“YOU DON’T LOOK LIKE ONE, SO HOW ARE YOU AFRICAN?” HOW WEST AFRICAN IMMIGRANT GIRLS IN THE U.S. LEARN TO (RE)NEGOTIATE ETHNIC IDENTITIES IN HOME AND SCHOOL CONTEXTS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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School of The Ohio State University

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ABSTRACT

Early adolescence is when many physical, biological and psychological changes occur. Among the many transition events going on at this time is the move from elementary to middle, junior high and high school. It is at this critical time that adolescents begin to question their identity and their place in the world (Erikson, 1963; Tatum, 1997). Tatum (1997) argues that “for Black youth, asking ‘Who am I?’ includes thinking about “Who am I ethnically and/or racially’” (p. 53)? For West African immigrant adolescent girls, the question of who they are ethnically and racially is further complicated by the fact that they are also trying to find their place in American society where some people may assume that they are African-American and identify as such, without taking into consideration the role that their West African immigrant backgrounds play in their ethnic identity formation.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how home and school experiences shape the ethnic identities of young immigrant girls and what their stories might teach us about their educational and socio-cultural needs. The overarching research question is, “What ethnic identities do these young girls choose and what factors in the home and school contexts shape their choice of ethnic identity?” This study is informed by a qualitative research paradigm and employs narrative analysis as a methodology.
within qualitative research because of its “use of stories as data” (Merriam, 2002).
Because of the absence and invisibility of adolescent girls of West African ascent in the
literature, and because of my experiences as an African immigrant parent and researcher,
I have chosen to work within the Black feminist epistemology which makes the race and
ethnicity of the researchers and respondents a focal point (Madriz, 2003). I also use Gay’s
(2000) culturally-responsive pedagogy as a framework within which to understand the
impact that the treatment of Africa in the school curriculum through the inclusion of
African projects, history and literature, had on the participants’ ethnic identity. Finally, I
use Phinney’s (1990) stage model of ethnic identity development as a theoretical
framework with which I attempt to position these adolescent girls and their ethnic
identity choices along the continuum of three stages of ethnic identity development: an
unexamined ethnic identity, exploration and commitment.

An analysis of the data generated through focus group and personal interview
transcripts, field notes, participant and researcher journals revealed five findings that
characterized the participants’ experiences. They are (1) the girls’ experiences with
African-American stereotypes of Africans, the girls’ stereotypes of African-Americans,
and the impact on participants’ choice of ethnic identity; (2) personal agency and the
importance participants attributed to their sense of choice in their ethnic identity
construction; (3) the significant role that the participants families played in their ethnic
identity development by setting standards for their daughters which were manifested
through family ethnic practices in relation to respect for adult authority, gender expectations, dating and marriage, choice of peers, and academic achievement; (4) the importance that the participants placed on immigrant peer relationships and the impact of this on the participants’ ethnic identity and (5) the connection between the girls’ experiences with the treatment of Africa in the curriculum and their ethnic identity.

Further implications for teachers, policy makers, parents and leaders in West African communities are included, along with recommendations for future research with this student population.
Dedicated to my father and mother, Dr. and Mrs. Ezueh, my husband, Osita, and our children Ugonna, Chineze, Chidubem and Amara, who believe that I can do anything I set my mind to. You are the wind beneath my wings.
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suggestions. I don’t believe it was by accident that you were both here during the candidacy and dissertation stages. You cheered me on many days when I was ready to give up. Thank you for raising us all with a great love of and value for education. I am glad that you are here to see me earn this degree. I love you both.

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Thanks to all my friends, extended family members, co-workers and the Sisters of the Yam who supported me through phone calls, prayers and words of encouragement. To the Sisters of the Yam- Sam, Yvette, Khosi and Detra- I wish I had met all of you earlier. Here’s hoping the connection endures.

Finally, I am grateful to the four young women who were very enthusiastic about sharing their stories. Remember the gap in research that we spoke about during the interviews? Well, your stories have now opened the doors for other children of West African ascent to share their experiences and have their voices heard.
VITA

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Major Field: Education
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Educated elites typically claim that only they are qualified to produce theory and believe that only they can interpret not only their own but everyone else’s experiences.” (Collins, 2000, p. vii)

I am in the midst of the daily ritual of making dinner when I call my seventeen-year-old daughter to the kitchen to admonish her for not being in the kitchen with me while I am cooking. My mother, who is visiting for a while, chimes in with her concern that my daughter does not show any interest in learning. I can hear the concern in my mother’s voice just like I did when I was my daughter’s age. It is a commonly held belief in Nigeria that a woman who does not know how to cook for her husband and children has not been raised well. In other words, her lack of culinary skills reflects poorly on her mother’s ability to raise a daughter.

As I listen to my mother go on about why it is important for my daughter to learn how to cook for her future husband, I realize that the scene I am witnessing, is probably reenacted in many other immigrant Nigerian homes. I also realize this is one of the reasons for my work with West African immigrant girls.
I realize that I want my daughter to learn how to cook for several reasons—because it is cheaper and healthier than eating out and for basic survival. The reality is that my daughter is being raised under circumstances different from mine. I watch as she is caught between my mother’s traditional expectations and mine which are now probably “Americanized” and realize that this young woman, born in Nigeria, but being raised in the U.S. by immigrant parents, will come to define for herself who she wants to be.

**Purpose of study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of West African immigrant adolescent girls as they negotiate ethnic identities while growing up in the U.S. More specifically, this study examined how home and school experiences shape the ethnic identities of young immigrant girls and what their stories might teach us about their educational and socio-cultural needs. Because of their dual status as blacks and immigrants, the proposed outcome of this study was to describe the relationship between home and school experiences and ethnic identity construction of West African immigrant girls and to show how, for immigrant youth, their identity development requires the usual challenges of adolescence complicated by a process of … ethnic identification (Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003). For the purposes of this study, “immigrant girls” will refer to girls with both first and second generation immigrant status. I will also include a group of immigrant children who have been termed the 1.5
generation\(^1\) because they have migrated as adolescents. Their age at the time of migration is likely to impact their ethnic and socio-cultural adjustment.

**Statement of the problem**

Early adolescence is when many physical, biological and psychological changes occur. Among the many transition events going on at this time is the move from elementary to middle, junior high and high school. It is at this critical time that adolescents begin to question their identity and their place in the world (Erikson, 1963; Tatum, 1997). Tatum (1997) argues that “for Black youth, asking ‘Who am I?’ includes thinking about ‘Who am I ethnically and/or racially’” (p. 53)? For West African immigrant adolescent girls, the question of who they are ethnically is further complicated by the fact that they are also trying to find their place in American society where some people may assume that they are African-American and identify as such, without taking into consideration the role that their West African immigrant backgrounds play in their ethnic identity formation. This study chose to focus on girls because, according to Boyd (1986) and Brettell & Simon (1986), females were historically neglected in earlier research on the immigrant experience. It is only in the past twenty years that the role of gender in immigrant experiences has been explored (Dion & Dion, 2001). I have also

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\(^1\) Unlike the term first generation immigrant which refers to adult immigrants, and second generation immigrant which refers to children born to immigrants, Rumbaut & Ima (1988) recommend the use of this term to describe children born abroad but have migrated as adolescents.
chosen to focus on girls because female children, much more than their male counterparts, are more likely to be expected to maintain their family culture and tradition (Stritikus & Nguyen, 2007). It is imperative that the literature begin to reflect the experiences of these girls as they adjust to their new environment and begin to negotiate ethnic identities.

With the demographic changes caused by the presence of foreign-born Black immigrants, questions about the ethnic identity of Black African immigrants have become pertinent. Trueba & Bartolome (2000) have described the ability of immigrants to simultaneously maintain different identities in different contexts. Trueba & Bartolome (2000) also refer to the resilience that Black African immigrants have acquired as a result of their ability to become an “other” and participate in different worlds.

The research on the ethnic identity experiences of other immigrant groups generally has not included much about the ethnic identity formation of Black immigrant groups. Studies that do exist focus mostly on the ethnic identity development of Black Caribbean immigrant children (Waters, 1994). Missing from the literature are the experiences of West African immigrant children for whom the ethnic identity issue is complicated by the fact that they are being raised in West African immigrant households in the U.S., with subsequent expectations to retain some allegiance to their families’ customs and traditions.

Since American schools have always been at the forefront for meeting newcomers (Rong & Brown, 2002), it is crucial that educators study and
understand ethnic identity development in Black African immigrant children (Rong & Brown, 2002) since racial discrimination is part of the daily experiences of this population. Educators also need to understand how school experiences during adolescence, a critical time in identity development, also shape who these children become.

Tatum (1997) has addressed the ways school experiences influence the development of ethnic identity and other studies that have examined the implications of identity and school experience include (Gibson, 1991, 1995; Waters, 1991, 1994; Rong & Brown, 2001). Phinney (1992) made the connection between highly developed levels of ethnic identity and better school performance. Fuligni, Witkow & Garcia (2005), in their study on the implications of ethnic identity on adolescents’ academic motivation and achievement, concluded that the strength of their ethnic identification was relevant to their academic adjustment.

None of these studies have dealt with ethnic identity and the home and school experiences of West African immigrant females. So this void in the connection between home and school experiences and ethnic identity development among adolescent girls from West African immigrant backgrounds will be addressed by this study.

**Research questions**

In seeking to understand the experiences of Nigerian and Ghanaian immigrant girls and the role that their home and school experiences play in their
ethnic identity construction, this study attempted to answer some pertinent research questions. The questions investigated how these girls believe they are perceived by others, the factors that influence their choice of ethnic identity and how they feel about their identities as adolescent girls being raised with West African values and socio-cultural expectations. The questions also sought to understand how home and school experiences help shape the participants’ ethnic identities. The personal and group interview guides were developed with these questions in mind:

(1) What ethnic identities do adolescent girls who are growing up in West African immigrant families in the U.S. adopt and what factors influence their ethnic identity development?

(2) What role do home experiences play in the ethnic identity construction of West African adolescent girls?

(3) What role do school experiences play in their ethnic identity construction?

(4) How are the girls negotiating identities between home, school and society and what challenges accompany this negotiation?

**Background of study**

The face of the U.S. population changed substantially post 1965 with the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965. This Act eliminated prior restrictions by increasing the quota of immigrants allowed from each country and opening up the doors to immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and Africa (Arthur, 2000; Stewart,
Immigrants from these continents have accounted for more than seventy-five percent of immigrants entering the U.S. since then (Rong & Preissle, 1998).

Edmonston & Passel (1992) assert that immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean accounted for one-sixth of the U.S. Black population growth during the 1980’s, the height of the new immigration. The presence of African immigrants in the 21st century has become very noticeable, especially in larger cities like New York, Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, Dallas and Los Angeles where many of them tend to settle (Falola & Afolabi, 2008). There are over one million foreign-born Africans in the U.S. today and approximately thirty-six percent of them are from West Africa (Wilson, 2003). Ghana and Nigeria are the focus of this study because they send the most immigrants from West Africa to the U.S. They also share a common history of colonization by Britain and have maintained English as their lingua franca (Massey, Mooney, Torres & Charles, 2007). With such a noticeable presence in the U.S., it can then be assumed that children from Ghanaian and Nigerian immigrant households are also establishing a significant presence in our schools.

