes place. There are an exchange of ideas; they start telling you about your family and the stories they've heard about their ancestors who were taken across the Atlantic. It's just a whole other level.

The exchange of historical narratives occurs in both directions. While the emphasis was on the relatives from Africa sharing information with the participant, participants also shared information about the history of African Americans. They sometimes use these moments to delve deep into core social issues such as the African and African American divide. As Joseph explains, “So we talk about that as friends and as relatives and try to get a better understanding of each other's story.” Nechelle illustrated grappling with the complex histories of African countries based on her family history.

It gets more complicated, and I mean no disrespect, but it gets more complicated understanding without bringing your own biases in the history of Africa. It just gets like, "Okay, I'm trying to sort it out. I'm trying to really understand the history of Ghana." Ghana went through some stuff. They are still going through some stuff, but I'm trying to flush it out.

She hopes to use her relatedness to bridge divides among African peoples.

Before finding relatives from Africa, Joseph engaged in research about African American history in general:

Primarily because it was always stressed as an important subject by my mother and other adults in my life. As I began to grow as a historian, I found that it was only natural that my foundational outlook should be rooted in my ancestral and genetic memory/perspective. It was the only logical choice for me as a man of African descent to study history and the world from the perspective of my forebears.

After finding relatives from Africa, his research refocused on the specific African country and ethnic groups of his ancestors determined based on the ethnicity of the relative from Africa. In other words, his research about his ethnicity changed from being general to specific, from being based on the African American population level to more specific familial level research of the histories of his relatives from Africa, believing these to be his ancestral ethnicities through his ancestors.

A key component in the experience, as illustrated by Nzeh, is that this claim of ethnic identity was based on finding relatives from Africa and then learning about their relatives’ ethnicity. For example, the strength in Nzeh’s conviction that he is African is based on the genetic results linking him to specific relatives from Africa. As he asserted:
I'm African. I am a West African man. I mean, period. And genetics is backing that up all the way. At the point that you find family, at the point that you find family members of yours related to you genetically, related to you biologically, related to you familiarly from the African continent, you can't lie to Africans. You know what I mean? You just can't, and if you do, you're a damn fool.

**Shifting Ethnic Identity**

While participants engage in ethnic exploration, they begin to shift their ethnic identity towards Africa and being African and African American. The shift in ethnic identity is in terms of intensifying or sharpening the focus on mosaic Africa within an African American identity.

**Strengthen Connection to Africa.** Identifying relatives from multiple African countries strengthened Kwasi’s connection to Africa. As he explains:

Ah, so it really, like, wow, I am definitely from Africa. You know. [laughter] And my family [relatives from Africa] comes from all over, you know. …each present-day nation of West Africa I probably had an ancestor, or several ancestors came from each one of those nations, present-day nations. So, it’s fascinating; it’s just, it strengthens my connection to Africa.

**Identifying as African.** Nzeh entered the experiences identifying as African American; he was African with a generalized historical context. As he explains, “whereas before I said that I was African, but it was easy because I was indiscriminately African. I didn't know where in Africa I was from. I was African American.” When he found a relative who was Igbo from Nigeria, Nzeh identified as being of Nigerian descent or of Igbo descent. But after a while, he found more relatives from various countries across Africa that it was no longer a simple matter to claim the identity of one family group. “But we had so many ethnic groups or so many people, so many relatives from different ethnic groups across Africa that it became difficult to say, ‘Oh, well, you know I'm just Igbo.’” It became more complicated for Nzeh to find a fitting African localized ethnic identity. “But as more and more relatives come in from different places, you're like, ‘Oh shit. Where do I belong? What do I say I am?’ Because I'm all of these things, and I don't want to be dishonest.”

Nzeh now self-identifies as African and perceives that others view him as African as well. “So, I'm African. That's my orientation; that's what people see me as.” It is an African identity that has intensified or gained specificity. It is a more informed African identity based on connecting with specific relatives from Africa. He emphasizes that his ancestry began in Africa, not elsewhere, and that his current ancestry composition is a result of events that occurred during the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

I'm African. My ancestry, my being here [in the U.S.], didn't start in Europe. It didn't start in Israel. It didn't start here [in the U.S.]. It started when my African ancestors were taken
as captives and brought here, and the subsequent admixing that happened after that, but it still began in Africa. So, I'm African. My identity became a lot more complex since before testing to now.

Although claiming ancestry from Africa sounds like common wording among African Americans, for Nzeh, his African identity is now much more specific.

Carboni and Willie also illustrated having an African identity. Carboni identified as being a co-ethnic person with his family members from Ghana. As he says, “I am Fante. I am Ghanaian.” Carboni felt a daily sense of belonging to the ethnic group(s) of his family from Africa through this frequent communication with them, “this communication of a feeling of culture and life and being a part of that ethnic tribe has become a daily part of my life.” Similarly, Willie said, “I understand the rich culture of my people in Africa and how great and how rich of a resource the continent of Africa is…it makes me happy just simply to be an African.”

As Joseph asserted, “he asked me was I African. I said, ‘yes.’” Having entered the experience with a generalized pan-African identity, Joseph affirms, “I still identify as a Pan-African. I am now more informed, and my identity has been reinforced by genetic genealogy… The science gave me specifics of what was already known.” Even though Joseph strongly identified as an African of Nigerian descent, he questioned the level of acceptance and belonging he may receive at events catering to Nigerians. Joseph explains, “I've been contemplating, ‘Should I go, should I not go? Should I go, should I not go?’ At the end of the day, it's like I am young, I am of Nigerian descent, why not? But then, at the same time, I still kind of felt like there's still that divide there. Not divide, but still kind of like that.”

Marquis insists that the authority to claim an identity is not outside himself. “No one can really tell us that we're not African.” He made a distinction between claims based on cultural upbringing and claims based on ancestry. Marquis declared that based on the evidence of ancestry, African Americans are as African as any other African. As he explained:

As far as African citizens, of course, I can't say that—Of course, I'm not an African Citizen, and of course, I haven't been raised with certain traditions. However, as far as a sense of belonging, as far as being native somewhere, you can't say that Ghana and Nigeria, those areas, I'm not native to. I know I am. Because of that, I think of African Americans in that same light. I see them as other Africans, who are most of the time mixed. It's a beautiful thing.

Nechelle felt unique in her experiences because she claimed both her African and European ancestry through a positive lens. “I feel unique 'cause yes, I have European, and I have African. I'm like, ‘Okay, it's all good.’” Regarding her ethnic identity, she explains:
I still consider myself African American. I'm more likely to, but I always keep in mind, I'm Asante [an ethnic group primarily from Ghana]...I'm like Asante, Asante, Asante, that's intriguing for me...I still see myself as an African American, though, to answer your question. I just, I just, the idea of knowing that my ancestors are from the Akan group. That brings me great pride and both groups are represented. It's a little intensified. It's a little intensified.

Like others, the African in her African American is “intensified” and incorporates both her Black American and African ancestral heritage.

**Recognizing Relatedness**

African American participants engaged in genetic genealogy with the notion that there was an association between genetics and ancestral ethnic groups. They also associated the results with being able to identify relatives born in the U.S. during or after the U.S. slave era. Initially, relatives born in Africa before or during the slave era were typically found serendipitously in the results. After finding relatives from Africa, participants shifted the focus of using the genetic genealogy from ethnicity to relatedness. As Joseph explains:

> My primary focus at the time was the ethnicity estimate. And then, later on, the kind—that kind of kept me coming back was the cousin matching features...Especially if I could find living relatives who were from Africa, that was my greatest hope.

As explained by Willie:

> But when you begin to connect and collaborate, link up with people that you literally are related to that have been separated--you know for a fact--from your family lineage from the Transatlantic Slave Trade, it's a beautiful thing to be able to unite with them.

Nzeh emphasized that there was a qualitative difference in knowing his African ancestral family history compared to learning about his African ancestral ethnic history:

> I don't know how else to say it, but that there is no stronger connection that you can have than to the actual family members to Africa. That's not only knowing what ethnic you're from, that's knowing what's family your ancestor was taken from.

Similarly, Willie explained the same phenomenon, “it's one thing for you to get ancestry.com test results and them telling you your background—totally different plethora of an experience when you actually are engaging with someone that's like blood and flesh.”

**Identifying Relatives from Africa**

The more they continue in genetic genealogy, the more they inevitably learned about the science of genetic relatedness and the rules of identifying a true match (i.e., IBD match). The process of
identifying relatives from Africa consisted of (1) determining if the person represented by the genetic match was from Africa and (2) determining if the genetic match was a true genetic match.

**Determining if Genetic Match is from Africa.** Participants explained that they began the process of determining if the genetic match was from Africa by first noticing that a genetic match in their results list could be a person from Africa. Participants then went to the relative’s public profile and gathered information such as the name associated with the DNA kit, name of the DNA kit’s manager, shared ethnicities, and other personal information provided by the manager of the DNA kit. If the shared ethnicity estimates showed that only regions from Africa were shared between the participant and the genetic match, there was a good chance that the genetic match is a person from Africa. However, there was also the possibility that the genetic match was for a person of African descent and the manager for the genetic match’s DNA kit selected the option to only show admixtures shared with other genetic matches. In this second situation, the genetic match could be an African American, for example, and only share African admixtures with the participants, which would cause the participant to see African-only admixtures. Finding a genetic match with African-only admixtures was an indication that the genetic match was a person from Africa. When participants saw results with African-only admixture, they continued in the process of determining if the genetic match was from Africa.

Participants continued in the determination process by contacting the manager of the genetic match’s profile. If the manager of the genetic match’s profile responded to the participant, the manager confirmed or refuted that the genetic match or their parents were born in Africa. If the manager did not respond, but the participant found the genetic match on social media or some other source, and the source could provide ethnicity information about the genetic match, this information was usually used as evidence of the genetic match’s ethnicity. The process is repeated for each potential relative from Africa.

One of the key features at the beginning of determining if a genetic match is from Africa is the active pursuit of information about a genetic match found in the results list, even if that pursuit was not specifically about Africa. In the current study, all participants are managers of their own DNA profile and so obtaining any information about a genetic match is usually through their own active searching among their genetic matches. Notably, a pre-process event is the participant actively supplying their saliva sample to the company for the purpose of DNA analysis and responding affirmatively to the company’s online consent forms. Later in this process, the participant continues to search for information about the genetic match specifically because of the indication that the genetic match is from Africa. Participants entered this process subsequent times to continue to learn more about their genealogy, typically to search specifically for genetic matches from Africa.