While research and the literature have kept pace with the experiences of Asian (Zhou 1999; Takaki, 1998); Latino (Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco1995), and Black Caribbean (Waters, 1991; 1994) immigrant families and their school-age children, there’s still a noticeable

In one of the studies most relevant to the Black immigrant experience, a study of the socialization, culture and identities of Black immigrant children, Rong & Brown (2002) confirm the assertion made by Rong & Preissle (1998) that Black immigrants have been less researched compared to immigrants from other groups. They also specifically speak to the exclusion of immigrants from Africa on issues encountered by other Black immigrants. The argument made by Rong & Brown (2002) is that “the lack of research on Black immigrants denies the American public and policy makers opportunities to explore the many urgent and intriguing issues concerning Black immigrants; therefore denying the public insight into the special needs of these immigrants which have been neglected” (p.249). The authors stress the increasing presence of Black immigrants in urban areas and the questions that this presence raises. One of these questions is central and relevant to my research and it is “How do they [Black African immigrants] identify themselves as similar to and as different from American Blacks in terms of race and ethnic identity, and why?” (p. 249).

**Significance of the study**

First- and second-generation immigrant youth constitute about 20 percent of the children in the United States, so their healthy development has fundamental long-term implications for our society (Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003). With
demonstrated relationship between ethnic identity and school experiences (Tatum, 1997; Gibson, 1991, 1995; Waters, 1991, 1994; Rong & Brown, 2001; Phinney, 1992), school officials who work with adolescent girls of West African ascent\(^2\) will benefit from an understanding of their experiences as they navigate ethnic identities between the school and home contexts. West African immigrant parents will also benefit from an understanding of the experiences of their daughters as they negotiate ethnic identities between the home and school. On the part of the participants, I hope that they will not just see themselves as providers of information but potential agents of social change. This means that I hope the participants feel empowered by giving voice to other West African girls who have been, otherwise, silenced in immigrant literature.

**Limitations of the study**

The limitations of this study were as follows: (1) I was not able to use prolonged engagement and observation as a validation technique because of time constraints. I was always conscious of Institutional Review Board (IRB) rules which stipulated that my study not interfere with the participants’ instruction time and this limited the duration of the interviews and the richness of the stories; (2) the scope of study was not longitudinal because the length of study was limited to

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\(^2\) I first learned of this term from Dillard (2006) who uses it because of its inherent connotation of upward mobility of African people in the diaspora. She attributes it to Kohain Hahlevi, a Hebrew Israelite rabbi who coined the term “African-ascendant” as opposed to “African-descendant” to describe people of African heritage and their forward-moving nature. The term descendant may imply a downward or backward moving process.
three months; (3) by using only personal interviews, group interviews and journals for data collection, the study was limited. Observation of the participants through a typical school day would have yielded richer data; (4) the study used journals as an additional source of data, but the journaling process did not go as planned. The girls did not make as many journal entries as I would have preferred, but I still utilized what entries they had made as data sources. In order to accommodate time limitations, I suggested that the participants and I continue to journal through e-mail. Not all the participants had access to e-mail and only one eventually utilized this medium of communication. I ended up using all the journal entries, including the e-mail communication; (5) the number of participants was also a limitation. I am aware that more study participants would have provided a wider range of perspectives. The participants’ stories are by no means representative of the stories of all adolescent girls being raised in West African immigrant homes in the U.S. In spite of the limitations of the study, I believe that the participants’ stories will add to the limited availability of the lived experiences of adolescents from West African immigrant homes.

**Definition of terms**

Adolescent: A person between the ages of 13-18.

African-American peers: Children of Black Americans whose origins can be traced to Africa. They made
up a significant portion of the student population in the school which the study participants attended.

Culturally responsive pedagogy: A pedagogy that promotes effective teaching by utilizing the prior cultural knowledge of ethnically diverse students.

Ethnicity identity: An individual’s sense of self that derives from membership in an ethnic group.

First-generation immigrant: A person born in another country other than the current country of residence and is the first of the immigrant generation to live there.

Foreign-born: A person born in another country outside of the U.S. or current country of domicile.

Ghanaian: A citizen of Ghana, an English-speaking West African country and a former British colony.

Identity development: The process by which a person develops a sense of self within a broad social context that could include race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, social class, etc.

Immigrant: A person who has migrated to the U.S. or
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nigerian</td>
<td>A citizen of Nigeria, an English-speaking West African country and a former British colony.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 generation immigrant:</td>
<td>A person who migrates to the U.S during his or her adolescent years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy:</td>
<td>The art or science of instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee:</td>
<td>A person who lives in a particular country and is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of birth due to fear of ethnic, religious or political persecution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-cultural expectations:</td>
<td>The expectations that one will display behaviors associated with a certain culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West African:</td>
<td>A citizen of one of the countries that make up the Western part of the African continent.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Overview of chapters

The study of the experiences of Nigerian and Ghanaian immigrant girls’ ethnic identity construction and the roles of the home and school in this process will be discussed in the following chapters:

Chapter 1 introduces the statement of the problem identified by the researcher and situates it in current literature. Also included in this chapter are the purpose of the study, the major research questions, significance and limitations of the study and definition of terms.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on 1) the history of immigration, with particular emphasis on the history of African immigration, 2) the history of Americanization through schooling, 3) historical approaches to educating immigrants in the 20th century, 4) situating the education of African immigrants, and 5) ethnic identity development, with a close examination of immigrant ethnic identity development.

Chapter 3 presents an overview of qualitative inquiry which directed this study, the theoretical framework and appropriate methodology and methods that guided the process. Also discussed here are details of the procedures that guided this study- methods of data collection and data analysis, selection of study site and participants, triangulation, peer review and member check as strategies for promoting reliability and validity, and ethical considerations of the study.
Chapter 4 describes the study participants and focuses on reporting the findings of the study. Using the data collected through personal and group interviews, participant and researcher journals and field notes, I describe the emerging themes and sub themes.

Chapter 5 consists of a positioning and discussion of the findings as they relate to existing research. I state the study’s contribution to the literature, implications for immigrant communities, schools and policy makers, and make suggestions for future research.
“Many of the newcomers to the United States, as in years past, qualify as “tired… poor… huddled masses… wretched refuse of other teeming shores,” to borrow some phrases from a well-known American lady. But others, by recent congressional decree, are drawn from the ranks of the skilled, the educated, and even the wealthy of other nations. By any standard, it is a new immigration, and it is a phenomenon that must be accommodated more effectively by educators in the United States.”- David W. Stewart, 1993.

The assumptions that guide this review of the literature on the history of immigration in the U.S., the history of African immigration, the history of immigrant education and education of African immigrants are as follows: people of other nationalities, especially African nations, are going to continue to come to the U.S. for economic, political, and educational reasons; schools will continue to be at the forefront for receiving and training new immigrants; U.S. institutions, especially schools are going to continue to be stretched in their capacity to accommodate and adequately educate immigrant children (Rong & Preissle, 1998; Rong & Brown, 2002), but especially African children who have become a significant part of the Black population in U.S. schools; and educational
institutions will need to continuously seek ways to change with the changing faces of the school population (Stewart 1993).

A review of the literature on the history of immigrant education cannot be isolated from the history of immigration because the latter will examine different immigration patterns and educational needs and the one constant feature of immigration and schools - the “Americanization” of newcomers to fit into the dominant mold initially established by the first arrivals to these shores.

Another assumption that guides this review of the literature is that West African immigrant girls, like their American counterparts, undergo physical, biological and psychological changes which also cause them to ask, “Who am I?” and “Who am I becoming?” Like their counterparts everywhere, West African immigrant girls question their identity and their place in the world. Tatum (1997) confirms that for children from “minority” groups, the question always has an ethnic and/or racial angle to it. A review of the literature on racial and ethnic identity will situate the experiences of West African immigrant children, in general, and immigrant girls, in particular, to examine whether this group of children is included in the literature.

**A history of immigration in the U.S.**

No other country in the world is home to as many immigrants as the United States (Bender & Leone, 1990; Arthur, 2000; Dinnerstein & Reimers, 1999 & Rong & Preissle, 1998). Its history cannot be isolated from both
voluntary and involuntary migration. The history of the United States also shows how immigration policies have evolved from one of almost total openness during the frontier days to the restrictive era from 1920-1940 and back to an opening of the doors again in 1965 with the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965 (Stewart, 1993). Between 1820, when the U.S. began counting its immigrant population and 1987, it is estimated that over fifty-four million people migrated to the U.S. (Bender & Leone, 1990). Except for the Native Americans who are the original inhabitants of what is now known as the United States, and African-American descendants of slaves, almost everyone is either an immigrant or the descendant of sixty million immigrants (Rong & Preissle, 1998; Dinnerstein & Reimers, 1999 & Bender & Leone, 1990).

According to historian Riche (2000), two hundred years ago, early census calculations in the U.S. counted only three ethnic populations- Whites, American Indians and Blacks. He argues that, today, the U.S. can be said to be the most ethnically and culturally diverse nation in the world and each wave of immigration- Irish in the 1840s, Chinese in the 1870s, Italians at the turn of the century, Cubans in the 1960s, Southeast Asians in the 1970s, and others which include the influx of Black immigrants since the 1980s- have sparked controversies among Americans who are descendants of earlier immigrants (Bender & Leone, 1990).
The first immigration wave (The 17\textsuperscript{th} century)

The first wave of immigration can be traced back to the voluntary migration of Europeans and the involuntary migration of Africans\(^3\) in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century (Stewart, 1993; Rong & Preissle, 1998). The English\(^4\), the first Europeans to establish a settlement in North America, were significant in laying the foundation for the American society as we know it by transplanting their Pilgrim and Puritanical values to their new home. English influence on the new nation’s culture was enormous- in language, institutional forms, values, and attitudes (Parrillo, 1997). Although they were a minority, they have been accorded a place of great influence in the history of the U.S. and Anglo-Saxonism has remained until today as the dominant model for newcomers to emulate (Dinnerstein & Reimers, 1999).

The ideologies of the Protestant faith, hard work and individualism are legacies of this first group of settlers. All subsequent groups to arrive to these shores have had to conform to these markers of what it means to be American in order to be accepted (Dinnerstein & Reimers, 1999). In other words, the extent to which each group has been successful in assimilating the dominant values is the extent to which they could be said to have adapted well. Although the English had

\(^3\) According to Black historian and journalist, Lerone Bennett (1961), Blacks came to Virginia, Florida, Arizona, New Mexico “before the Mayflower.” Bryce-Laporte (1972) also alludes to suggestions that Blacks may have settled in America before early Spanish explorers got to the interior of the American mainland. The earliest Africans in British North America are said to have arrived as indentured servants in Jamestown in 1619. By about 1700, most of the African population in the U.S. was enslaved.

\(^4\) As the English, Dutch and French settled the Atlantic coastal region, the Spanish were exploring and settling the Southwest.
come to the new world for economic and religious reasons, they were not very tolerant of subsequent immigrants who differed from them in culture, belief and language.

The second immigration wave (Mid 1800s)

The second wave of immigration, in 1849 and the 1850s, saw an increasingly large number of newcomers from Northern and Western Europe and was dominated by the Scots-Irish, the Dutch and the Germans whose presence challenged the Protestant and Anglo Saxon norms (Parrillo, 1997; Dinnerstein & Reimers, 1999). Together with the English, these groups made up over 95 percent of the immigrant population (Stewart, 1993). Also included in these numbers were Africans who were brought involuntarily to the U.S. beginning as far back as 1619 when the first groups of slaves arrived in Virginia. While the English, Dutch and French occupied the Atlantic coastal region, Mexican immigration was taking place in the American Southwest. It was not until the nineteenth century that this region became a part of the U.S. (Dinnerstein & Reimers, 1999). Between the years 1820-1930, more than 37 million immigrants arrived, with the countries of origin of immigrants gradually shifting from Northern and Western Europe to Eastern and Southern Europe (Rong & Preissle, 1998; Arthur, 2000).

5 See notes on 2
6 See notes on 3
The third wave of immigration occurred between 1880 and 1914 as industrialization spread in Southern and Eastern Europe. (Rong & Preissle, 1998). Many of these newcomers were Catholic or Jewish who came in large numbers and settled into manufacturing jobs in the larger cities. The inevitable social tensions that followed as a result of urban congestion, cultural and religious differences and politics led to calls for restrictions (Rong & Preissle, 1998; Arthur, 2000). With these pressures for control came the decision by Congress to limit the admission of immigrants from Europe.