**Determining if the Genetic Match is a True Genetic Match.** At any point in the process of determining if the genetic match is from Africa, participants questioned whether the genetic match was a
true match or a false match. A true match is identical-by-descent (IBD), a segment of DNA that has been inherited from a common ancestor by both the participant and the genetic match. If the segment is IBD, then at least one parent of the participant and at least one parent of the genetic match would also have shared DNA.

Questioning the validity of a genetic match is based on a tester’s understanding of the science of genetic relatedness. Participants range from believing the genetic match is a true match simply because the company lists the profile as a genetic match to skepticism. As they gain more knowledge and experience, participants shift from only using the results provided by the company to using a basic understanding of relatedness science to confirm relatedness, to using a greater understanding of the science of relatedness by using tools that enable chromosomal level comparisons. At this latter end of the range, participants use rules to provide strong evidence of relatedness to identify that the genetic match is from Africa and is a true match.

At the time of the interviews, all participants were exercising a greater understanding of the science of relatedness to provide strong evidence of finding relatives from Africa. There is excitement and a sense of confirmation when the genetic match from Africa also matches a participant’s parent. Kwasi explained:

You know it’s like, you know, when I, ah, when I looked at the DNA results of either one of my parents and a new match, particularly if that new match is an African, it’s just like, wow! It’s a wow moment for me every time.

A genetic match matching the participant and one of their parents provides information about how the genetic match is related to the family. For example, when Willie’s genetic match also matched a parent, it provided him with “double confirmation” that the person from Africa was their relative but also which side of his family to connect the relative. Kwasi explains a further application of the method, “So that was fascinating within itself, and then the fact that this person not only match me and my father but also match my father’s second cousin.” Matching his father’s second cousin means that Kwasi knows the specific great grandparent to whom, out of Kwasi’s total of eight great grandparents, his relative from Africa is related. The genetic matching was used to add relatives from Africa to specific branches on the family tree and enriched stories to the known family history. This use contributed to understanding why participants continue in the testing cycle by testing additional known family members. There was an excitement of finding and communicating with relatives from Africa even if the identity of their specific shared ancestor was unknown. As Kwasi explains:

“Chances are pretty great that we won’t ever figure it out, but that doesn’t matter…I’ve never imaged that I would have that type of connection to actual, actual family, blood
relatives…that I’m actually communicating with people back in Africa who are blood relatives.”

They explained the relatedness using scientific concepts such as IBD and overlapping segments (e.g., “on the same spot”). Kwasi continues to explain finding a relative, “he matched my father and my father’s second cousin on the same spot, so that let me know that…it’s definitely an IBD match, a real, you know, Identity by Descent match.”

Through engaging in genealogy to identify relatives from Africa, participants also developed a range of skills and interests in related fields. As Nechelle illustrates:

Phonetics or language/dialects have been helpful…Genograms are also interesting…discovering the identity of Jane/John Does and assisting law enforcement in solving cold cases. Fascinating to witness different emerging specialties not only in the field of justice but family/individual therapy.

Nechelle later added in an email:

I like being able to assist individuals in identifying biological parents in the United States and other countries. Assisting the individuals in the Reconciliation process i.e., coming to terms with results of identifying estranged relatives. I like the emerging specialties such as Investigative Genetic Genealogy, which involves working with law enforcement in solving cold cases and identifying Jane/John Does. I like the emerging specialties such as Therapeutic Genealogy, which involves using information about family history to gain an understanding about self and family. (e.g., Cycles of behaviors/attitudes).

**Claiming Kinship**

Claiming kin moves beyond the technical process of identifying a relative from Africa to a more social process of claiming kinship. It is a shifting of emphasis from discovering and confirming biological relatedness to the socioemotional components of doing family.

**Naming the Relationship.** Though relatedness was discovered through DNA testing, participants emphasized that their relatives from Africa were family, cousins. This is illustrated when Nechelle explained her desire after discovering the relatedness, “I want to see them face to face…I want to see my family because they are my cousins, and they're not just genetic cousins; they're my cousins.” Referring to their relatives from Africa as relatives, family, or cousins was common among the participants as they shared their experiences. African ancestral family reunification is a new phenomenon among the African American population, and so at this early stage of the phenomenon, participants had difficulty articulating their sentiment. However, participants generally claimed the relatives from Africa as family. Nechelle tried to explain the underlying support for the claim as family:
I think just it, oh my gosh, that's just so, I mean to know that you're a DNA match to something, to someone that's across the world that you never met and that—Oh my gosh. It's kind of hard to—Family's big. Family is big. Family's, it's kind of hard to put into words. I mean, this is my family. This is my roots. This is where I came from. These people are from the same ancestry, and yet we're so far apart. You know?...We have different experiences, yet we're family. I mean, it's just kind of hard to put into words.

Carboni set Ghana family practices as the barometer for doing family, leading him to reevaluate his U.S.-based family experiences as lacking. This sense of lack was based on his not experiencing Ghanaian family norms continuously during his life in the U.S. As he says, “when I connected with my family there [in Ghana], I recognized how much in America with my family that I'm missing.”

When participants explained their experiences, they typically referred to the relative from Africa as a cousin without the distinction of the degree of relatedness. For example, biologically speaking, the relatives from Africa that African Americans identified approximately their fourth to eighth cousins (sharing third to seventh great grandparents). The biological connection in the ancestral family group provides a level of certainty in the relatedness. As Kwasi explains, “because the DNA doesn’t lie, and we are family.”

**Recognizing the Extended Family Nucleus.** Structurally, the ancestral family group formed by eighth cousins is an extra-extended family structure. This has implications on initial expectations of family membership. Only Carboni articulated the family structure. He explains of his relatives from Africa, “So, they have become, and they are a part of the extended family nucleus.” According to Carboni, relatives from Africa were both becoming members of the family unit (i.e., socially) and had already been part of the family structure (i.e., biologically). For him, it was a conscious social acceptance of what already was. This phrase extended family nucleus is a peculiar phrase indicating both that he accepted his relatives from Africa as being within the social-biological boundaries of his extended family and that the functional unit of his family was the extra-extended family structure. Although the family structure was specifically articulated only by Carboni, there are hints of the idea from all participants.

**Perceived Acceptance.** Another form of claiming kinship was for participants to perceive that they are recognized by their relatives in Africa as members of the family. There is a power in feeling claimed as kin that is well illustrated in Joseph’s experience with a family video. As Joseph explains, “they [relatives in Nigeria] actually made a video for me saying, "Hey, the past is the past. We love you, we love your family, we want you all to come back here...” Joseph had tears of joy when he watched the video. The relative’s family accepting Joseph’s membership within the family was documented in this family video in their claiming him as kin. This claiming, in turn, led to the saliency of his family identity as a sense of belonging or sense of membership. As Joseph explained:
I just broke down crying…And I was like, ‘Oh my god, this is my family, this is my actual relatives in Africa telling me that, ‘We want you all back. We want to connect with you; we want to know you.’’ And I’ll tell anybody…You know the whole tears of joy thing.

The fact of biological relatedness, as expressed by Joseph, has historical significance and is not essentialism of family based on sharing biological connections. Joseph perceived that his relatives were calling Nigeria his homeland. It was a place to return to even though it was the participants' ancestors who were taken multiple generations ago. This points to a sense of belonging based on other members of the group recognizing the participants’ membership. But this also illustrates an evolving generational orientation for participants. It was a highly meaningful experience for Joseph to hear relatives from Africa tell him that he was loved and welcomed in the present and that the trauma in the past of the Transatlantic Slave Trade could be left in the past. Joseph was connected, reconnected to his new family that already was. The sense of continuity linking him to his ancestors in Africa was forming in a very real way.

**Establishing and Maintaining Contact**

Throughout the processes of identifying relatives from African and claiming kinship, participants reported engaging in social interactions with the genetically matched person. After identifying a genetic match of interest, all participants initiated contact with the relative. There are three components of establishing contact with potential relatives from Africa: (1) the mechanisms of contact, (2) the nature of the participants’ initial message, and (3) the nature of the relative’s response. Most participants reported initiating contact through the company website. Various tools used to maintain contact include the messaging features on the company website, Facebook, phone, Skype, WhatsApp, and face-to-face interactions. However, sometimes participants search social media using the names listed with the DNA kit and initiate contact through direct message. Initial introductory messages sent by participants were usually short and included a question about the genetic match’s ethnicity. The nature of the response was based on the speed of the response, the frequency of contact, and the perceived reaction of the relative.

In Kwasi’s experience, about half of his relatives from Africa responded to his initial contact message. When they did respond, they told him their ethnic group and country of birth. Kwasi explains, “they respond to my question that lets me know exactly where they’re from. What ethnic group they’re from.” Based on the descriptions provided by participants, in many cases, the relative had someone else manage their genetic genealogy account. For example, in one reply, the relative’s wife responded to Kwasi’s initial contact message with information about the relative’s ethnic identity and background. Kwasi elaborates:

“I remember sending this person a message, and his wife was the one to respond because his wife was the one who tested him and she was managing his account…I was very
grateful that, ah, his wife responded back to me and told me as much as she could tell me.”

Marquis tempered his expectations when reaching out to new relatives. He mentioned safeguarding his feelings to avoid being hurt by their possible rejection. “You'll be hurt by you wanting to establish a relationship and them not wanting to. I've learned to focus on at the very least expectation, which is still amazing.” Like Kwasi, Marquis focused his initial messages on gathering or confirming information about his African ancestral ethnicities. “I approach it where these folks just confirm to me ethnicities…it makes it real for me, that's what it means, it makes it real for me. Confirmation.”

When relatives didn’t respond to his initial contact message, Kwasi felt sad and disheartened. Kwasi explained, “I say about a little bout over half of them, I never get a response, which is disheartening, but that’s okay.” In these cases, he did not draw any conclusions about the reasons for their non-response but remained hopeful that they will respond at some point. He explains, “you don’t know what’s going on their end… so I don’t try to draw any conclusions as to why they don’t respond back to me…But—I’m still hopeful that they’ll be led to respond to my message.” Nechelle reasoned that the response times are delayed because of the relatives’ busy lives. As she explained, “Sometimes, I have to wait a while. Some people don't contact me until a year later. I get that, contrary to what I read in groups, people get busy…It's been pretty positive for the most part. Some of these, you strike up a very good collaborative relationship.”