Exclusion of Asian immigrants

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which suspended the entry of Chinese laborers, was the first of such restrictions of an ethnic group (Stewart, 1993; Rong & Preissle, 1998). The Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1908 which caused the U.S. not to ban Japanese immigration but expected Japan not to issue passports to Japanese laborers, and the 1924 Oriental exclusion Act, all drastically reduced the number of Asian immigrants (Dinnerstein & Reimers, 1999; King, 2000; Lee, 2006; Rong & Preissle, 1998).

The presumed cultural and racial differences and the belief that the Chinese had low morals, practiced prostitution and smoked opium, all led to the advocacy for restricted immigration (Stewart, 1993; Rong & Preissle, 1998). Also, as the immigration of Eastern Jews increased in the late 1800s, anti-
Semitism fueled the movement for restriction. By the 1880s and 1890s, as the nation became economically depressed, labor unions supported a literacy test as a means of limiting immigration (Dinnerstein & Reimers, 1999). Congress had enacted a literacy requirement for all new immigrants in an attempt to limit the numbers of adult male immigrants who could not read or write in their own language. It was also the first time that attention was paid to the educational attainment of immigrants (Stewart, 1993).

The growth of nativism

The growth in nativism coincided with increased presence of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. These newcomers were believed to be “undesirable, unassimilable, and hostile or indifferent to American values” and stereotyped images of Slavs, Italians and Jews were standard (Dinnerstein & Reimers, 1999, p. 79). The Joint Commission on Immigration established by Congress in 1907 also reached the conclusion that the immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe were racially inferior, resistant to assimilation, criminally minded, violent and were competing for jobs meant for “old-stock” Americans (Dinnerstein & Reimers, 1999; King, 2000; Lee, 2006; Higham, 1978). This fear of the immigrant was based on the need to keep the nation’s institutions from disintegrating (Rong & Preissle, 1998).

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7 The term “old stock” was used to refer to immigrants from Northern Europe to differentiate them from latter groups from Southern and Eastern Europe.
It is important to note that earlier immigrant groups, the “old stock” Americans, received better treatment than these more “ignorant” and “dangerous” latter groups. Naturally, tensions arose among the immigrants themselves and the call for restrictions continued. Dinnerstein & Reimers (1999) cite bigots who thought it critical for the U.S. to decide whether the nation was “to be peopled by British, German and Scandinavian stock, historically free, energetic, progressive, or by Slav, Latin and Asiatic races, historically downtrodden, atavistic, and stagnant” (p. 81). America’s entry into World War I only served to reinforce the bigotry against everyone who was not 100 percent American as German and Irish immigrants became suspect on their roles in the war. With the passage of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924, quotas were enforced, further limiting the number of immigrants from southern and Eastern Europe, but favoring Northern and Western migration (Stewart, 1993). For the first time since the institution of restrictions against Asians, each European nation received a quota of possible immigrants based on its share of the total U.S. white population. The results were a somewhat balanced distribution of ethnic groups (Stewart, 1993).

The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 and the Immigration Act of 1965 opened up opportunities for Third World immigrants (Gerstle & Mollenkopf, 2001; Stewart, 1993). The former set up minimum annual quotas for all countries, allowing for the immigration of new groups while the latter abolished the national-origin quotas as every country was allowed equal numbers of immigrants, bringing to an end the era of large scale and open-door immigration.
By this time in immigration history, the ability to read, write, speak, and understand English was a requirement for all immigrants (Stewart, 1993).

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 marked a major shift from past immigration policies that had instituted restrictions. It not only removed national origin quotas, but focused on family reunification and desired occupational skills as criteria for admission into the U.S. (Stewart, 1993; Rong & Preissle, 1998). While there were huge increases of immigrants from Asia, Latin America and Africa, there was a marked decline in the number of immigrants from Europe (Stewart, 1993; Rong & Preissle, 1998; Lee, 2006). Most Western European nations were experiencing democracy and economic prosperity, thereby reducing the need to migrate, and Eastern Europe was experiencing communism which did not look favorably on those who tried to migrate (Stewart, 1993). It is important to note here that although the number of immigrants from Africa more than doubled during this era, the numbers were still small in comparison to those from Asia and Latin America (Rockett, 1983; Stewart, 1993).

*The fourth immigration wave (1970s to present)*

The United States has been experiencing its fourth wave of immigration since the 1970s (Rong & Brown, 2002) and the increase in the number of immigrants from Asia, Latin America and Africa continues. Immigration is said to have reached the same levels as the period of peak immigration in 1910- nearly one million arrivals per year since the late 1970s (Rong & Brown, 2002). About
half of the total U.S. foreign-born population arrived in America between 1980 and 1990 (Rong & Preissle, 1998). The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 and the Immigration Act of 1990 were enacted during these years and played a significant role in increasing the number of immigrants from the African continent. Called the new immigration, this period had a large number of immigrants from Latin America, Asia and the Caribbean as well (Rong & Brown, 2002).

Also worth mentioning is a category of immigrants who Rong & Preissle (1998) call “additional immigrants.” According to them, these include undocumented immigrants, asylees, amnestied immigrants and refugees whose admission into the U.S. is governed by provisions of the Refugee Act of 1980. The United States, in the last twenty years, has admitted more refugees than any other receiving nation (Stewart, 1993). To qualify as a refugee, persons entering the U.S. must be victims of persecution in their countries or must have, according to the Refugee Act of 1980, “a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.” As of 1992, an estimated 16.6 million refugees were living away from home due to civil wars or political unrests. Some of these people are Ethiopians, Somalis, Mozambicans, Laotians, Cambodians and Afghans to name a few, and many of them have settled in the U.S. (Stewart, 1993). I will now expand on the

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8 Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, 1951, Article 1, Section 2
history of African immigration for the sole purpose of situating the history and pattern of migration from the African continent in this study.

A history of African immigration to the U.S.

The numbers of Africans who have settled in the United States in the past twenty-five years represent the largest number of Africans to have settled here in more than two hundred years (Arthur, 2000). Their presence in major cities of the United States like Houston, Los Angeles, New York City, Washington, D.C. and Atlanta cannot be ignored.

African presence in the United States dates as far back as the early 1600s when it is recorded that a Dutch ship in Jamestown, Virginia, exchanged their cargo of twenty Africans for food (Bennett, 1984). Bennett (1984) explains that these Africans were not slaves, but indentured servants, some of whom owned property and servants after they had served out their indenture. It was not until later that men, women and children from the African continent were brought to these shores as slaves. It is estimated that the slave trade brought between ten to twenty million Africans to America (Arthur, 2000). After the slave trade was abolished, African immigration was at a bare minimum until the first fifty years of the 20th century when African immigration resumed as a result of colonial rule in Africa (Gordon, 1998). According to Halter (2007), beginning in the 1930s, but especially after 1960 when many West African countries had gained independence from the colonialists, immigration from the West Coast of Africa to
the U.S. increased. Immigration to Europe had also become restrictive partly to discourage migration from former colonies at about the same time that doors were opening up in the U.S. (Halter, 2007). Since then the numbers of Africans in the U.S. have steadily increased depending on immigration laws at different periods.

At the time of the most recent Census 2000 data, it was estimated that there were about 881,300 African immigrants in the U.S. (Dixon, 2006). There is a discrepancy between these estimates and those reported by Wilson (2003) and Grieco (2004) which claim that the African-born population is about 2.5 million. Agbali (2008) believes that there is a discrepancy between official census and immigration figures and attributes this to “the incidences of illegal immigrants who might avoid the census for fear of reprisal [and who] might be equally responsible for this discrepancy (p.57).

A significant wave of African immigration occurred as a result of changes in U.S. Immigration laws, ushered in by the Immigration Act of 1965 which was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson (Arthur, 2000; Takaki, 1998). Prior to this period, national origin and national quota system for admitting immigrants were instituted as an immigration control measure by the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 (Arthur, 2000). The 1965 Immigration Act eliminated the restrictions by increasing the quota of immigrants allowed from each country and opening up large scale immigration from Third World countries in Asia and Latin America, but most especially from the African continent (Arthur, 2000; Stewart, 1993; Rong & Preissle, 1998; Kamya, 1997). Under this Act, people with highly needed
skills were granted immigrant visas. One of the factors that precipitated the surge in immigration was kinship ties which the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 made the primary rationale for admitting immigrants to the U.S. Other factors were social, economic and political changes around the world (Kamya, 1997).

Following the 1960s was a period of liberal immigration policies that facilitated the admission of African refugees, among many other nationalities, who were fleeing civil wars and despotic regimes in the 1970s (Halter, 2007; Arthur, 2000). Many of the African refugees came from Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea, Ghana and Liberia. The 1980s also saw an increase in the number of legalized African immigrants, many of whom benefited from the immigration reforms of 1986 (the Immigration Reform and Control Act) which made it possible for undocumented Africans living in the United States to be granted legal status through an amnesty (Arthur, 2000). In a bid to reduce the numbers of illegal immigrants in the U.S., Congress had enacted a legalization program that eventually granted legalized status to 2.8 million formerly illegal immigrants (Contreras, 2002).

The 1990 Immigration Act, which raised the limit for legal immigration to 700,000 a year, is responsible for the most recent wave of immigrants from Africa. The Act removed the former six-category preference system and substituted three immigration tracks, those of (1) family sponsorship, (2) employment skills, and (3) diversity (Stewart, 1993). The goal of diversity meant
an increased number of visas to persons from countries from which immigration
had been lower than 50,000 over the preceding five years. Through the Diversity
Lottery Visa Program that took effect in 1995, a program created to increase the
number of immigrants from countries with lower immigration rates and to support
the diversity goal of the 1990 Immigration Act, a large number of Africans were
admitted and continue to be admitted into the United States. According to Gordon
(1998), in 1995 alone, 37 percent of the diversity visas awarded was to Africans
alone. In 1998, President Bill Clinton also increased the refugee allotment from
Africa to 12,000 and Africans began averaging over 20,000 annually.

Of the over one million foreign-born Africans in the U.S. today, about 36
percent are from West Africa⁹ (Wilson, 2003). Research on African emigration
shows that African countries like Ghana and Nigeria are sending the most
educated people and trained artisans to other countries including the U.S. (Arthur,
2000). Rong & Preissle (1998) confirm that Nigeria has sent the largest number of
the African-born foreign population. As the twentieth century came to a close,
Nigerians made up over 17 percent of the African immigrant population (Gordon,
1998). Current U.S. Census numbers put the number of Nigerians in the U.S. at
about 140,929 (Wilson, 2003). The number of foreign-born Ghanaians is the
second largest group from West Africa totaling about 68,122 (Wilson, 2003).
Their position as the major “senders” of immigrants from West Africa to the U.S.
is the reason why Ghana and Nigeria have been chosen as the focus of this study.

⁹ See Figure 2:1 for a map of West Africa
Bump (2006) believes that these figures are undercounts and do not reflect the numbers of people in all Nigerian and Ghanaian households in the U.S. They do not include children born in the U.S. to immigrant parents from these nations. They also do not include Nigerian and Ghanaian foreign-born with other nations’ passports or undocumented immigrants from these countries.

Agbali (2008) believes that African immigrants who outstay their visas and become “illegal” are not likely to be included in official demographic data. In addition, Halter (2007) claims that West African community leaders agree that the census figures are severe undercounts and that totals may actually be twice the reported counts. Nevertheless, though few in number compared to other immigrant groups, the African’s contributions to the American quilt have been noteworthy in the areas of educational attainment, multilingual characteristics, strong kinship and family structure, ethnic business formation, and unfettered ambition to become successful (Arthur, 2000).
The ambition to be successful can be attributed to the fact that African immigrants, even more than the Asian and White populace, are the most educated group in the U.S. Lobo (2001) as cited by Agbali (2008) concludes that African immigrants in the U.S. represent the best and the brightest from their various countries. It can be assumed, then, that they transfer expectations of academic success to their children and that like earlier immigrants, they recognize the role of education in their successful transition to the new environment. The next section will examine the history of how immigrants have been educated for the purposes of indoctrination, assimilation and achievement of a national identity.
Institutional approaches to educating immigrants: the history of Americanization through schooling

The United States is a country of immigrants and perceptions about how all immigrants should be integrated into American society have changed over time (Burdick-Will & Gomez, 2006). The history of immigration in the U.S. cannot be divorced from the history of modern education because as the nation experienced an influx of immigrants at different times in its history, it was imperative that the newcomers from different nationalities, values and cultures be assimilated into a homogenous value system through school indoctrination (Rong & Preissle, 1998). Fass (2006) confirms that schooling did not exist as a nation-building enterprise until after the formation of the union and then it was instituted for the fostering of national goals. She points to the interconnectedness of schooling and immigration in this process of nation-building. Although schools were not created as a result of immigration, their development was intertwined with the increasing heterogeneity of the immigrant population which called for a national cohesiveness. (Fass, 2006).

Dinnerstein & Reimers (1999) conclude that “the pattern of minority life developed in the English colonies in the seventeenth century set the standard for future European minorities…” (p.15). The English colonists and later Americans of the, then, majority group (including Northern and Western Europeans) expected newcomers from Southern, Central and Eastern Europe to “absorb existing customs while shedding their own as quickly as possible” (p.15). It can
be assumed that these expectations have been extended to subsequent immigrant
groups, including Africans from the latest wave of immigration.

Collins (2000) asserts that “historical comparisons are crucial because
there have been a number of different kinds of education, not a single
evolutionary progress from primitive to modern forms” (p. 214). He made this
assertion in regards to global forms of education in tribal societies and early
Greece until present times, but this sentiment can be applied to the various forms
and purposes of education that have existed in the U.S. from the colonial times
until present. American schools have always been at the forefront for meeting
newcomers (Rong & Preissle, 1998; Rong & Brown, 2002), and have had to
undergo changes in educational philosophy, curriculum and instruction in order to
adapt to the various waves of immigration and the ethnic make up of the
immigrants. “The incorporation of each wave of immigrants and their children
challenges American society, and the response to this challenge depends on how
the children of the newest Americans move through the U.S. educational
pipeline” (Rong & Preissle, 1998).

Immigration policy has always impacted education, especially in the cities
where immigrants first settle in significant numbers (Contreras & Stephens,
1997). Immigration policy affects the numbers of new students enrolling in our
schools, the rate at which they enter, the nature and quality of services their
families receive, and their physical and economic well-being as well (Contreras &
Stephens, 1997). Immigration policy also affects the climate of the schools they
attend and the effectiveness with which schools educate the students (Contreras & Stephens, 1997). These factors were considered in this study’s examination of the role that the school context plays in the identity formation and well-being of West African immigrant girls.

Colonial Schools

I will briefly discuss colonial schools because the so called “Americanization” in education or instruction, which was aimed at socializing immigrants to the norms of the existing culture, can be traced back to the colonial period (Stewart, 1993). The Puritans, determined to maintain their ideals, sought to impose these ideals on new immigrants. Prior to the 19th century, education had been informal- comprising mostly of apprenticeships and private tutoring. The family, rather than the school, was the primary institution for socializing and training children in colonial New England (Bailyn, 1960). Although there were many schools in existence, the education they provided was still supplementary to the family, the church, and apprenticeship (Kaestle, 1972; Bailyn, 1960). Families were assisted by ministers and churches since most of the education at this time was religious. The father was entrusted with educating the children until after the mid-17th when women became the primary educators (Moran & Vinovskis, 1986).

These colonial schools were short-term and were supported by the towns in which they were located. The duration of these schools ranged from 10-12 weeks a year and boys were more likely than girls to be educated. The overall
education of children was viewed as a combined responsibility of the family, church and neighbor. This type of schooling ensured that education was available to only a few who could afford it. It also meant that wealth, race and gender were determinants of who could or could not be educated (Vinovskis, 1987).

**Monitorial charity schools, Sunday schools and infant schools**

Three antebellum education programs that preceded mass public schooling were monitorial charity schools, Sunday schools and infant schools and these existed mostly in Northeast America. (Nasaw, 1979). I have included a brief history of these schools because they later became the means by which immigrant children were educated before the introduction of public schooling.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, charity schools were established for poor children in American cities. These schools, mostly funded by religious groups and philanthropic agencies, served children whose parents could not educate them at home or in private schools and also unruly children of poor parents. These children were mostly offspring of failed farmers who migrated to the city from the Northeast (Nasaw, 1979). Free African-American children were also beneficiaries of the education provided by monitorial charity schools. As public schooling grew, there was movement away from these schools.

Sunday schools were intended for poor children as well and were set up in factory towns by industrialists and the wealthy to provide schooling and religious training for the children who worked in textile mills (Tucker, 1984). Sunday
schools taught poor children and illiterate adults how to read and memorize passages from the Bible. Many African-Americans in northern cities received their education from Sunday schools. As public schools became available and adult illiteracy declined, and because children acquired reading and writing from public schools, it was no longer necessary to teach literacy through Sunday schools. Infant schools, like monitorial and Sunday schools, educated poor children of all ages, but infant schools were designed for younger children who were removed from their poor parents. The purpose of this separation was to distance these children from their parents’ negative influence.

These programs all started out for the poor but quickly spread to everyone and can be said to have been the means by which immigrant populations were educated at the times they existed and before public schooling began. Nasaw (1979) refers to the mission of these schools which was to “civilize” or “tame” the supposedly “uncouth” immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. Of course, the stigma\textsuperscript{10} attached to these schools disappeared and the quality of education improved once lower class and middle class Americans started attending them.

\textit{Common Schools}

The need for common schools arose for several reasons- as a result of an increase in industrialism and immigration and for educating a heterogeneous

\begin{footnote}{10} Those for who these schools were designed were repelled by them until the lower and middle class children enrolled in them.\end{footnote}
immigrant population for democracy and citizenship (Ueda, 2006). Mass public elementary or common schooling as a formal institution developed in the 19th century. The common school of the early- and mid-1800s became what we call the public school today. The period from 1830-1860 coincided with the first large and significant wave of immigrants to arrive into the United States and it was in this context that the ideal of the public common school took root (Ueda, 2006). There are many schools of thought as to why common schools were created. Revisionists like Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Katz, 1968) believed that common schools were established as a response to industrialization. They argued that industrialists championed the public school system to ensure that future workers respected the law and authority necessary in the newly emerging capitalist economy. In that case, it can be concluded that from its inception, its purpose was to educate children to become citizens of the new democratic nation.

By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the face of immigration had changed from Northern and Western Europeans to Southern and Eastern Europeans who settled in already overcrowded flooded urban centers. It is estimated that between 1890 and 1930, over 20 million people (3 million of them children) came to the U.S. About 50 percent of children were in school at this time, while the others were working to raise money for their families. The increase in population brought about an increase in vagrancy, poverty, class conflict, crime and the threat of Catholicism (Kaestle, 1973, 1983; Ueda, 2006) and vocational education was to be the cure in that it would equip
young immigrants with skills necessary for survival. The urban mixture of 
etnicities, cultures, religious beliefs and values continued to raise an alarm for 
the need of an American national identity— an identity defined by Anglo-Saxon 
and Protestant norms. This in turn caused educators to intensify efforts to 
“Americanize” the newcomers by focusing on personal hygiene, manners, daily 
conduct, and English language instruction (Ueda, 2006). Contrary to the mode of 
education experienced by the Northern and Western Europeans, an education that 
focused mostly on enforcing a national identity, these newcomers were 
considered to be uncouth and uncivilized and in need of “taming.”

By 1891, leaders in the National Education Association (NEA) were 
concerned that these foreigners were beginning to threaten what it meant to be 
American by preserving their languages and traditions (Tyack, 1993). Bringing 
their native cultures and values with them, they were under pressure to discard 
everything that was un-American. The surge of immigrants from Southeastern 
Europe—Italians, Poles and Russians, most of whom were Jewish or Catholic— 
threatened the “old” immigrants who sought to separate themselves from these 
“new” immigrants. Tyack (1993) describes the major themes that subsequently 
dominated the public discourse on immigrant education for the next three 
decades. Some of these include the idea that the “new” immigrants were 
intellectually and morally inferior to the “old” immigrants and their children 
needed to be schooled in English and American politics and culture.
Banks & Banks (2004) draw from Brumberg’s (1986) detailed account of the education of European immigrants in New York schools which outlines the scope of instruction in the early 20th century. The standard norm at that time was a middle-class notion of hygiene, accentless English, aesthetics, dress, manners and appropriate knowledge of U.S. history. Educators made determined efforts to exclude immigrant cultures from school curriculum and to prohibit the use of native languages in school communication. Immigrant parents were accepting of these acculturation tactics to a large extent because they understood that their children were being prepared for successful integration into the new society. Their protests were around efforts to vocationalize immigrant secondary education which they understood to be an impediment to the same successful acculturation that schools proposed.

In his history of bilingualism in the U.S., Crawford (1999) points to the fact that the framers of the U.S. Constitution did not adopt an official language for the country, and although English became the dominant language, many immigrants were schooled in their native language until the early part of the 20th century when Americanization efforts linked speaking good English with becoming American. English influence on the nation’s culture was significant because the majority of those who had been in power during the 18th century were of English ascent. This superiority of Anglo-Saxon culture remained dominant well into the 20th century (Parrillo, 1997). The paradox of welcoming strangers with open arms only to ask them to conform is captured in this statement:
“whereas on the one hand we have welcomed strangers to work and live among us, on the other hand we have scorned and abused immigrants or minority groups who have deviated from the dominant culture” (Dinnerstein & Reimers, 1999).

The early twentieth century assimilation and Americanization theories claimed that immigrants must give up their cultural heritage and native language in order to become American (Burdick-Will & Gomez, 2006). Doing so would cause a varied group of immigrants to form a homogenized American identity. Put differently, Tyack (1993) claims that schools were expected to “drive a wedge between students and the parental culture and language, thereby assimilating the second generation” (p.15). Parrillo (1997) defined assimilation as the functioning of racial or ethnic minority groups within a society without any marked cultural, social, or personal differences from the majority group. Park (1928) as cited in Burdick-Will & Gomez (2006), and other Chicago School urban sociologists, believed that migration impacted the evolutionary process and led to a breakdown of the social order. They predicted that social chaos would result from a lack of a common language and uniform customs.

Schools became a socializing agent in promoting the shedding of these differences (Parrillo, 1997; Noel, 2000) and were promoted by social reformers as “culture factories” that would cure moral depravity and instill principles of republican virtue and American habits and identities (Banks & Banks, 2004). The Americanization of new arrivals was achieved through school curriculum whose sole aim was to socialize newcomers to the norms of the dominant culture. The
common schools became characterized by uniform curriculum, standardized attendance requirements, standardized promotion of students and teacher training, and central policy making.