Maintaining contact was a continuation of establishing contact. Communications among extra-extended relatives varied in frequency and nature. Participants communicated with their relatives from Africa with frequencies ranging from daily to less than daily. For Carboni, communicating daily with his relatives has become part of his lifestyle. These interactions consist of daily greetings and inquiries about the relative’s activities that day. When possible, interactions also include sharing in everyday activities such as eating a meal together or visiting with relatives at their homes. As Carboni explained:

“[It] changed my life in the sense that on a daily basis daily, my communication with the descendants of the ancestors has become an integral part of my life beyond even the communication with the American friends and things of that sort.”

For some participants, the frequency of contact was less than daily. As Kwasi explains: “it’s not like a constant daily communication. If I inbox him, ask him something, they’ll respond. Very friendly.” Similarly, though Marquis’ contact with his relatives is not as he would like, he does try to maintain contact: “We had some pleasant interactions, albeit for a small amount of time. That, as far as me and her, is good enough, so we keep in contact.” Marquis further explains, in reference to another relative from Africa, “Yeah, so I talk to him about once a year, but our relationship never got sour or anything. We kind of just got busy. You know what I mean?” Regardless of the frequency of communications, participants
make meaning for family based on the nature of the communication, such as perceived importance of the topic or the ability to share narratives and receive social support. For example, Kwasi interpreted being asked by a relative about a decision on an internship as being valued as a family member. As Kwasi explained, “That’s special, you know. Like wow! She really values us and value our opinion and value us as family members.” For Carboni, having them as family “means that I have someone that I can call from another side of the ocean, and I can talk with them, and share with them about things that I might be going through personally.”

**Psychological Outcomes Associated with the Experience**

There are multiple emotional and behavioral responses associated with the participants’ evolving ethnic identity and recognizing relatedness.

**Acceptance and Belonging**

Participants recall their perceptions of being accepted or rejected based on their evolving African ethnic identity. Sometimes participants perceive that some relatives and nonrelatives within preexisting social networks accept them because they were able to be specific about their African ethnic origins. Sometimes they faced rejection by nonrelatives who were not in their preexisting social networks. Participants defended or maintained their African ethnic identity in response to rejection by Africans by rationalizing the reason for the rejection, providing historical context for the identity, or relying on connections with the ancestors instead of those who reject the identity.

Carboni perceived that members of the Fante ethnic group and citizens of Ghana love him. However, he perceived that his family has a specific appreciation that he could be specific about which ethnic group his ancestors were a part of. He explained, “I feel very good about Fante. I feel good about Ghana. I love Ghana. I love Fante. I love all of the ethnic tribes in Ghana, and I believe that they love me. But they also appreciate the fact that I have discovered the real tribe that my ancestors came from.”

Similarly, Nzeh illustrates that acceptance by other Nigerians when he shows them his DNA results. As Nzeh recalls:

And I remember showing my friends, who many of them were Nigerian. And they were like, ‘Oh, wow! 37%? Wow! You're Nigerian, you are!’ You know, so I wasn't voted off [a committee based on Nigerian identity]. I was gonna be voted off, but a lot of them were like, ‘Oh! You're Nigerian!’ And then some of them were like, ‘Well, wait a minute, you know, you're Benin-Togo! Wow!’ We had a dance, and I wouldn't dance, and one of them was like, ‘Aw man, come on, man! You gotta get in here, man! You're a Niger boy [N-i-g-e-r, slang for Nigerian]!’

Participants sometimes were not affirmed by Africans who were not in their preexisting networks. Participants maintained their ethnic identity when rejected by Africans. For example, Nzeh reasons that
the African person who rejects his African identity probably faced childhood trauma by African Americans. As Nzeh explains:

Then you have some pushbacks. It's a pushback from some people who are from Africa that may have had some trauma in their childhood by African Americans that tell you that no matter what you have in you or no matter where your ancestry comes from that you're not really African. You're a Black American. I actually had somebody tell me that. I was like, "Hmm." [And the African person said,] "You're a Black American. I'll never accept you as an African." [Nzeh sarcastically responds,] "Okay."

Joseph’s identification as African was especially salient when he was around people more recently from Africa. He defended his African identity even when African immigrants rejected his identification, willingly telling how his family got to the U.S. As Joseph explains:

He asked me was I African. I said, ‘yes.’ And he said, ‘Where you from?’ I said, ‘I'm from New Jersey.’ He said, ‘What are your parents?’ I said, ‘They're from America.’ ‘So, what about your grandparents?’ ‘They're from America.’ He says, ‘You're not African.’ I say, ‘Yes, I am.’ He says, ‘If you weren't from Africa, your parents not from Africa, how are you African?’ I said, ‘Well, my ancestor was kidnapped from Africa, you know that story?’

Marquis fortified his African ethnic identity when his identity was rejected by other Africans by focusing on communing with his ancestors from Africa as opposed to his living relatives from Africa. As he says,

If you ran into an African person who, God forbid, just happens to be somehow combative about you identifying with them or their tribe, just remember if you're African American, it's not them who makes you who you are. It's your ancestors who tell you if you're part of a tribe or not, not them.

His claim to his African ethnic identities is based on his biological connection to his ancestors and not what co-ethnic members claim.

Participants ranged from having a sense of belonging to not having a sense of belonging. Kwasi illustrates having a sense of belonging to his family from Africa. As he explains, “I felt a sense of belonging...So that sense of belonging is great. Is powerful. It’s something that we, as African American, a lot of us are longing for. Especially a sense of belonging with African kin.” Similarly, Willie felt a sense of familial belonging with his relatives from Africa based on the belief in his being related to those relatives. As he explained, “It, first and foremost, shaped my experience of belonging to a family.”

Willie’s experiences were life-changing for him because they became his identity. As he explained, “I mean, when you link that up with literally having an interactive experience of touching base
with an actual cousin…I mean, that unquestionably is life-changing, because now that is your identity.” In getting to know his family from Africa, Carboni felt that he got to know himself more. He explained, “It helped me to understand me more, when I can connect with my family, when I can sit with them, when I can talk with them, when I can have a meal with them.” It is a “deeper part” of himself. However, Carboni recognized that some members were receptive to the reunification, whereas others were not receptive. As he explains, “Some of the descendants would talk, and there were others—talk meaning that they were excited about it—and there were others who may not have been. They heard it, but it didn't resonate with them.”

In contrast, some participants felt no sense of family or belonging with relatives from Africa. As Marquis explained, “I have to say, as far as belonging to a family, I don't feel the belonging, unfortunately.” He instead chooses to focus on his shared ancestors with the relatives. “I'm pretty much re-communing with my ancestors.” However, he did have a sense of ethnic (i.e., indigenous) belonging based on his ancestry. As he explained, “as far as a sense of belonging, as far as being native somewhere, you can't say that Ghana and Nigeria, those areas, I'm not native to. I know I am.”

**Pride and Self-esteem**

For participants, interacting with relatives led to an affirmation in having an African ethnic identity, strengthening their sense of pride in the African heritage, and strengthening their connection to an ancestral homeland. Because of these experiences, self-identity as a person of African descent and pride in having African ancestry and heritage grew greatly. Kwasi explained:

> My self-identity was exploded into greater pride for my African roots.” As Kwasi says, genetic genealogy “can tell you who in Africa you’re related to. So, that right there is phenomenal. Powerful. So, it strengthened my sense of pride for my African roots.

Although Joseph has always been proud that his ancestors came from Africa, his pride had heightened saliency when he heard about those specific regions where he knows his ancestors were more likely from. In knowing where his ancestors were from through communicating with his living relatives from Africa, Joseph felt more connected to the cultural legacies of those African countries. As Joseph explains, “It made me feel empowered…It made me feel reconnected is what I want to say, to that, which was a part of me all this time anyway.” Willie’s increased sense of ethnic pride as a person of African descent is the result of having greater specificity in the knowledge of his African heritage than before the genetic genealogy and reunion experiences. As he explained, “it's allowed to be even more proud to be a person of African descent, because now that's become a lot more defined, versus me just looking at my skin color.”

Growing up and into adulthood, Nechelle was never excited or proud about her African ancestry until she found a relative from Africa. “I never felt excited about African until my DNA match…just the
idea of knowing that my ancestors are from Akan group, that brings me great pride.” She said, more broadly, “DNA results make me want to know about Africa and want me to know about African American studies.”

For Marquis, “it's recovering a destroyed sense of self, to where back to, I guess, what would be called a healthy view of oneself, and value, and self-esteem.” The experience has left Marquis with a sense of pride, self-esteem, self-determination, and self-importance.

“Yeah, it was certainly, even to summarize what was said already, it was a sense of…proper pride, a sense of pride, …self-esteem, [a] determined nature. In the beginning, it was like this constant high, but now it's more—just general, I feel like, oh, well this is, I must be important.”

Marquis now knows that his ancestors from Africa were not inferior to others despite the advent of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. As he explains:

I know that my ancestors were, in fact, not inferior. Except for, obviously, with historical things happening, and just situational things happening, situationally being inferior…and of course the brain drain. All of that inspires me to know that I need to just focus on things that are present and that I can push forward. Like I said, my ancestors "were somebody." I think I was starting something.

The experiences did not leave Willie feeling a sense of superiority as an African American. “It doesn't make me feel egocentric as if me as an African-American is better than anybody else.” Willies explained:

“It's definitely increased my level of confidence, not to the point to where--and I'm happy about this--not the point where I think I'm any better than anybody else because I understand the rich culture of my people in Africa.”

Marquis explains that his sense of pride is based on self-knowledge, not a sense of superiority:

“Of course, I walked out with my chest out a little bit more, not because I'm part of something or one that's considering I'm better than somebody else. No, I had my chest out, it was because I knew something more about myself, and actually, a whole lot more about myself now.”

Nechelle explained a similar self-confidence:

It makes me more confident, I guess maybe. Like I know who I am, not in a cocky way, I think, in general, it helps me get a full sense of knowing who I am and accepting everything that has shaped me…It's a part of me. It may not show in my outward appearance, but this is who I am.
Wille viewed these reunion activities as a source of empowerment, restoration, and reconnection to what was lost:

There's so much that's been taken from us, and rather than be bitter about it--I can't personally change anything in the past. I feel like these are steps I can personally make as an African American, steps that I can take of being empowered, feeling empowered, and empowering others. Look, there are ways that we can be connected back from the wrongs in the past and how we were separated.

Willie’s experiences were empowering to him partially because stereotypes about the intelligence of Africans have been broken due to his relatives’ lives being contrary to those stereotypes. As he explained, “it was a strengthening experience of empowerment, right, to be able to speak to a family member that was just so intelligent, to even further break that stereotype.”