Common school reformers won a public school monopoly on tax monies for schooling and called for nonsectarian moral education, Bible reading and a denigration of Catholicism and the moral character of the Irish (Kaestle, 1973). The moralizing practices of schools were not always well-received by parents who balked at the cultural and religious indoctrination that was the driving force of common school education (Kaestle, 1973). This dissension led to the establishment of parochial schools which German-speaking Lutherans, German Reformed, Mennonite, Catholics and Slavic groups (Nasaw, 1979) looked to for a continuation of ethnic, linguistic and religious training. Thus, the parochial schools came to be known for their conservation of culture as opposed to the Americanizing efforts of public schools (Cohen & Mohl, 1979). With the 1924 restrictions on immigration, diminished ethnic cohesion, ethnic co-mingling and social mobility, parochial schools began to play less of a role of preserving ethnicity and more of a role of organizing an Americanized Catholic community (Sanders, 1977). At the time of these restrictions, the high schools had become “important arenas of the Americanizing experience for the second and third generations…” and places where “the ethnic complexity of America was most often brought home” (Fass, 2006, p. 501).
Ueda (2006) calls to our attention the fact that although agricultural displacement and industrialization brought a diverse pool of immigrants to the U.S. in the nineteenth century, the focus of school planners and reformers was on the education of white immigrants from Europe. They were seen as having the potential for citizenship in comparison to Asian immigrants who arrived for a brief period and African-American slaves who were denied schooling unless they were free in the north. While Americanization and assimilation were general values that taught a predominantly white immigrant population what it meant to be American, these values affected the ways subsequent immigrant populations were educated.

**Historical approaches to educating immigrants: 20th century models**

Historical approaches to educating immigrants in the 20th century were informed by ideas of what it means to be American; nevertheless, the early 1920s saw a shift in the purposes of immigrant education- from an emphasis on a national cultural identity to intercultural or intergroup education (Banks & Banks, 2004). By the early 1900s, marked differences had begun to appear between acculturated immigrant children and their parents. The consequences of the inevitable acculturation and the purposeful denigration of their culture and language led to alienation from the first generation immigrants and cultural ignorance of other ethnic and religious groups (Banks & Banks, 2004). Also at
this time the restrictive immigration laws of 1921 and 1924 had been passed and
schools were paying less attention to assimilation practices (Tyack, 1993). The
call for ethnic self-preservation became the new call of the times (Tyack, 1993).

Horace Kallen is known as the premier advocate for cultural pluralism and
is also known for his rejection of the assimilation and amalgamation theories. In
contrast to reformers who called for Americanization, Kallen advocated for
schools to recognize and preserve the culture of the immigrants (Kallen, 1924).
Unlike assimilation theories which proposed that all immigrants and their
succeeding generations could eventually become indistinguishable from the
dominant group as they shed their native customs and traditions, the melting pot
theory advocated for immigrants to bring their customs and traditions to the fore
to create a new American identity. This melting together of the ethnic
contributions of various immigrant groups was problematic because not all groups
were allowed to “melt”. Cultural pluralism, also referred to as the salad bowl or
mosaic theory, acknowledged the existence of multiple ethnic groups and
identities which could co-exist and be celebrated (Ueda, 2006 ). Rather than see
the varied cultures as a threat to the American national identity, Kallen saw
cultural pluralism as natural outcome of a democratic society (Kallen, 1924).
Since the foundation of the United States was one of pluralism, as evidenced by
the ways different ethnic groups initially settled in clusters, advocates of pluralism
believed that assimilation and pluralism were not mutually exclusive, and that
both could be practiced simultaneously (Tyack, 1993).
Intergroup/Intercultural Education (1930-1950)

Although Banks (2005) uses the terms inter-cultural and inter-group education interchangeably, she maintains that a difference in focus existed between both approaches. While the focus of intercultural education was on the preservation and understanding of diverse cultures, the emphasis of intergroup education was on reducing the prejudices that were beginning to surface in the interactions between immigrant groups from within (from the South to the North) and outside of the U.S.

The intercultural education movement is attributed to the efforts of Rachel Dubois and allies who worked in the 1930s to address prejudices that arose during the Great Depression and the end of World War II and encourage respect for ethnic and cultural diversity (Tyack, 1993). By the 1940s and 1950s, the demands of World War II had created job opportunities in the North and West that were not available in the South. With migrants coming from the South for jobs, ethnic tensions broke out and resulted in racially motivated incidents. Intergroup education emerged as an educational response to these racial problems (Banks & Banks, 2004).

Although educators continued to educate citizens about the strengths of cultural diversity, Tyack (1993) claims that intercultural education “did not emerge from immigrant grass roots”. Instead, it foreshadowed the multicultural debates of post-1965 immigrant education (Banks & Banks, 2004). After the
Immigration Reform Act of 1965, the surge in immigration once again raised the question of the best ways to school immigrant children. Just as was the case in the 1900s, schools were intent on integrating immigrant children into the dominant societal American norms. Suarez-Orozco (2000) refers to this as the “clean break” assumption- an assumption that immigrants need to discard their old cultures and identities in order to assimilate into the new country. Then, just as now, the immigrant students’ identities, cultures and histories were not acknowledged in schools.

*Multicultural Education (1960-1980)*

Discussions about ways that schools have accommodated and educated immigrants from diverse groups and cultures will not be complete without an examination of multicultural education. The degree and manner in which schools have acknowledged and accommodated cultural differences have varied over time and locale (Banks & Banks, 2004) - from colonial education to the common school of the 19th and early 20th century; from intergroup education of the middle 20th century to multicultural education of the 1960s. Although the U.S. has been diverse since its founding, its ethnic make up changed dramatically after the Immigration Reform Act of 1965 (Banks & Banks, 2004). Whereas most of the nation’s immigrants came from Europe between 1901 and 1910, after 1965 and later, mostly between 1991 and 1998, majority of the new immigrants came from
Latin America and Asia. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), the ethnic groups of color will make up 47 percent of the U.S. population by 2050.

Banks & Banks (2005) describe multicultural education as education that “incorporates the idea that all students- regardless of their gender and social class and their ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics- should have an equal opportunity to learn in school” (p.3). They add that “some students, because of these characteristics, have a better chance to learn in schools as they are currently structured than do students who belong to other groups or who have different cultural characteristics” (Banks, 2005). Banks & Banks (2005) also explain that multicultural education is an idea, an educational reform and a process. This process began during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s when multicultural education emerged in response to the Eurocentric domination of the American school curriculum. There were calls from African-Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans, women and other marginalized groups for reform in race relations in education and society (McCarthy, 1990). This call was a rejection of earlier twentieth century assimilation theories which required immigrants to give up their culture and language in order to melt into one unified American identity (Burdick-Will & Gomez, 2006). The movement’s goal included the elimination of discrimination in education among other aspects of life (Banks & Banks, 2004). African Americans, as well as other groups which included various immigrant groups, demanded that schools change their curricula to reflect experiences,
histories, cultures and perspectives that were not Eurocentric (Banks & Banks, 2004; Tyack, 1993).

Banks & Banks (2005) argue that school curriculum that focuses on the experiences of mainstream Americans, and ignores the experiences, cultures and histories of other ethnic groups, racial, cultural, language, and religious groups has negative effects on both majority and minority students. Although multicultural education addresses the need for all students, regardless of ethnicity or cultural background, to be educated in cross-cultural understanding, it is particularly relevant to children from non-Western cultures who are asked to study only European values and history and who, in doing so, may begin to see their own cultural past as being unimportant (Stewart, 1993). According to Guttman (2004), students from these groups are marginalized when they do not receive equal representation in schools.

The advocacy for a transformation of citizenship education in the 20th century to reflect the ethnic, cultural, language and religious diversity is not a new phenomenon. It became more pertinent in the 1960s that a transformed citizenship education allow immigrants to maintain attachments to their cultural and ethnic communities while participating in a shared national culture- the purpose and goal of all immigrant education (Banks & Banks, 2005). The demands made of multicultural education have continued into the 21st century and have included the expectations for schools to hire more teachers that are representative of the ethnic
population of the schools; for community control of neighborhood schools and for
the revision of textbooks to reflect the nation’s diversity (Banks & Banks, 2005).

Multicultural education today (1980s-present)

With U.S. schools being the most diverse in population than they have ever been, it continues to be pertinent that schools agree on the best ways to develop and teach from multicultural curricula. The term “multicultural curricula”, like most words associated with immigrant education, has been controversial. Some argue that such curricula ignores the common strands that define the U.S. and they believe that a multicultural curriculum is a threat to the standard curricula that continues to promote a national identity- the primary aim of 19th century education (Hirsch, 1987; Ravitch, 1990).

Immigrant children are at a disadvantage when they arrive in U.S. schools because they are different. The differences can be physical, cultural, religious or linguistic. As these newcomers struggle to find a place in the schools, they are confronted with school curriculum that further marginalizes them (Stewart, 1993). Many of these students may come from countries where they have learned from curricula that were all-inclusive- that is curriculum that reflects world histories and cultures. The appropriate curricula is one that takes into account the ways that the nations’ diverse cultures have influenced and still influence the nation and the world at large. Accounts of tensions between immigrant and native-born children
abound and can be alleviated by intercultural learning that teaches acceptance of all cultures.

Reactions to the presence of immigrant children in schools are reminiscent of the earlier waves of immigration, especially in the 19th century. Then, reactions to the influx of immigrants from Southern, Eastern and Central Europe were that they were taking over and should go back to where they came from (Kaestle, 1973, 1983; Ueda, 2006). These are still some of the reactions that immigrant children experience today. Native-born students are uncomfortable with unfamiliar languages, foods, dress, customs and smells. Schools have began to address some of these issues by celebrating different ethnicities in schools through international fairs and celebrations and talks by guest speakers who are members of the immigrant community.

Bilingual Education (1968-present)

As the population of immigrants from Latin America and Asia increased significantly after the Immigration Act of 1965 (Edmonston & Passel, 1992), the federal government recognized the language needs of students with limited English speaking ability (LESA). The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 was the first official recognition that LESA students had unique education needs and that in order for them to enjoy equal educational opportunities as other children, bilingual programs had to be introduced (Stewner-Manzanares, 1988). The Bilingual Act or Title VII was a response to what were considered civil rights
violations. This was the first time that Congress had allocated significant funds for an educational program primarily serving immigrants (Stewart, 1993). As immigrants enrolled in schools, bilingual education and ESL programs were at the forefront of accommodations to meet the needs of students for whom English was either a new or second language. Proponents of bilingual education advocated for the preservation of home language and culture of students concerned (Fass, 2006).

Including bilingual education in this discussion on immigrant education is to show how efforts made at educating language minority students also served immigrant students who are learners of English. The term *bilingual education* is used to describe a number of educational approaches that use English and another language (usually the native language) in instruction. The term “English Language Learner” was introduced by LaCelle Peterson & Rivera (1994) to describe non-native speakers of English who lack English proficiency. They prefer the term ELL to LEP, a term used by government-funded program and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to determine inclusion in programs.

An understanding of the social climate at this time in the nation’s history is critical to understanding the passage of the Bilingual Education Act. First of all, in 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled that school segregation based on race was unconstitutional. This ruling initiated subsequent legislation that would create programs for the disadvantaged (Stewner-Manzanares, 1988). The 1960s saw the birth of the Civil Rights Movement as Blacks, women and other minority groups
protested lack of work, housing, political and educational opportunities. Title IV of the Bilingual Education Act allowed the Attorney General to initiate school desegregation on behalf of private citizens, while Title VI of the Act stated that anyone participating in federally funded program could not be discriminated against based on race or national origin. This ruling had implications for educational programs that were federally funded (Stewner-Manzanares, 1988).

With much leeway from the government, school districts had the freedom to create programs that fell within guidelines for the federal grants which included resources for educational programs and training for teachers and teacher aides (Stewner-Manzanares, 1988).