**Phenotypical Self-love**

Through the experience of researching African history, including history based on his own African ancestors, Marquis changed from having an ingrained hatred for other Black men to seeing their beauty, intelligence, and strength based on their African ancestry. Marquis explained, “When I see another black man now, another African American, or African, first of all, I see in their face Africa, I see where they're from. I see what they probably don't even see, which is that they're nice looking. Handsome, or beautiful, or smart, or strong. I see that.”

The information gained through the genetic genealogy experience fortified Marquis in the destruction of internalized White supremacist ideology. The process began before taking a DNA test “but was strengthened and built upon during the genealogy research.” He grew to have phenotypical self-love:

It's enjoyable to see myself. There's no pain when I look at myself in that mirror now.

There's a degree of pleasure sometimes. "Okay, that's actually your Senegalese side that you're looking at right now, your nose looks like—" Just in something positive, not negative anymore.

Marquis continued to explain, “I'm able to look at myself compared to other people in other ethnic groups and say:

Wow, man, those features are nice. That lip shape is nice. The skin tone is nice, the curliness of the hair is really nice." I'm able to not be having an inferiority complex, but more so have more of an equal sense of attractiveness, whether it's true or not….enjoying this sense that I can do, not just look like, but I can do just as good as someone else…Now I love myself, and I love where I come from, and I can see billions of people that look like me and come from the spaces I come from, that are handsome and
beautiful, and more importantly, smart, accomplished, and the list goes on. That's the heart of it right there.

When Willie looks in the mirror, he also sees Africa and beauty. He explained:

“When I look in the mirror, oftentimes I see Ghana. When I look in the mirror, I see Nigeria; I don't see the USA….When I look in the mirror now, my view of myself is a lot more expansive. I don't just stereotype or condense my being as an American, but I look at myself as an African...Since I've connected more with my roots, I have a better appreciation, or even a greater appreciation for natural hair...even dark skinned. I've always felt like dark skin is beautiful, but I even think that it's even more beautiful now.”

Rather than describing an image in the mirror, Carboni explains seeing himself in other Africans, “When I see them, I see me. I see my grandfather and great-grandfather.”

**Evolving Generational Orientation**

The fact that Joseph could scientifically state that he had specific genetic ties to particular African countries was significant. This ability influenced the way he saw himself. Slavery was no longer the origin of Black history for Joseph. His self-definition was no longer originating from the experience of slavery. As Joseph explained:

To know that I have—and not to just assume—but to be able to scientifically state that I have genetic ties back to these particular regions, it's really influenced how I see myself, and knowing that I'm not just defined by the experience of slavery.

Joseph’s measure of African American population progress (e.g., upward mobility) did not start at the time of slavery in the Americas but at the time of his ancestors a few generations prior in Africa, predating slavery in the Americas. As Joseph explained:

When you start the history of black people with slavery, everything that happens after that looks like progress. But when you start our history at the beginning of time, at the beginning of civilization, things look different. And slavery no longer becomes the origins of black history.

Marquis drew on his ancestors’ industriousness and strength to over adversity both to positively reevaluate his own past situations and to encourage him in today’s situations. As Marquis explained:

For one, I don't look too down on a situation and the situation I've been in before. I learned the history and know my ancestors; for one, a lot of the times had it a whole lot worse…but just as important, I have industrious peoples in my bloodline and multiple African peoples. That causes me to be encouraged and to not give up.

As Kwasi explains, “we were more than savages. We were human beings who had a flourishing community in Africa that was disrupted. So, my connecting to Africa is like strengthen not only my
mindset but the mindset of people I talk to too.” Because of his relationships with his relatives in Africa, Carboni has become a world citizen. The geopolitical borders are less salient as he travels to various African countries. His sense of self is becoming more transnational. This gives Carboni a sense of liberation and a “true understanding of freedom.”

Change in Perception of Africa and Interactions in General

One clear association with using genetic genealogy to contact relatives from Africa was that recognizing their biological relatedness with specific African families caused them to want to interact more with Africans in general. For example, Marquis now seeks opportunities to engage with other Africans regardless of where they are from. “It's definitely changed the way I interact with the people from, pretty much, all ethnic groups in Africa.” To illustrate with Marquis further, motivated by these reunification experiences, Marquis now loves to interact with others, especially other African Americans. “I interact more with other folks who are African American, and I love the interaction… It is being able to see beauty in any African American person... In other words, the friendliness is there from African Americans and even whites.”

Finding specific relatives from Africa also encourages Nechelle to socialize with Africans in general. “What got me more intrigued is now when I see Africans, I may be waiting on the city bus, I strike up a conversation.” Because of learning about her genetic connection to specific African individuals, Nechelle felt more connected to Africans in general and desired to engage with them more. As she explains, “I meet Africans, some of them from Senegal, some from Niger, and some from Ghana, and just to talk to them. I just feel a little bit more connected to them. …I feel more connected when I meet another African.” As Willie explains it, “it just simply allows me to be able to identify more with the people in that particular continent, and specifically the West African region.”

Joseph explained a similar desire, “It did make me kind of shift how I identify as well. Especially when I'm talking to people who have more recently moved from those areas here, made me want to engage them more.” Joseph seeks perspectives of Africans and engages in deeper dialogues about the general relationship between Africans and African Americans. As Joseph explained, “it made me kind of go back and reassess the relationships that I've had with my Nigerian friends…really made me kind of want to get a better understanding of their opinions from a cultural perspective of things. And to have some deeper dialogue and conversations about the relationships between Africans and African Americans.”

Willie also explained wanting to have more relationships with Africans in general and to embrace his Nigerian culture through everyday activities such as going to Nigerian restaurants. As he said, “it's just opened me up to clearly I want to have more of a relationship with Africans, even with the food, even going to restaurants here in Los Angeles that are Nigerian restaurants.” He went on to explain, “It makes
me want to embrace the culture, eat the food, learn more about the food, learn more about people because that is my culture.”

Willie’s orientation towards Africa changed. He admired his cousin in Guinea, causing him to be cognizant of the fact that in that situation, America was looking up to Africa. It continues to wash away that sense of inferiority once held for Africa.

My cousin in Guinea…he's doing things that I'm looking up to him in doing. Oftentimes in the world, America thinks that Africa looks up to America. But what happens when an American looks up to an African, an African that you find yourself related to. It literally changes your entire perception, even things unconsciously that have been placed in you, as it relates to anything dealing with the inferiority of Africa relative to the western world.

Marquis explains that his reunification experiences have shifted him away from the negative views he once held about Africa and her peoples. As he says, the “negative view about Africa and that people that I would have, that was kind of trained in me, was actually turning a whole lot, it was shifting a whole lot.”
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

This study used grounded theory methods to develop a grounded theory on family identity development and ethnic identity development among African Americans who engaged in social interactions with their extra-extended relatives from Africa. The objectives of this study were to examine (1) the familial and ethnic meanings of relatedness with an African genetic match, (2) the processes of family and ethnic identity development within the context of ancestral family reunification, and (3) psychological outcomes associated with family and ethnic identity development within the context of ancestral family reunification.

Examining the collective experiences of the participants of this study, participants felt (1) a sense of lack in African ancestral history and (2) an evolving ethnic identity while (3) recognizing relatedness, and (4) managing many emotions associated with the experience. The processes of evolving ethnic identity and recognizing relatedness address the study’s objective of examining the processes of family and ethnic identity development within the context of ancestral family reunification. To a lesser extent, these two processes also address the study’s objective of examining the familial and ethnic meanings associated with relatedness with an African genetic match. With the resultant grounded theory construct of a sense of lack in African ancestral history, these processes hint more at the experience's psychosocial significance rather than fully illuminating the familial and ethnic meanings. The process of managing emotions associated with the experience described in the resultant grounded theory addresses the study’s objective to examine the psychological outcomes associated with family and ethnic identity development within the context of ancestral family reunification. What follows is the resultant substantive theory (Appendix I) with an interpretation of the findings and a discussion with extant literature.

Resultant Grounded Theory: African American Family and Ethnic Identity Development within African Ancestral Families

A Sense of Lack in African Ancestral History

Before entering the ancestral family reunification experience, participants experience A Sense of Lack in African Ancestral History, defined as a perception of having an insufficient level of knowledge in ones’ African genealogical family history. A Sense of Lack in African Ancestral History has 3 phases: (1) developing a sense of lack in African family history, (2) looking towards genealogy for ancestral family history, and (3) using genetic genealogy for ancestral family history. The boundaries of these phases are porous and overlap considerably.

Developing a Sense of Lack in African Family History. The sense of lack in African ancestral history is created or made conscious through a series of experiences that cause the person to determine that they are not as informed about their ancestral history as is expected in some socializing environments. The person perceives that they have a deficiency in personal, family, and ancestral
knowledge. The sense of lack is further reinforced when ethnic identity exploration activities (e.g., searching civic archives) fail to produce stories or artifacts associated with a well-developed genealogical history. This sense of lack usually begins during early childhood in socializing settings and then continues into adulthood as a more individualized experience, such as searching for genealogical information.

**Looking Towards Genealogy for Ancestral Family History.** At some point during adulthood, participants begin to consider engaging in genealogy to address their sense of lack. Genealogy activities include reviewing family tree and other genealogical work conducted by other family members, searching various archives such as court documents and religious records, and reviewing genetic genealogy results. The type of information sought may be national, ethnic, community, or family history. It may span a few or hundreds of generations. Persons searching archival records may only be searching for family history within the last few generations, whereas a person taking a genetic genealogy test may be seeking national, ethnic, or community history tens or hundreds of generations ago. Seeking or exploring behavior could occur at any phase of adulthood, not necessarily early or emerging adulthood.

**Using Genetic Genealogy for Ancestral Family History.** At some point while engaging in genealogy (including genetic genealogy), participants begin to amplify their efforts in autosomal genetic genealogy (1) to learn their ancestry composition in general, (2) to learn about their African ancestral ethnic identities in particular, and (3) to further their genealogical research in family mysteries. Participants usually test with multiple companies and test multiple family members. Testing with multiple companies enables participants to compare results and to have access to multiple databases. Testing multiple family members enables participants to apply a greater understanding of the science of genetic genealogy to uncovering family branches. Here, participants enthusiastically engage in genetic genealogy specifically to identify or confirm relatedness with relatives from Africa.