The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 has undergone many amendments. Schools had utilized the submersion techniques by placing students with limited English proficiency in regular classrooms in which English was the only language of instruction (Stewart, 1993). These students were given no special program to help them overcome their language problems and their native language was not used in the classroom. This “sink or swim” submersion was found unconstitutional in the Supreme Court’s 1974 decision in *Lau v. Nichols* (Stewart, 1993). The Supreme Court ruled in the *Lau v. Nichols* case that providing the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curricula to all students, regardless of ethnicity or immigration status, did not constitute equal education. The court found that federally funded schools violated the 1964 Civil Rights Act if they do not provide their non-English-speaking students with instruction in how to speak
English or with classes in their native language. This decision was based largely on a 1970 memorandum by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) which stated that school districts must go beyond providing the same books and teachers to all students to rectifying English language deficiencies (Teitelbaum & Hiller, 1977).

**Sheltered English programs** are employed at the secondary level as alternative content classes for students who do not have sufficient English language skills to follow the regular curriculum. Sometimes content-based courses parallel almost all curricular offerings and at other times, may involve a couple of subjects. The benefit of these programs is that students can stay in them until they have been determined to achieve English proficiency that will enable them to succeed in mainstream classrooms (Stewart, 1993). **Structured immersion programs**, that teach all subject matter in English, are used in elementary and secondary classrooms. Although the teacher uses only English for instruction, the students are encouraged to use their native language in class (Stewart, 1993). **The pull-out immersion program** is used in schools with low immigrant student enrollment- usually schools located in suburbs or in cities that are not typical destination points for immigrants. Students with limited English proficiency are “pulled out” of regular classes for instruction in English by teachers trained in ESL methodology (Stewart, 1993).

Another Act that led to amendment of the 1968 Act was the Title II of the Educational Amendment Act of 1974 which advocated that instructional
programs be instituted to help students overcome language barriers. Therefore, the 1974 Amendment to the Bilingual Act specifically defined a bilingual education program as one that provided instruction in both English and the native language of the student- something that English as a second language programs could not do. This amendment expanded federal support for bilingual education (Carnevale, 2006). The 1978 Amendment to the 1968 Act went beyond students of limited English speaking ability (LESA) to include students with “limited English proficiency” (LEP) (Castellanos, 1983, p. 179). LEP referred to students who had difficulty speaking, reading, writing and understanding the English language and who were to be prepared to enter the regular classroom as soon as possible. It is important to point out that the native language was to be used only to the extent that it facilitated English instruction (transitional bilingual instruction) and programs designed to maintain the native language were not funded under this amendment.

After the 1968 Act underwent a series of amendments in the 70s, the Bilingual Education Act of 1984 was passed. The differences between this and the amended 1968 Act was the increased flexibility given to school districts in the implementation of LEP programs. In a departure from the landmark *Lau v Nichols* case which called for the use of the native language in English language instruction, the 1984 Act allowed some of the allocated funds to go towards programs that did not require the native language to be used as part of the English language instruction (Stewart, 1993). Grants were awarded for several programs
which, in addition to utilizing the native language as a part of instruction, included provisions for up to 40 percent of the transitional class being made up of non-LEP students and developmental bilingual education programs with full time instruction in both English and a second language (Stewart, 1993).

By 1983, opponents of bilingual education were uneasy about the fact that immigrants were being encouraged to be indifferent to the English language. These “English only” proponents gained a large following of critics of bilingual education (Stewart, 1993). The 1988 Bilingual Education Act is the most recent legislature passed for the education of a diverse group of LEP students. The current wave of immigration since the 1980s has been the largest since the 1910s and has brought more than 1,000 immigrant children per day into U.S. schools (Rong & Preissle, 1998). The United States is in the midst of a wave of immigration that shows no signs of slowing down and the diversity among these new immigrants also poses a challenge to American schools. As Asia and Latin America continued to send the highest number of immigrants in the 1980s, the need to effectively educate a bilingual student population remained a priority.

All the changes to the initial Bilingual Education Act of 1968 outlined above show how the needs of the LEP student population have influenced the direction in which bilingual education has been headed. It is obvious that the use of the student’s native language in English language instruction has been a controversial piece of this (Stewner-Manzanares, 1988; Fass, 2006). The most recent Act confirms that schools have been given the freedom to provide
programming that is relevant to their LEP student population- the goal being to prepare these students for proficiency in English and successful absorption into mainstream classes.

The case against bilingual education is that it reinforces “stereotypes, ghettoizes immigrant children, and sets them apart in programs perceived by students and teachers alike to be of inferior status” (Stewart, 1993). Opponents of bilingual education also believe that ESL programs are more effective in that they provide “a greater stimulus for learning and result in much more rapid learning” (p.149). Proponents of bilingual education believe, among other things, that bilingual education is affirming for the immigrant student’s well-being and self-esteem. They also believe that English-immersion programs may cause students to lose their primary (native) language- something that some immigrant parents may work hard to maintain (Stewart, 1993).

By the early 1980s, schools were not receiving passing grades for their efforts to meet the needs of limited English proficiency students. In 1982, Secretary of Education Terrell Bell stated that “although local school districts and states are making an effort, schools in general are not meeting the needs of LEP students” (Stewart, 1993). He added that “many schools are not assessing the special needs of language-minority children. They are not assessing the English language proficiency of these children, much less the home language proficiency, as a basis for planning programs and providing services” (Stewart, 1993). There has been a decline in bilingual instruction, most notably in cities like California,
New York and Washington State where it is believed that this type of instruction impedes English Language acquisition (Fass, 2006).

Students who speak a language other than English and who have limited proficiency in English are still the fastest-growing population in U.S. public schools. During the process of locating a study site, I was constantly referred to either ESL schools or Welcome centers. I had to explain each time that Nigeria and Ghana are English-speaking nations; therefore, immigrant children and/or their parents from these countries are English speakers and are not typically served by ESL or bilingual education.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, other programs were instituted to accommodate immigrant children- specialized assessment and placement centers, systems to assess language proficiency, “newcomer schools” that serve immigrant students exclusively, year-round school calendars, cultural sensitivity programs, parental outreach programs, and partnerships with community agencies and organizations (Contreras & Stephens, 1997). All these programs were tailored to match the make-up of immigrant and/or refugee groups at each time period. I will pay specific attention to “newcomer schools” which are worth mentioning as another method that schools have utilized in response to educating immigrant children.
Newcomer Schools/Programs (1990s)

There is a small but growing presence of newcomer programs in urban middle and high school settings across the U.S. (Short, 2002). These programs are found in areas where the largest numbers of immigrants reside- California, New York, New Jersey and Texas. 1990 seems to be the year when demographic changes, due to increased immigration and refugee admission and the needs of immigrant students, precipitated the establishment of newcomer schools/programs. ESL and bilingual education programs were found not to meet the needs of newcomers because secondary school curricula and materials assume students have literacy skills and are fully acculturated to schools (Short, 2002). Previous attempts like placing students in lower grades proved unsuccessful, so newcomer programs were developed to address the needs of students with zero to low English proficiency, low literacy, and limited formal schooling. Examples of such students are refugees who have spent years in transit in refugee camps. This bridge between newcomers’ needs and regular language support programs continues to grow as urban school districts respond to the challenges of educating new immigrants (Olsen, 1997). The purposes of newcomer schools are multiple. They range from helping students acquire beginning English skills, and assisting in the acculturation process, to developing the students’ native language skills and providing instruction in core academic content areas (Olsen, 1997).

Short (2002) distinguishes newcomer schools from other language support programs in that not all students learning English as another language are eligible
for newcomer programs because the latter are designed for students with the lowest literacy skills, those who arrive after the beginning of the school year, and those who are older learners- a population that is seen among refugee students who have spent considerable time in refugee camps and missed a lot of schooling. Secondly, whereas other language programs do not have a limit on the period of enrollment, newcomer programs last anywhere from 1-3 semesters and sometimes beyond. Thirdly, newcomer programs differ from English as a second language (ESL) and bilingual programs especially in native language literacy development, orientation to the community and foundational content courses like arithmetic and introduction to U.S. history. Fourthly, basic instruction on school skills range from how to hold a pencil to how to follow a school schedule; from how to read textbooks to how to negotiate public transportation systems. Lastly, newcomer programs extend their services to students’ families. Parents are connected to social, health and employment services through already existing school-community partnerships; parents are oriented to the new environment through family events and adult ESL classes are provided to help parents function more effectively in their new environment. The services provided to families are similar to settlement houses of the early part of the 20th century. They are also reminiscent of the “special” classes established by urban school districts in the 19th century to accommodate all the newcomers at that time (Short, 2002).

In a four year research conducted for the U.S. Department of Education, to see how schools serve the needs of newcomer students at the middle or high
school levels, Short (2002) found evidence of student language and academic growth among students attending newcomer programs. The programs polled enrolled close to 15,000 students and the population included a large number of refugees and students from multiple language backgrounds. Spanish speakers dominated this group followed by Vietnamese and Somali speakers. This study also identified three common newcomer school types: programs within schools, separate site schools and whole schools. The programs within schools ensure that students are served in their home school and are not completely separated from the main student body. The programs on a separate site are usually full day programs that may last about a year before students are returned to language support programs in their home schools. The positive aspect of this type of newcomer program is that it accelerates English language acquisition so that they can integrate faster with the main student body, but the negative aspect is that students are isolated from the rest of the school population. Stewart (1993) identified the Newcomer school in the Los Angeles Unified School District as an excellent example of a newcomer school on a separate site. This program extends for not more than a year to avoid charges of segregation. Students are assigned to an assessment center where they receive physical examinations, are tested in their native language and undergo a review of how much education they have coming into the schools. Stewart (1993) reveal that referral to this Newcomer School is presented as an option to the parents.
As with most language support programs created to serve immigrant students, controversies also surround newcomer programs. There has been some evidence that the success of immigrant students comes at the direct or indirect expense of the educational attainment of the native born (Schwartz & Gershberg, 2001). It is believed that immigrant students might crowd out the native born in competition for educational resources (Duncombe & Yinger, 1997; Downes & Pogue, 1994). These resources include costs associated with limited English proficiency. Some have criticized newcomer programs as creating separate track education, while others argue that newcomer students should be mainstreamed with regular students as soon as possible (Duncombe & Yinger, 1997; Downes & Pogue, 1994).

The decades from 1980-2000 saw a dramatic increase in the number of new immigrants and because immigrants are younger than the native-born population and tend to have more school-age children, there are profound implications for U.S. public schools (Perkins, 2000). The newcomers of these past two decades differ from those of the early 20th century because they are distinctly non-white and non-European. The similarities, though, are that like the 19th and early 20th century immigrants, these newcomers arrive with different languages, customs, values and religions. As school crowding became a common phenomenon in cities with rapid immigration growth, the concept of year-round schools arose.
Refugee Education (1970s-present)

In addition to bilingual education, immigrants arriving post 1965 have also been served by refugee education. The United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as a person “who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality… (and) is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” Persons seeking admission to the U.S. must meet the definition of refugee specified in the Refugee Act of 1980; must be among the types of refugees determined under explicit provisions in the law to be “of special humanitarian concern to the United States;” must be admissible under U.S. law and not firmly settled in any foreign country (Stewart, 1993).

Cubans were the largest group of refugees to be admitted to the U.S. after World War II, followed by persons from Southeast Asian nations (Stewart, 1993). Since 1975, the U.S. has permanently resettled 2.4 million refugees. Many of the early refugees were well-educated Southeast Asians whose children went on to excel academically in the U.S. (McBrien, 2003). Between 1975 and 1986, 109,000 Soviet refugees, 30,000 Poles, 26,000 Romanians, 21,000 Afghans, 18,000 Ethiopians, and 6,000 Iraqis entered the U.S. as refugees. Florida was hard hit by the waves of Cuban refugees who came in such numbers as to strain education services in the state. The fall of Saigon in 1975 brought a wave of

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11 See notes on 6
refugees from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia (Stewart, 1993). This group of refugees was relatively young, better-educated, and relatively skilled. The refugees of the 1980s included the “boat people” and tended to be different from previous waves of refugees in that they were from lower economic and social classes and less likely to speak English (Stewart, 1993).