A sense of lack in African ancestral history as a construct is consistent with Alondra Nelson’s ethnography among African American consumers of African Ancestry, Inc. (Nelson, 2016). One example of the consistency is how the Roots miniseries (Chomsky et al., 1977) served as a catalyst for developing a sense of lack in African family and ethnic history and using genealogy to reduce that lack (Abel, 2018; Nelson, 2016). Because of imposed disruptions of familial ties during the U.S. slave era, which ended about four generations ago (Micheletti et al., 2020), there was a significant disruption in the African American sense of intergenerational continuity (Butler, 2001; Lindahl & Back, 1987). Participants of the present study engaged in genetic genealogy for genealogical research and curiosity about their past like the Wagner and Weiss (2012) study. However, though 75% of participants in their study engaged in genetic genealogy for fun, no participant in the present study used terms like fun to describe the experience (Wagner & Weiss, 2012). Similar to findings in other studies, participants in this study sought genetic genealogy to learn about their African ancestral past and identify an African homeland (Fehler,
The generational orientation of participants in this study reflects a changing narrative that situates themselves as springing forth from thriving communities and families in Africa rather than from chattel slavery in the U.S. Although not explicitly stated by participants, genealogy provides a family history that can be used to establish a sense of social location in time and history (Kramer, 2011; Stein, 2009). For example, beginning in the 1970s, middle-aged children of Holocaust survivors increasingly developed their family narratives through memory work, such as heritage tourism, oral histories from surviving relatives, films, memoirs, and artifacts, to learn about unknown ancestors after war and genocide disrupted their sense of continuity (Stein, 2009). The Holocaust survivors’ descendants’ motivations for engaging in memory work included contacting living surviving relatives, finding proof of parents’ and grandparents’ lives, understanding family background, and mourning losses (Stein, 2009). These experiences may prove to be informative about the drive for genetic genealogy testing among African Americans. Like the descendants of Holocaust survivors in Stein’s (2009) study, African Americans are descendants of ancestors who experienced capture, disruption from family ties, torture, or death as recently as four or five generations ago (e.g., Hurston, 2018). An important difference is that Africans enslaved in the U.S. experienced mass trauma for multiple generations, making genetic genealogy testing the only means of establishing ancestral continuity for African Americans in almost all cases.

**Evolving Ethnic Identity**

The evolving ethnic identity is the process of ethnic identity becoming salient and shifting in emphasis by uncovering information about the ethnicity of the relative from Africa and claiming this as one’s ethnic heritage. Four components of the evolving ethnic identity process are (1) initial racial-ethnic identity, (2) reviewing the test results, (3) refocusing ethnic identity exploration based on genetic relatedness, and (4) shifting ethnic identity.

**Initial Racial-Ethnic Identity.** The initial racial-ethnic identity is the psychological sense of group membership held by participants as they entered the genetic genealogy experience. The ethnic labels may vary. “African,” “of African descent,” “African American,” and “Black” are all racial-ethnic labels that participants may use. The label meanings may vary or be interchangeable. For example, some may use African and Black interchangeably, or they use African or African American depending on the context. Participants who discussed their skin pigmentation as a notably darker (i.e., Marcus) or lighter (i.e., Nechelle) tone within a brown-black color spectrum initially rejected or ignored an African label. Both embraced African-based labels only after gravitating towards embracing African continental history in general or their African relatives specifically. Even when an African label was used, the label was indiscriminately African because they did not know where their ancestors were from in Africa.
Reviewing the Test Results. Due to their sense of lack in African ancestral history, they take an autosomal genetic genealogy test in the hopes of learning more about their ancestral past. The two main sets of results are their admixture results (e.g., “ethnicity estimates”) and their genetic matches (i.e., individuals with whom they share DNA meeting specific thresholds). Participants typically view their admixture results first. Early expressions of the shifting ethnic identity appear as they claim an African national ethnicity based on the genetic genealogy results. For example, if the largest admixture region is Nigeria, the participant may claim to be Nigerian. Then participants review the genetic matches and eventually identify individuals from Africa. Reviewing the Test Results is repeated each time participants test with a new company or test a different family member, which may vary in the listed estimated percentage range of ancestry from a specific African region and the specific individuals listed as genetic matches.

Refocusing Ethnic Identity Exploration Based on Genetic Relatedness. Around this point of the evolving ethnic identity process, participants shift their ethnic exploration from African continental history to African history based on their genetic genealogy results to African history based on claiming the ethnicity of their living relatives from Africa as their ancestral ethnic heritage. In this use of genetic genealogy, ancestral ethnic identity is learned from African relatives instead of or along with biogeographical ancestry results. Extra-extended cousins become the agents of socialization, and African personal stories become the source of socialization messages. This act of learning about their ancestral ethnicity is ethnic socialization occurring in adulthood. Members of a family group are still the primary agents of socialization. The difference is that those members share ancestors within the last 20 generations instead of just the last two or three generations. The agents are from Africa rather than the U.S. and can tell them a part of their history that their parents and grandparents never knew. As participants interact with additional relatives from Africa, they recognize that their relatives are from various nations and ethnic groups in Sub-Saharan Africa. Claiming an ethnic identity label based on the perceived ethnicity of their ancestors shared with their relatives is no longer straightforward. The identity goes into flux as various family-based African ethnicities or nations are considered. This presents a significant shift in the nature of ethnic socialization.

Shifting Ethnic Identity. At some point during ethnic identity exploration with relatives from Africa, participants repurpose the labels African and African American to reflect their mosaic African ethnicities. Participants may use a specific African ethnic identity label depending on the context. They have a greater psychological connection to Africa and Africans, even claiming specific shared labels with Africans born in Africa having that label. Some may feel a psychological sense of belonging to a specific ethnic group. For example, a participant may claim to be Fante (an African ethnic group) when talking
with a person born in Africa in the Fante ethnic group. There may still be some confusion about how to operationalize their newly claimed ethnic identity. For example, a participant may question if they should attend a gathering catering to Nigerians. Participants may feel that the ethnic identity belongs to them as an inheritance from their ancestors shared with the relative from Africa and that no one can deny their claims of being African, including Africans born on the continent. Participants may claim the ethnicity as their ethnicity or simply as their ancestors' ethnicity.

Existing research asserts that ethnic identity is a subjective sense of membership with components of self-labeling, sense of belonging, preference and positive evaluation of the ethnic group, ethnic knowledge, and participation in ethnic activities (Cokley, 2007). It develops through socialization and periods of exploration and commitment (Phinney, 1989, 1993; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020). The evolving ethnic identity process as presented in the present study illuminates how engaging in genetic genealogy and subsequently interacting with relatives from Africa is a rich example of both ethnic socialization and ethnic identity exploration. As participants receive messages about the ethnicity of their relatives from Africa, there is a flux in self-labeling as their level of ethnic knowledge greatly changes. This flux may be associated with a change in ethnic identity commitment. This study agrees with assertions that participants shape an ethnic identity based on direct communications with relatives and family from Africa over time and experience.

This study expands on that understanding by showing an ethnic socialization where the agents of socialization include relatives beyond the relationships of grandparents, great-grandparents, and first- or second-cousins. In the experiences shared in this study, the shared ancestor is unknown and may be upwards of 20 generations ago (Micheletti et al., 2020). Furthermore, this ethnic identity development is occurring well into late adulthood. It is also significant because it changes the narrative about African Americans not being able to identify specific ancestral homelands.

**Recognizing Relatedness**

Typically, during the early portions of the Evolving Ethnic Identity process, participants enter the Recognizing Relatedness process. Recognizing Relatedness is the process of going from acknowledging that a person is a potential genetic match to claiming that person as a family member. During this process, participants’ motivations for Reviewing Test Results shift from using the biogeographical ancestry results to determine ethnicities to using the genetic matches results to identify relatives from Africa. Three components of recognizing relatedness are (1) identifying relatives from Africa, (2) claiming kinship, and (3) establishing and maintaining contact.

**Identifying Relatives from Africa.** This is a cognitive exercise of Recognizing Relatedness consisting of (1) determining if the person represented by the genetic match is from Africa and (2) determining if the genetic match is a true genetic match. Determining if the person represented by the
genetic match is from Africa goes from selecting a genetic match in the results to receiving a verbal or written confirmation from the person managing the genetic match’s profile that the person was born in Africa or born of parents from Africa. If the profile manager has supplied sufficient information in the public profile or public family tree, a participant can determine that the relative is from Africa before the confirmation. After selecting a genetic match and initiating contact, about half of the contacted profile managers respond. Participants would then receive a written confirmation of the genetic match being from Africa as a reply to their initiating contact. It is a rare experience for participants to receive an initiating contact from the profile manager of the genetic match from Africa. Once a communication line has been established, participants can learn about the ethnicity of the person from Africa and thereby provide the participant with an African ethnicity to claim as an inheritance.

Determining if the genetic match is a true genetic match is a process of determining if the genetic match is a true match that represents shared ancestry within the last 4 to 20 generations or a false match representing some error in the results or relatedness more extended than 20 generations. As the level of experience grows, understanding the science of genetic genealogy also grows, and participants apply that knowledge to supporting or refuting a claim of relatedness. Using autosomal genetic genealogy for multiple family members is an integral part of this process. It provides evidence of relatedness and information about which branch of the tree the genetic match should be placed.

There is a historical significance to having evidence of biological relatedness between an African American individual (or family group) and an African individual (or family group). In an African American population where having fictive kin is a norm, the emphasis on genetic relatedness is a factor of historical recovery of kinship networks before mass trauma. The biological connection becomes evidence that the participant found the family that their ancestor(s) was a member of in Africa before that ancestor was taken in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. This does not mean that they have reduced family to biological relatedness only or in some way have essentialized and elevated biological relatedness over social relatedness. It is not either-or but both-and. Biological relatedness with a person from Africa with a shared ancestor approximately 4 to 20 generations ago provides evidence that families that the Transatlantic Slave Trade separated are reuniting, a feat thought impossible until recently.

Claiming Kinship. This is a socioemotional process of Recognizing Relatedness. The component of this process is (1) naming the relationship, (2) recognizing the extended family nucleus, and (3) perceived acceptance. Naming the relationship is a description of how participants refer to the relative from Africa during the interview with the researcher. Participants referred to the genetic match as relatives, family, or cousins. Although participants go through great lengths to place the relative from Africa on the proper branch in their family tree (e.g., using multiple testing companies, testing multiple family members), the precise degree of cousinship becomes irrelevant in the early experiences of
claiming kinship. None referred to a genetic match from Africa that they determined to be a true match in terms of not being related. However, the participant’s familial sentiment towards the relative from Africa was not always clear when participants used the words relative or cousin. It is possible that these words were used simply because participants felt a lack of a more descriptive term for their sentiment.