Another wave of refugee migration from Southeast Asia began in 1982 and schools continued to be swamped and unprepared to educate children whose educational background was non-existent. Massachusetts schools were significantly overwhelmed by the arrival in large numbers of Southeast Asian refugees. The Center for Applied linguistics (CAL) made attempts to aid educators in educating these new arrivals by reprinting Vietnamese school textbooks in English so that teachers could assess students’ former learning (Stewart, 1993).

Refugee children that came with these groups had little or no schooling because they were displaced and constantly on the move from one refugee camp to another. These children were understandably unprepared for the major adjustments they had to make in U.S. classrooms. In addition to the shock of adjustment, students arrived without academic records that could help educators in the evaluation and placement process.

Under the Refugee Assistance Extension Act of 1986, federal funds were provided for the educational needs of refugee children enrolled in public and nonprofit private elementary and secondary schools (Stewart, 1993). This Act
authorizes instruction that improves English language skills- a necessary skill for fast track into the workforce; bilingual education; remedial programs; school counseling and guidance services, in-service training for educational personnel, and training for parents. In addition to these, funds are also approved for rental space, school construction costs and transportation costs (Stewart, 1993).

The latest refugee groups to settle in the U.S. include Moslems from Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Burundi, Somalia and Sudan (United Nations Commissioner for Refugees, 2002). These refugees are distinct from immigrants because they have not left their homes by choice; do not have significant financial/economic base and do not have family and friends with whom they can settle (McBrien, 1999). Forced out due to civil wars and other political unrests, refugees spend years in refugee camps, missing large amounts of schooling at a time. Another distinction between refugees and immigrants is that the former qualify for a number of social services that include English language training, job preparation, health services and cash allocation (Stewart, 1993).

The presence of refugees has transformed major communities- from the Hmong in Fresno, California to the Somalis in Columbus, Ohio and Minneapolis, Minnesota, and I will address ways that schools have attempted to educate refugee children. One of the first things refugees, like all non-English speaking immigrants, learn on settling in the U.S. is that proficiency in English is closely linked with their participation in the labor force. To meet this need, many refugees participate in English as a second language (ESL) classes- one of the
programs funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement. Recipients of these funds include refugee self-help organizations, church groups and community agencies (Bliss, 1988).

The main thrust of refugee education is to provide a variety of education and training experiences to facilitate a fast entrance into mainstream society. There are a few pre-entry education sites in education and training camps located in countries of first asylum in Southeast Asia which serve to give refugees a head start prior to arriving in the U.S. Federal policy for refugee education programs emphasize vocational education following circumscribed educational activities (Stewart, 1993). In 1985, a program was instituted for preparing refugee adolescents, 12-16 years old, for secondary school experiences in overseas refugee camps as a complement to adult transitional programs (Pfleger, 1985). Named the Preparation for American Secondary Schools (PASS), this daily program was designed to simulate the schedule and classroom procedures of a typical U.S. secondary school. These classes include E.S.L instruction, basic math and American studies. Before 1985, adolescents were not included in the overseas training program. Arriving in the U.S. without formal English language training and introduction to American culture received by the adult refugees, these teenagers were not familiar with school procedures or appropriate social behavior and were far behind their peers in academic achievement (Pfleger, 1985). Before 1987, refugee children were not included in the overseas training program meant for adult refugees ages 16-55. In 1987, the Preparing Refugees for Elementary
Programs (PREP) began at the Phillipine Refugee processing center. Its goal was to prepare children, 6-11 years old for further learning in the U.S. by teaching them linguistic, academic and interpersonal skills needed for successful entry into U.S. elementary schools.

The pre-entry programs have undergone changes since 1990 as quick resettlement became priority. Instead, efforts were put into post-arrival programs which were aimed at short-term job and English training to ensure refugee employability within a year of arrival. Called a “front-loading” vocational educational program, success is measured in terms of job placements, job retention and reductions in cash assistance…” (from the Federal Register, 13 April 1990, No. 13978 as cited in Stewart, 1993). This method of refugee education that requires vocational training at the onset is controversial because economic adaptation is seen to take precedence over cultural adaptation. A major critic is James Tollefson, at the University of Washington, who places the educational programs used for Indochinese refugees in the tradition of the Americanization movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries which forced immigrants to assimilate at the lowest rungs of the social and economic ladder by changing who they are (Tollefson, 1989). Stewart (1993) agrees that, although eventual and early employability of refugees is a noble goal of federal policy affecting refugee education, all immigrants, including refugees, should also be trained to become functional citizens of the U.S. This will address the critics’ accusation of refugees being educated for cheap labor. The refugees, themselves,
quickly come to understand that their ticket to economic and social success in the
U.S. is linked to education.

Most of the efforts at educating refugees discussed above target adult
refugees. How about refugee children who are entering American schools?
Learning that many of the newcomers likely will not have gone to school before,
the St. Paul, Minnesota administrators came up with a plan that deviates from the
school system's usual strategy for teaching immigrant and refugee children (Zehr,
2004). Known as transitional centers, these programs are housed in regular
schools but in separate classrooms. Educators test the skills of the Hmong
children and decide if they will be placed in the regular programs for English-
language learners or be retained for a while in the special classes. Those who
remain in the centers take separate classes in intensive English and learn the
routines and rituals of school. In order not to feel segregated from the main school
population, these children join other students outside their group for classes such
as art, music, and physical education (Zehr, 2004).

As educational institutions continue to work on the front lines to educate a
rapidly growing immigrant population, an examination of the different approaches
to educating the various waves of immigrants in the last 400 years reveals that
there is a group whose educational, cultural and social needs have not been
adequately addressed- African immigrants who do not have refugee status and
whose primary language is English. The question that needs to be asked is what
approaches schools have taken to address the needs of African immigrant students
whose needs are not necessarily linguistic in nature. Are schools aware that these students may have other issues of school adjustment beyond the linguistic?

As I situate the education of African immigrants within the history of immigrant education, I will examine the experiences of African immigrants in the schools and determine what efforts have been made by schools to serve this fast-growing population.

**Situating the African Immigrant Education**

A survey of the history of immigration and immigrant education yields substantive information on the waves of immigration and approaches to educating immigrants at different periods in U.S. history (Fass, 2006). The children of immigrants, regardless of country of origin, are a rising share of the nation’s K-12 student population. By 2015, they will constitute 30 percent of the nation’s school population. The numbers of Ghanaian and Nigerian immigrants in the U.S. are an indication of the number of their children in U.S. schools (Fix & Passel, 2003). Yet, there has been a lack of attention given to African immigrant groups in the U.S. (Kamya, 1997).

Existing research on immigrant groups and immigrant education focuses on patterns of entry into the U.S. and on bilingual and refugee education as approaches that have been used towards the education of immigrants as a whole. Current research appears to treat all immigrant children as being in need of bilingual education before they can gain entry into mainstream classrooms. This
leads to the assumption that all African immigrants are included in these
discussions. But missing from a review of literature are the stories of African
immigrants who have non-refugee status—those who have voluntarily migrated to
the U.S., are from English-speaking nations and are therefore not served by
bilingual education.

The presence of African immigrants has been noticeable in the past two
decades along with the influx of new immigrants from Mexico, the Caribbean,
South America, Europe, Asia and Africa (Rong & Preissle, 1998). These new
immigrants can be found in major metropolitan areas in states like New York,
Texas, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland and California. The literature on immigrants
from 1980-2000 reveals that most studies have focused on immigrants from Latin
America, Asia, the Caribbean, Mexico the Middle-Eastern and Europe. So while
immigrants from these regions have received much attention, few studies focus on
immigrants from Africa (Peil, 1995; Takougang, 1995; Dodoo, 1997; Kamya,
1997; Perry, 1997; Gordon, 1997; Lobo and Salvo, 2001).

African immigrants surveyed by Arthur (2000) cited four main reasons for
coming to the United States. They migrate for postsecondary education, to reunite
with family members, to take advantage of economic opportunities, and to escape
from political terror and instability. According to Arthur (2000), the first cultural
contact that most African immigrants have with the U.S. is through the education
system. Education is the cultural capital that most Africans bring with them to the
U.S. and like many immigrants they expect their children to be prepared by
schools for successful entry into American society (Obeng, 2008). These expectations can be traced to the importance that African families attach to education (Obeng, 2008) and to the rich tradition of commitment to education that African immigrants bring to the U.S. (Arthur, 2000; Obeng, 2008). African immigrants also see education as a means to social mobility and economic advancement in the U.S. As with all immigrants at different time periods, schools fulfill the function of introducing African immigrants to American values and culture. Upon arrival in the U.S., African immigrants face adjustment problems like cultural differences, discrimination and alienation (Obeng, 2008). Those arriving with children face further challenges like the school adjustment of their children. Research on the education of this population will assist parents, educators and policy makers in meeting the needs of these children (Obeng, 2008).

Students coming from former British colonies, such as Nigeria and Ghana, bring a variety of English that is influenced by historical factors such as colonization and by cultural factors related to the co-existence of English and other African languages (Alidou, 2000). The lingua franca of any African nation is determined by the language of the former colonizing powers and this variation in official and school languages are reflected in the linguistic make up of African immigrants in the U.S. One of the most prevalent forms of prejudice and discrimination in the U.S. is linguicism, experienced mostly by Black African and international students from non-European Anglo-Saxon countries (Alidou, 2000).
Linguicism occurs when schools implement language policies or teachers and native students react negatively to a foreign accent. The very high premium placed on fluency in the English language can be traced back to the nineteenth century when Southern, Eastern and Central European immigrants were forced to discard their languages and adopt English as one of the symbols of their Americanization. The Northern and Western European immigrants, who first came to these shores, were native English speakers and they set the norms for American society, one of which is the dominance of the English language as the ultimate measure of assimilation. Every immigrant group thereafter that has not been White, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant, has had to contend with this linguistic challenge. Rong & Preissle (1998) argue that English has become a symbol of commitment to America. They claim that an immigrant who successfully acquires a nonaccented English is perceived as having passed the patriotism test. In examining the school experiences of Ghanaian and Nigerian immigrant girls, this study tried to understand the role that linguicism and discrimination based on accented speech plays in the ethnic identity construction and school adjustment of the girls.

There are shifts in the literature with respect to perspectives on immigrants and approaches to educating them. With each group that arrived in the U.S. from the 19th century onwards, the instillation of a cohesive national identity was the goal of the schools (Fass, 2006). This could only be achieved by a stripping away of the cultures, values, customs, languages and religions that the immigrants
brought to the new land. The views that were held about immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe as uncouth and uncivilized (Kaestle, 1973, 1983; Ueda, 2006) remain the same today towards immigrant groups that continue to arrive from non-European nations. In the same way, education has been perceived as the tool for shaping and molding these newcomers to conform to an “American” identity (Fass, 2006). Measured against the dominant norm, every immigrant group has fallen short and has needed to assimilate in order to successfully blend. White immigrants may be seen as encountering fewer struggles in their transition to American culture than their African counterparts, because of their categorization into the “White race” through American racial stratification (Offoh, 2003). Barrett & Roediger (1997), in their study about U.S. immigration during the late 19th and early 20th century, as cited in Offoh (2003), found that European immigrants, “Polish, Russian, Italian and Slav artisans and peasants, were placed above African Americans and Asians but below ‘White’ people…Americanization was perceived in a racial sense, with becoming American meaning becoming White (p.3).