Recognizing the extended family nucleus describes the way participants view the relative from Africa concerning the family composition or family structure. The phrase extended family nucleus refers to the sentiment that the primary functioning family unit (i.e., family nucleus) is the extended family unit as a norm and that the extended family unit includes relatives from Africa. Family studies characterize contemporary African American families as having an extended family structure consisting of biological kin and fictive kin that are multi-generational and multi-residential (Belgrave & Allison, 2009; McAdoo & Younge, 2009). However, this study shows that the degree of relatedness included as biological kin is expanding from first or second cousin to include more distantly related relatives from Africa.

Understanding family composition and structure is essential given the role that family plays in socialization, identity development, decision-making, resource management, and psychological well-being (Belgrave & Allison, 2009; Bennett, Wolin, & McAvity, 1988). Furthermore, far from essentializing family membership as only biological connections, participants often use genetic matching to connect to a broader African family group, community, ethnicity, or nation.

Although participants referred to their genetic matches from Africa as relatives or family, only one participant explicitly articulated the changed family composition. Future studies could further explore family composition and structure within the ancestral family context. For example, additional research could explore the roles and hierarchies that elder Africans fill in the extended family nucleus.

Perceived Acceptance within the Claiming Kinship process refers to the sense of being recognized by relatives from Africa as being a member of their family. This could range from not feeling accepted at all to feeling completely accepted. This perception could be different for each participant-relative relationship which should be considered when evaluating overall perceived acceptance for a participant with identified relatives from multiple families in Africa.

Establishing and Maintaining Contact. This process is a mechanism for establishing and maintaining social interactions with relatives from Africa. There are three components of establishing and maintaining contact with relatives from Africa: (1) the mechanisms of contact, (2) the nature of the participants’ initial message, and (3) the nature of the relative’s response. Mechanisms include direct messaging on the genetic genealogy company website, Facebook, telephone, Skype, WhatsApp, and face-to-face interactions. In participants’ initial contact messages to the relative, they usually ask questions to confirm that the relative is indeed a person born in Africa. If the participant receives a response, a favorable response includes a confirmation that the genetic match is from Africa and the person’s ethnic
group. Participants spoke of on-going communications in terms of the speed of the responses, the frequency of contact, and perceived reactions of the relative.

**Psychological Outcomes Associated with the Experience**

The emotions that participants shared about their experiences were frequently reactions to both family identity development and ethnic identity development components, which speaks to the sense of lack in their African ancestral ethnic history that drew them to engage in genetic genealogy and the subsequent intertwining family identity development and ethnic identity development that occurs at the point of engaging in social interactions with relatives from Africa. Psychological outcomes associated with the experience include (1) acceptance and belonging, (2) pride and self-esteem, (3) phenotypical self-love, (4) evolving generational orientation, (5) a change in perceptions of Africa, and interactions with Africans in general. Participants feel a sense of belonging to the ethnic group or family group of their relatives from Africa, ranging from feeling a strong sense of belonging to not feeling a sense of belonging. Participants deal with a sense of rejection by rationalizing the reason for the rejection or relying on connections with the ancestors instead of those who reject the identity. Social interactions with relatives boost participants’ pride and self-esteem by affirming their African ethnic identity, strengthening their sense of pride in their African heritage, and strengthening their psychological connection to an ancestral homeland. Some participants also expressed this self-esteem in terms of increased appreciation for their own facial features as an African inheritance. This experience causes participants to have an expanded generational orientation that includes more personalized histories of African ancestries and stories of trait inheritances.

**African American Identity Change**

The aim of this study was to develop a substantive theory on African American adult ethnic identity and family identity development. However, this study also makes theoretical connections with identity change in identity control theory (ICT) as conceptualized by Peter Burke. ICT stems from a structural symbolic interaction perspective and addresses identity as a process (Burke, 1991).

ICT emphasizes identity meanings and the relationship between identities and behavior within a social context (Burke, 2016). According to ICT, while a person manages their behavior so that their self-view and reflected appraisals change to be consistent with their identity ideals, the person’s ideals will change to be consistent with the meanings in the situation if they remain in the situation long enough. In the current study, the situation is African Americans identifying genetic matches from Africa and engaging in social interactions with them. In ICT, identities can change in the strength of a response in an identity dimension (e.g., how nurturing is a cousin) and in the dimensions relevant for the identity (e.g., the nurturing dimension becoming important to what it means to be a cousin) (Burke, 2006). In the current study, identities are changing in the set of significant others being identified with. Perhaps this
represents both a change in the strength of the response compared to previous responses to extra-extended cousins in general (if they were recognized at all) and a change in the relevant dimensions for extra-extended cousins' role.

Until the discrepancy between the perceptions in the situation and the identity standard returns to congruence, the person may experience alienation and a loss of the sense of self (Burke, 1991). Future studies could examine the period of flux in the Evolving Ethnic Identity process when participants determine their ethnic self-label based on their newfound relatedness. Although participants talked about this flux, a conflict with multiple identities may not be a universal experience. One participant explained how he needed to reassure his mother that she was not losing him to Africa. Other indications of this conflict may be when a participant explained that she embraced both her African and European ancestry or when another participant was goaded into dancing because of his newfound Nigerian ethnicity. Future studies could explore the period of flux further.

The substantive theory could also benefit from a future exploration of African Americans comparing their (1) self-views with their identity ideal, (2) reflected appraisals with their identity ideal, and (3) self-views with reflected appraisals within the emerging African ancestral family. For example, African Americans may receive new reflected appraisals about what it means to be both a person of African descent and a family member. According to ICT, both new reflected appraisals and new self-knowledge would influence African American self-views. African Americans would then compare their self-views, reflected appraisals, and self-knowledge to their identity ideals for family identities. Future studies could examine this process further.

Another area for future work is to include the perspectives of the relatives from Africa and the U.S. in the study. The substantive theory could be expanded to illuminate the exchange between African and African American relatives as they negotiate new shared meanings of family and ethnicity. The negotiations with close relatives (e.g., immediate family members, first cousins, aunts/uncles) would also be factors.

**Limitations**

Limitations and suggestions for expanding this work were discussed throughout the discussion section on the resulting substantive theory. A notable limitation highlighted in this section is the lack of diversity in the sample for this study. A more diverse sample would likely have been more representative of the resultant processes. This sample was predominantly men and should be expanded to include women. Intentional efforts should be taken to be diverse in other demographics such as gender, sexuality, religion, and family background (e.g., foster care, single-parent household). This theory could be further expanded by including the participants’ relatives from Africa and other previously known family members of both the African American and the African related person. In both suggestions, group
interviewing could also be used to capture meaning-making processes and to delve deeper into meanings and processes.

**Implications**

African Americans engaging with African relatives has several ethical, legal, and social implications. Family reunification among families separated during the mass trauma of the Transatlantic Slave Trade can be used as an avenue for restorative justice. One of the clear outcomes of the mass trauma was the disruption of families and families' social processes for generations. The effects of the trauma still seep into the lives of descendants long after the memories and family narratives of such events are forgotten. However, evidence of these former family connections can be found in genetic genealogy through an increasingly accessible commercial DNA test. The popularity of genetic genealogy among African Americans for African ethnic exploration despite common medical mistrust is notable, and existing research strongly supports the association between ethnic identity and psychological well-being. Supporting these efforts in ethnic exploration and, for some, family exploration is one way that a restorative justice collective action could contribute toward repairing some of the effects of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Recognizing relatedness and the shifting ethnic identity among relatives from Africa is also a matter of social justice for African Americans. Those engaged in these practices who know their ancestral family history through generations of African history can experience the privileges and disadvantages of being aware of their family history. Such privileges include experiencing the benefits of having an informed generational orientation and having specific homelands beyond the territories of the U.S. There are also the disadvantages of having to contend with the horrors within a long personal family history.

Legal implications of recognizing relatedness include cases for reparations and citizenship. Recall that in the reparations case of *Farmer-Paellmann v. FleetBoston*, Judge Norgle’s arguments for dismissal was that (1) the lineage-type genetic genealogy test used in that case did not satisfactorily show a direct biological relationship between specific deceased slaves and the defendants, (2) the lineage-type genetic genealogy test did not and could not differentiate between descendants of African enslaved in the U.S. and Africans who immigrated to the U.S. more recently and that (3) acceptable DNA evidence for reparations would be to show genetic evidence of uninterrupted pedigree from a person of African descent to an enslaved person (Nelson, 2016). In contrast to the use of the lineage-type genetic genealogy test that gained popularity among African Americans because of its use in identifying ancestral African tribes, the use of the autosomal genetic genealogy test used by the participants in this study to identify relatives from Africa can be used to show an uninterrupted pedigree through several generations. It provides precisely the type of DNA evidence specifically mentioned by Judge Norgle that would be
needed for reparations court cases. A broader implication is that it can also show evidence for uninterrupted pedigree between a descendant of a slave and a descendant of the slave owner.

Recognizing relatedness with relatives from Africa could influence the legal processes of citizenship. Proving direct relatedness could support the quest of African Americans to gain citizenship in the African country where their relative is from. U.S. policymakers involved in the policies and laws on U.S. citizens having dual citizenship with African nations should revisit these decisions given that African Americans are forming, at a minimum, lines of communication between themselves and African relatives still residing in Africa. Similarly, policymakers in African nations should revisit their repatriation and path to citizenship policies for African Americans who can show a direct genetic relatedness between themselves and a national of the African country.

These legal implications are connected to the social implications of these new African transnational extra-extended family forms. African American families that typically included three generations of extended relatives and fictive kin are morphing into family forms that include more distinct degrees of relatedness and relatives from multiple countries. Whereas socially, family is whatever its members make it, legal uses for reparations and citizenship would require it to be defined in specific ways. Motivations and mechanisms for engaging in family, community, national, and international matters may also shift. Infrastructure such as access to the internet and video calling to support family engagement should also be addressed.

Recognizing relatedness and shifting ethnic identity should be considered within family and ethnic identity development, but also within fields and practices associated with family and identity. This study is suggestive of the broad range of topics to examine within the context of African Americans finding relatedness and identity among Africans through the use of autosomal genetic genealogy.

**Conclusion**

As African Americans engage in interactions with extra-extended relatives from Africa, they encounter new situations that may challenge their family-oriented self-meanings. New family forms are taking shape as African transnational families as new social contexts for ethnic identity development during adulthood. These new experiences are associated with increased pride, phenotypical self-love, and a general desire to associate with Africans beyond the biological connection.
References


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Appendix A: Recruitment Text – Emailing Existing Participants

Greetings,

My name is LaKisha David and I am studying experiences with using genetic genealogy to find relatives from Africa. If you may recall, I interviewed you for a study that was about genetic genealogy testing, finding African relatives, and ethnic identity among people who took an autosomal genetic genealogy test. Thanks so much for your assistance. I really found your responses about your motivations for taking the genetic genealogy tests and the meanings that you held for your relatives from Africa helpful. I now have a new project approved through the ethics board of the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (UIUC) to learn more about those motivations and meanings. I would really like for you to be a part of it.

The purpose of this study is to understand African Americans’ motivations for engaging in genetic genealogy and the meanings associated with identifying African genetic matches. Benefits related to this research include helping researchers and society to understand experiences related to African Americans’ use of genetic genealogy and finding African genetic matches. Participants will receive a copy of the final report about the study and will be entered in a drawing to win a free genetic genealogy kit from your choice of Ancestry or 23andMe.

To participate in this new study, you must:

- identify as an African American
- be 18 years of age or older
- have personally taken a genetic genealogy test
- have identified and communicated with an African genetic match
- be willing to have the interview audio recorded

If you consent to participate, you would answer a few demographic questions online, and then schedule a time to talk with me for about an hour and a half about your experiences with contacting African genetic matches. Participating in this research project is completely voluntary.

Feel free to contact me directly at LTDAVID2@illinois.edu or the principal investigator, Shardé Smith, PhD, at 217-300-1215 or snssmith@illinois.edu if you have questions about the project.

Please click on the following link to begin: [insert link].

This study is being conducted through the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1105 W. Nevada Street, Office 201, Urbana, IL 61801

IRB Protocol # 19755

All the best to you,
LaKisha

________________
LaKisha David
Doctoral Candidate, Human Development and Family Studies, UIUC
MCP, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, MIT
Appendix B: Recruitment Text – Snowball Sampling

Greetings,

My name is LaKisha David and I am studying African American experiences with using genetic genealogy to find relatives from Africa. I am studying this as a PhD student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I was given your contact information from someone who thought you would be interested in participating in this study and I would really like for you to be a part of it.

The purpose of this study is to understand African Americans’ motivations for engaging in genetic genealogy and the meanings associated with identifying African genetic matches. Benefits related to this research include helping researchers and society to understand experiences related to African Americans’ use of genetic genealogy and finding African genetic matches. Participants will receive a copy of the final report about the study and will be entered in a drawing to win a free genetic genealogy kit from your choice of Ancestry or 23andMe.

To participate in this new study, you must:

- identify as an African American
- be 18 years of age or older
- have personally taken a genetic genealogy test
- have identified and communicated with an African genetic match
- be willing to have the interview audio recorded

If you consent to participate, you would answer a few demographic questions online, and then schedule a time to talk with me for about an hour and a half about your experiences with contacting African genetic matches. Participating in this research project is completely voluntary.

Feel free to contact me directly at LTDAVID2@illinois.edu or the principal investigator, Shardé Smith, PhD, at 217-300-1215 or snsmith@illinois.edu if you have questions about the project.

Please click on the following link to begin: [insert link].

This study is being conducted through the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1105 W. Nevada Street, Office 201, Urbana, IL 61801

IRB Protocol # 19755
All the best to you,
LaKisha

LaKisha David
Doctoral Candidate, Human Development and Family Studies, UIUC
MCP, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, MIT
Appendix C: Screening Material

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study about the motivations for engaging in genetic genealogy and the meanings associated with finding African genetic matches.

Please answer six questions to confirm your eligibility.

Begin. [Note: Questions appear one at a time. If no is selected, the survey ends.]

1) Do you self-identify as African American?
   a. Yes
   b. No

2) Are you currently located in the United States? (Are you physically located in the United States right now?)
   a. Yes
   b. No

3) Are you 18 years of age or older?
   a. Yes
   b. No

4) Have you personally taken a genetic genealogy test (e.g., Ancestry or 23andMe)?
   a. Yes, I have personally taken a genetic genealogy test.
   b. No, I did not personally take a genetic genealogy test but a relative did.
   c. No, I did not personally take a genetic genealogy test

5) Were your genetic genealogy results used to find African genetic matches (even if you did not find them yourself)?
   a. Yes, my results were used to find African genetic matches
   b. No, African genetic matches were not found in my results

6) Have you identified and communicated with an African genetic match?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7) Are you willing to participate in an audio-recorded phone interview?
   a. Yes
   b. No

[Note: If no is selected, survey ends with: “Unfortunately, you are not eligible to participate in this study at this time.” If the screening questions are passed, participant is directed to the consent form.]
Appendix D: Online Consent Form

The Motivations and Meanings African Americans Associate with Finding African Relatives: An Informed Grounded Theory

What is the purpose of this research?

You are being asked to participate in a voluntary research study. The purpose of this study is to understand African Americans’ motivations for engaging in genetic genealogy and the meanings associated with identifying African genetic matches. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to do two things: (1) independently fill out a brief online survey with your contact and demographic information (e.g., What is your name? What is your e-mail address? What is your age) and (2) take part in an audio-recorded phone interview lasting approximately one and a half hours. In this interview, you will be asked questions such as “What activities that you participate in because of your connection with your African genetic match?” Risks related to this research are minimal and will include nothing more than potential discomfort as you recall your day-to-day experiences; benefits related to this research include helping researchers and society to understand experiences related to African Americans’ use of genetic genealogy and finding African genetic matches.

Principal Investigator Name and Title: Shardé Smith, Assistant Professor

Department and Institution: Human Development and Family Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign

Contact Information: 217-300-1215, snsmitth@illinois.edu

What procedures are involved?

Participating in this study will involve completing a short online survey to collect some basic information and suggested times for an audio-recorded phone interview. This survey will take about five minutes. We will then conduct an interview about your experiences at the time you select. A reminder email will be sent (1) immediately after completion of online questions, (2) one week prior to the scheduled interview, and (3) one day prior to the scheduled interview. The phone interview will last about one hour and 30 minutes and will start by you calling the researcher toll-free (844) 801-5555 at your scheduled interview time. You can participate in the phone interview in a location of your choosing but will be encouraged to do so where you will have privacy. You may be asked to interview a second time if we need additional information about an experience you described. If you are requested for a second interview, you will be emailed a written copy of the first interview before the second interview to help you think more about what you have already shared. The second interview will last approximately one hour.
Will my study-related information be kept confidential?

Faculty, staff, students, and others with permission or authority to see your study information will maintain its confidentiality to the extent permitted and required by laws and university policies. The names or personal identifiers of participants will not be published or presented. You will choose a pseudonym (a fake name) that we can use when transcribing your contributions from the audio files. Your audio files and contact information will be secured and stored separately from your research data in password protected digital files or in a locked office of the principal investigator. When the results of the research are published or discussed in public, no information will be included that would reveal your identity unless you specify that you would like to reveal your identity.

Will I be reimbursed for any expenses or paid for my participation in this research?

After recruitment for participants has ended, all participants will be entered in a drawing to win a free genetic genealogy kit from your choice of either Ancestry or 23andMe. The winner will be contacted by email.

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?

You are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate, or to withdraw after beginning participation, will not affect your current or future dealings with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. For any question that is asked in the interview, you may choose to answer or not. The researchers also have the right to stop your participation in this study without your consent if they believe it is in your best interests or you were to object to any future changes that may be made in the study plan.

Will data collected from me be used for any other research?

Your de-identified information could be used for future research related to what you share during the interview(s) without additional informed consent.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

If you have questions about this project, you may contact Dr. Shardé Smith at 217-300-1215 or snsmit@illinois.edu. You may also contact research team member LaKisha David at LTDAVID2@illinois.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 217-333-2670 or via email at irb@illinois.edu.

Please answer the following questions to provide consent to participate in this study:

8) Do you understand the consent form?
   a. Yes, I understand it.
b. No, I have questions about it. [The survey would then end and redirect to a screen with the following text:

“I would be glad to answer any questions you have about this consent form.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

If you have questions about this project, you may contact Dr. Shardé Smith at 217-300-1215 or snsmith@illinois.edu. You may also contact research team members LaKisha David at LTDAVID2@illinois.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 217-333-2670 or via email at irb@illinois.edu.”]

9) Are you willingly volunteering on your own to participate in this study?

a. Yes, I am willingly volunteering on my own to participate.

b. No, I was told or pressured into participating in this study. [The survey would then end and redirect to a screen with the following text:

“I’m sorry. You do not meet the consent qualifications for this survey because you did not provide consent to participate.

If you know of anyone else who would like to participate in this study, please send them the link to this survey: [link]

To learn more about this and other projects, email us at LTDAVID2@illinois.edu.

We sincerely thank you and appreciate your time.]

I have read and understand the above consent form. I certify that I am 18 years old or older. By clicking the “Submit” button to enter the survey, I indicate my willingness to voluntarily take part in this study.

SUBMIT

Additional Consent for Public Use and Dissemination of Your Experiences:

There may be opportunities to share your experiences in public settings. If you consent to allow identifiable information about your experiences (e.g., your name, pictures) to be shared publicly, you may lose some privacy when it is shown in public settings (e.g., community forum, research team website, on
a video, and at professional research conferences.) NOTE: You may still participate in the research study even if you decide to NOT allow identifiable information about your experiences to be shown in public.

I give permission to have my experiences made public at community forums, on a research web site, on a video, and during educational/conference presentations (please check one box).

a. Yes
b. No

Please print this consent form if you would like to retain a copy for your records.
Appendix E: Demographic Survey

Great news! You are eligible to participate in the study!

To help us process your interview responses, please answer the following demographic questions:

[Note: Questions 1 – 13 will be short answer fill-in-the-blank responses.]

1) What is your first name?
2) What is your last name?
3) We will use a fake name to keep your information confidential. When selecting a fake name, please select a name that has no relation to a nickname or other name that you are known by.
4) What first and last name would you like to use?
5) What is your email address?
6) Please confirm your email address.
7) What is your age?
8) What is your gender?
9) What is your sexuality?
10) What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
11) For your primary job, what is your current occupation?
12) For your primary job, what is your job title?
13) What is your total current annual personal income from all sources?
14) What is your total current annual household income from all sources?
15) Please select a time when you can interview for about an hour and a half. [options will be provided]

Thank you so much. I look forward to talking with you on [insert selected time]!
Appendix F: Interview Guide

1) Tell me about the moment you identified a genetic match from Africa in your results list. (What were your thoughts about the match at the time? Who is this match to you? What does having this match mean?)

2) Tell me about the moment you contacted a genetic match from Africa in your results list. (What led you to contact the genetic match? Tell me more about your interactions with your African genetic match.)

[Replace “African genetic match” phrasing with the participant’s word choice.]

3) Are you in on-going contact with your discovered genetic match?

4) What activities do you do because of your connection with your African genetic match? (Rituals, narratives, social dramas, everyday interactions, intergenerational transfers?)

5) How have your interactions or activities changed over time?

6) Are there situations that have influenced these interactions or activities?

7) How would you describe the person you were before testing compared to who you are now after finding a genetic match from Africa? (How has this changed in terms of being related to the African genetic match?)

8) When you think back, can you recall of moments when knowing or thinking of your relative has influenced the moment? (What views have changed since engaging with genetic matches?)

9) How would you describe your sense of responsibility to your genetic match from Africa?

10) How would you describe your emotional attachment for your genetic match from Africa?

11) Has this changed how you see yourself in your daily life?

12) How do you think your African genetic match views you?

[Wrapping up the interview.]

13) What do you think is the most important set of experiences or things to understand in this experience?

14) Is there something that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during this interview?

15) Is there something else you think I should understand about your experiences with your African genetic matches?

16) Is there something you would like to ask me?
## Appendix G: Data Displays

### Table 5

*Data Display: Data Contributed by Participant for Evolving Ethnic Identity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Carboni</th>
<th>Joseph</th>
<th>Kwasi</th>
<th>Marquis</th>
<th>Nechelle</th>
<th>Nzeh</th>
<th>Willie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entering Identity</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entering Racial Identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entering Colorism and Internalized Racism</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning from Relatives from Africa</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(researching about African Ethnicities based on being Biological Relatives)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying as from</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa, as African, as African American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(definitely from Africa)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(identifying as African)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(identifying as African American and African)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioemotional Connection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(feeling entitled to ancestral ethnicity)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 5

*Data Display: Data Contributed by Participant for Evolving Ethnic Identity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Carboni</th>
<th>Joseph</th>
<th>Kwasi</th>
<th>Marquis</th>
<th>Nechelle</th>
<th>Nzeh</th>
<th>Willie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with Acceptance or Rejection of Ethnic Membership from Africans</td>
<td>x(-)</td>
<td>x(+)(-)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 6

*Data Display: Data Contributed by Participant for Recognizing Relatedness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Carboni</th>
<th>Joseph</th>
<th>Kwasi</th>
<th>Marquis</th>
<th>Nechelle</th>
<th>Nzeh</th>
<th>Willie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changing family boundaries &amp; composition</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchanging community narratives and personal narratives</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing expectations &amp; obligations</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Being a support system)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of Claiming from the Relative from Africa.</td>
<td>x(+)</td>
<td></td>
<td>x(-)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Rituals</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional connections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing roles &amp; behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday activities (shapes personal identity)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(sense of belonging)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x(-)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H: Interview Guide – Follow-up Questions

Memo 16
LaKisha David
November 13, 2019 – November 24, 2019

In this email dialogue, I will be asking clarifying questions within the following categories:

1) Motivations to get involved with genetic genealogy
2) Testing cycle
3) Family identity development: identifying relatives and claiming kin
4) Ethnic-racial identity development

Here are the follow-up questions for now:

Additional interview questions

Carboni:

Follow-up 1: November 13, 2019: Categories 1 & 2

1) Do I understand properly that you got involved in genetic genealogy at first to learn about your African ethnic background but that after you found relatives from Africa, finding additional relatives from Africa became your primarily focus?
2) Do I understand properly that you had a sense a lack about not having information about your ancestral background from childhood throughout adulthood until you found relatives from Africa? Could you give me an example of a time you felt this feeling during adulthood?
3) What was the specific event or moment that prompted you to actually take the DNA test? Was it your cousin on your mother’s side sharing information about genealogy stemming from Africa with you? Was it something else?
4) Could you tell me more about your process for identifying relatives from Africa and deciding to contact them?

Joseph

Follow-up 1: November 14, 2019: Category 4

Please explain your African and Black identity from childhood to now. For example:

1) In your interview, you said that before you found relatives from Africa, you had a pan-African identity. We are all together. You also had a similar Black identity in that all were Black. Was being African and being Black the same in childhood? All African/Black people were part of the same group?
2) Why did you research African American history during the time before finding relatives?
3) You had a sense of lack from not having information about your African ancestry starting in childhood. Did you feel this sense of lack as you grew up into adulthood?
4) Could you give specific examples of the sense of lack in adolescence, college, and adulthood?
5) Can you explain your African/Black identity now after finding relatives from Africa?
6) What led you to feel this way?
7) What moments in your life stand out as greatly influencing your African/Black identity?

**Follow-up 2**

1) Please explain your change in sense of kinship with your relatives from Africa

**Kwasi**

*Follow-up 1: November 16, 2019:

1) Please elaborate on your meaning of being connected to Africa. Several times in the interview, you described the experience as making you more connected to Africa. Is this a psychological connection, biological connection—please describe what type of connection to Africa this experience causes for you.

2) You were curious about your ancestry since your youth, but what was the event or moment that prompted you to actually take the DNA test?

3) Please describe the testing cycle as you experienced it from deciding to test to interacting with your first relative from Africa. For example, how did you get notified that your results were ready? How did you feel? Which did you look at first, the ethnicity estimates or genetic matches? Why?, etc.

**Nechelle**

*Follow-up 1: November 21, 2019*

1) Being motivated to engage in genealogy, was there a specific moment or event that led to your decision to actually take the DNA test? If yes, please explain.

2) How did you receive the notice that your results were ready? What were your feeling on seeing the notice (but before seeing the results)?

3) Which did you look at first, the ethnicity estimates or the genetic matches? Please explain why.

4) Please explain the steps you took to identify relatives from Africa.

5) In your interview, you said that your relatives from Africa are “cousins.” Please explain more about this feeling, sense, or reality that they are your cousins.

6) Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences?

**Willie**

*Follow-up 1: November 23, 2019*

1) In the interview, you mentioned that you were first motivated to engage in genetic genealogy while you were in South Africa and people were telling you how much you looked like their
relatives. What was the purpose of that trip to South Africa, your first trip to the continent? Was it related to ethnic exploration or some other reason?

2) In the interview, you mentioned that due to your reunion experiences, you felt a sense of belonging to the family. You also said the experience was life changing because it's now your identity. Could you elaborate further what you mean by a sense of belonging to the family and its impact on your identity?

3) Could you explain more about how these experiences has given you a greater appreciation of African facial features and natural hair?

4) Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences?

_Nzeh_

*Follow-up 1: November 23, 2019*

1) Do I have it correct that your initial purpose for engaging in genetic genealogy was to learn your African ancestry traced back to Africa but the prompt to actually test was when you were about to date a cousin?

2) You had a sense of lack from not having information about your African ancestry starting in childhood. Did you feel this sense of lack as you grew up into adulthood?

3) Could you give specific examples of the sense of lack in adolescence, college, and adulthood?

4) You explain that the connection to your family from Africa is strong. Can you explain this sense of kinship and where did it stem from? Are there any memorable moments that really made you think or feel that sense of family or kinship with your family from Africa?

5) Can you explain some of the emotional or other outcomes that you experienced as a result of finding family and finding ethnic identity?

_Marquis_

*Follow-up 1: November 24, 2019*

1) You found a relative from Africa for the first time by actively searching for African names in GEDmatch. What lead you to know or desire to use this method for finding African matches specifically?

2) Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences?

**New interview protocol**

1) Motivations to get involved with genetic genealogy

2) Testing cycle

3) Family identity development: identifying relatives and claiming kin

4) Ethnic-racial identity development
Appendix I: Table of Propositions

Table 7
Resultant Grounded Theory: African American Family and Ethnic Identity Development within African Ancestral Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A sense of lack in African Ancestral History</strong></td>
<td>Developing a sense of lack in African family history</td>
<td>created or made conscious through a series of experiences that cause the person to determine that they are not as informed about their ancestral history as is expected in some socializing environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Looking towards genealogy for ancestral family history</td>
<td>engaging in genealogy to address their sense of lack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using genetic genealogy for ancestral family history</td>
<td>amplify their efforts in autosomal genetic genealogy (1) to learn their ancestry composition in general, (2) to learn about their African ancestral ethnic identities in particular, and (3) to further their genealogical research in family mysteries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evolving Ethnic Identity</strong></td>
<td>Initial racial-ethnic identity</td>
<td>the psychological sense of group membership held by participants as they entered the genetic genealogy experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reviewing test results</td>
<td>take an autosomal genetic genealogy test in the hopes of learning more about the ancestral past. (1) admixture results (e.g., “ethnicity estimates”) and (2) their genetic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7
Resultant Grounded Theory: African American Family and Ethnic Identity Development within African Ancestral Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing Relatedness</td>
<td>Refocusing ethnic identity exploration</td>
<td>shifting ethnic exploration from African continental history to African history based on their genetic genealogy results to African history based on claiming the ethnicity of their living relatives from Africa as their ancestral ethnic heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shifting ethnic identity</td>
<td>repurpose the self-labels African and African American to reflect their mosaic African ethnicities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identifying relatives from Africa</td>
<td>(1) determining if the person represented by the genetic match is from Africa and (2) determining if the genetic match is a true genetic match</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Claiming kinship</td>
<td>(1) naming the relationship, (2) recognizing the extended family nucleus, and (3) perceived acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establishing and maintaining contact</td>
<td>A mechanism for establishing and maintaining social interactions with relatives from Africa. (1) the mechanisms of contact, (2) the nature of the contact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 7
Resultant Grounded Theory: African American Family and Ethnic Identity Development within African Ancestral Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acceptance and belonging</td>
<td>a sense of belonging to the ethnic group and/or family group of their relatives from Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pride and self-esteem</td>
<td>sense of pride in their African heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phenotypical self-love</td>
<td>appreciation for their own facial features as an African inheritance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evolving generational orientation</td>
<td>an expanded generational orientation that includes more personalized histories of African ancestries and stories of trait inheritances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change in perception of African and Interactions in General</td>
<td>engage with Africans more generally, regardless of a genetic connection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>