Djamba (1999) states that African students, in the past, were able to assimilate successfully due to their limited numbers in schools. This success was due to the fact that many of them came from highly educated upper middle-class and English speaking backgrounds- similar to the American middle-class culture. As the African immigrant population of the 80s and 90s increased in cultural, economic and educational diversity, assimilation became problematic. Very often,
African students’ linguistic backgrounds are not adequately analyzed before they are placed either into language programs or mainstream classrooms. Alidou (2000) refers to the reluctance of schools to take into account African immigrant students’ socio-economic status pre-migration. This, according to Alidou (2000), could make the difference between the placement of middle-class students with high linguistic and academic proficiency in a language and their peers coming from the same country but from working class or impoverished backgrounds.

Trends in the literature on African immigrant education appear in the periods following the 1986 and 1990 Immigration Acts that increased the numbers of African immigrants coming to the U.S. The little research that has been done on this group was in response to the fact that very little was known about African immigrants prior to this time period (Kamya, 1997; Offoh, 2003). Although African immigrants took advantage of the open door policy of the Immigration Act of 1965, their numbers were not as noticeable as those from Latin America and Asia. The approach taken in educating Latin American and Asian immigrants included bilingual education (Stewart, 1993) which may have benefited only non-English speaking African immigrants at that time. But there is minimal literature from this time period to show conscious efforts to meet the educational needs of this immigrant group. It is understandable that their numbers have not been significant enough to warrant any attention, but as statistics show, the peoples of the African continent are fast establishing a presence in the U.S.
Literature on African immigrant education post 1980s and 1990s focus mostly on African immigrants in higher education (Kamya, 1997; Offoh, 2003). There is a need for the examination of the experiences of West African immigrant adolescent girls as they negotiate ethnic identities while growing up in the U.S.

The socio-cultural experiences of these girls are likely to be affected by the racial and ethnic tensions in the U.S. Many of these immigrant families become “colored” only when they get to the United States (Rong & Preissle, 1998), in contrast to the religious, socio-economic and other identities they may have had in their home countries. For immigrant children, the gap between how they define themselves and the way others view them may be a source of conflict. Perez (1993) describes the challenges that these children face with racial and ethnic identity construction and reconstruction. In order to locate the experiences of West African immigrant girls within the literature on ethnic identity development, I will begin with a brief review on existing literature on ethnic identity research.

**Ethnic Identity Development**

How do individuals make meaning out of the important life question, “Who am I?” The answer to this age-old, timeless question comes from a close examination of identity development theories, in general, and racial and ethnic identity theories, in particular. According to Tatum (1997), the answer to this question is influenced by many factors, some of which include our social context,
social, cultural or world events surrounding our birth, our neighborhoods and whether we are a part of a minority or majority group in our community. Tatum goes on to say that the concept of identity is a complex one for the reasons stated above. She acknowledges that sometimes the world around us defines who we are; at other times, our identity is defined by our gender, age, social class, sexual orientation, religion and ability.

At what stage in human development do these identity questions begin to occur? Early adolescence is when most physical, biological and psychological changes occur. Among the many transition events going on at this time is the move from elementary to middle and junior high school (Tatum, 1997). It is at this critical time that adolescents begin to question their identity and their place in the world. Tatum (1997, p. 19) confirms that a combination of phenomena cause this question to occur in adolescence. She attributes this to “biological changes associated with puberty, maturation of cognitive abilities, changing societal expectations, the process of simultaneous reflection and observation, (and) the self-creation of one’s identity…” It is during adolescence that children ask not only the “Who am I?”, but also the “Who can I be?” question. For children from “minority” groups, the question always has an ethnic and/or racial angle to it. For all individuals, but especially for individuals who belong to disenfranchised groups, it may not be possible to disentangle fully personal and social identity (Worrell & Gardner-Kitt, 2005). Cooley (1922) as cited by Tatum (1997) calls other people the mirror through which we see ourselves. Therefore, the parts of
our identity that are salient to us are those that people notice and the ones by which they define us.

Before ethnic and racial identity development can be addressed, the foundational theories of identity development need to be briefly outlined to show how each succeeding theorist built on previous theories. Another important fact to note is that although foundational theories of identity are based on the dominant culture in the way they are developed and presented, they provide a frame of reference for more complex concepts of ethnic and multiple identity development (ASHE-ERIC Education Report, 2002).

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, p.166), in their study on identity development in college students, noted the “absence of studies dealing with identity development among Black (or other minority) students.” The absence of this type of research has forced faculty and administrators to apply identity development theories that were formed from studies of white students to all students regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or other differences. The application of these theories to students from very different racial or ethnic backgrounds can cause misunderstandings and miscommunications (ASHE-ERIC Education Report, 2002). An acknowledgement and understanding of the power that the dominant culture possesses in determining the norm is critical to any discussion on identity development. Tatum (1997) agrees that dominant groups (be they white, male, able or heterosexual) “set the parameters within which subordinates operate. The dominant group holds the power and the authority in society relative
to the subordinates and determines how that power and authority may be acceptably used” (p.23). She also states that the relational position of the dominant groups and others is one of inferiority and superiority where the “others” are “labeled as defective or substandard” (p.23).

Identity development involves the process of defining oneself as a group member within a broader social context and is the framework within which individuals develop a coherent sense of self (Grotevant, 1992; Josselson, 1994). Individuals distinguish themselves from others based on different social identities, two of which are racial and ethnic identity (and which are most relevant to this study).

I will begin with a brief description of the differences between racial and ethnic identity. I will outline a chronological developmental model (Erikson and Marcia), models of racial identity development (Cross and Helms) as well as ethnic minority models of identity development (Phinney and Banks) because the first two set the stage for all subsequent identity development theories about other “minority” groups. The most distinguishable difference between identity development theories based on majority white populations and those from racial, ethnic, and other socially subordinate groups is the presence of oppression and how individuals cope with it (ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, 2002).
Racial identity

Although there may be some overlap, race and ethnicity are different constructs (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). Researchers are not consistent in their use of these terms, so it is important to differentiate between the terms racial and ethnic identity (Helms & Talleyrand, 1997), even though we cannot ignore the effects of U.S. race relations on various ethnic groups. That is to say that for African-Americans and perhaps other Black immigrant groups, racial and ethnic identity is woven into the same fabric that has been stained by racial oppression. A racial group is a social and cultural construction that categorizes people according to hereditary or physical traits. Some interpretations of race focus on genetic or biological differences between groups. Researchers like Landrine & Klonoff (1996, pp. 8-9) argue that “the concept of race tells us to focus on the physical differences between groups and view these as socially important; race tells us to look at how people differ physically and see those physical differences as the explanation for behavioral differences.” Landrine & Klonoff (1996) continue by contrasting the concept of ethnicity which “tells us to focus on cultural differences between groups and see those as socially important; ethnicity tells us to look at how people differ culturally and to see those cultural differences as the explanation for behavioral variance” (pp. 8-9).

Helms’ (1990) definition of race and racial identity emphasizes the social and political implications of group membership and the subsequent effect on individual psychological functioning. As the most widely studied constructs
among African-Americans (Cross, 1995; Helms, 1990), racial identity theories explain the process by which individuals develop attitudes and beliefs about racial group membership. According to Helms (1990, p.3), racial identity theory refers to “a sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common heritage with a particular racial group... racial identity theory concerns the psychological implications of racial-group membership, that is, belief systems that evolve in reaction to perceived differential group membership.” In a society where racial group membership is emphasized, the development of a racial identity is inevitable in some form for everyone (Tatum, 1993). Tatum (1997) also points out that racial and ethnic identity can intersect. She gives the example of dark-skinned Puerto Ricans who may identify culturally as Puerto Rican and yet be categorized as Black based on their physical appearance. Most importantly, Tatum asserts, is that in the case of either identities, they remain salient to individuals of racial or ethnic groups that have been historically marginalized (p.17).

The continual and lifelong nature of racial identity development cannot be over-emphasized. Thompson & Carter (1997) choose to define racial identity as an individual’s continual and sometimes conflicting assessment of the people in his or her externally ascribed reference group and people who make up other racial groups as well.
Ethnic identity

Ethnicity may be related to race, but it extends beyond visible group membership to include socio-historical experiences that explain why one group of people consider themselves distinct from another (Marshall, 2002). Ethnicity is a shared worldview, language and set of behaviors associated with being a member of a cultural group. An ethnic group can be defined as a group of people who maintain a subjective belief in their common ascent and shared history, and who share certain cultural traits such as dress, art, music, food, literature, and language (Branch, 1999; Levine, 1997). Ethnicity is meaningful to the extent that it has salience for different individuals (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). That is to say that ethnicity is more likely to be salient for ethnic groups of color than for White Americans. Cross (1991) cautions, though, that ethnic identity is not something that you either have or do not have. It is a complex, multidimensional construct that varies across members of a group.

Phinney (1992) defines ethnic identity as the attitudes and beliefs that individuals hold towards their ethnic group. Some authors (Seaton, E., Scottham, K., & Sellers, R., 2006) use the term ethnic identity to refer to the conceptual model and measure developed by Phinney and others, and the term racial identity to refer to models of group identity that apply specifically to African Americans. So while ethnic identity refers to universal attributes associated with group identity for individuals across a variety of different ethnic groups (Seaton et al.,
2006), racial identity could refer to attributes associated with Blacks, Whites or Multi-racial individuals.

Henri Tajfel (1981, p. 255) defines ethnic identity as that part of an individual’s self-concept that derives from his/her knowledge of his/her membership in a social or ethnic group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership. He goes on to say that ethnic identity development is an age-related progression in the ability to perceive, process, and integrate or interpret racial or ethnic stimuli that lead to the establishment of ethnic identity. Seaton et al. (2006) admit that making a distinction between race and ethnicity is particularly difficult for African Americans because of historical issues surrounding slavery and the disconnect that African Americans feel from indigenous African culture. Therefore, African Americans feel connected to one another through racial than ethnic membership. On the other hand, Helms & Cook (1999) identify how immigrants associate more with ethnic group identification as opposed to racial group identification. They further explained how ethnic identification remains a salient aspect of their self- and group identification for many generations.

**Erik Erikson: The father of identity theories**

Erikson’s work (1963) is usually mentioned first in reviews of literature on identity development research because his seminal work set the foundation for all future works on identity development- adolescent racial and ethnic identity
development. He showed that adolescence is a critical period in the development of healthy ego identity. According to Erikson (1969, p.22), identity development is “a process located in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture… It is always changing and developing, at its best it is a process of increasing differentiation.”

Erikson’s (1968), Marcia’s (1980), Waterman’s (1985), Phinney’s (1992), & Helm’s (1994) work are some of the research that has addressed the importance of achieving an identity during adolescence. Erikson’s theory of identity formation posits that achieving an identity occurs through a process of search (exploration) and commitment and that a failure to do this leads to confusion and despair in adulthood. Exploration refers to a period of active questioning and engagement in choosing among meaningful alternatives, while commitment refers to the presence or absence of committing to an identity. Erikson showed that the answer to the “Who am I?” question lie in a sequence of stages of psychosocial development across the life span.

*James Marcia: Ego-identity status theories*

Marcia (1980, 1994), building on Erickson’s theory of identity formation that classifies individuals based on their degree of exploration and commitment, also employed these two criteria and provided a model for categorizing *adolescents* into four ego-identity statuses: identity diffusion, foreclosed identity, moratorium, and achieved identity. Unlike Erikson’s theory that views identity as
occurring in stages, Marcia’s theory emphasizes the process through which identity is developed. This typology states that adolescents who have not explored or committed to an identity can be considered diffuse and those who have explored but have not committed would be considered to be in moratorium. In contrast, those who have not explored but have committed to a particular identity are considered foreclosed, whereas those who have both explored and committed are said to have achieved (Umana-Taylor, A., Yazedjian, A., & Bamaca-Gomez, M., 2004).

Flum (1994) & the ASHE-ERIC Education Report (2002)) explains these four categories in detail. Adolescents in the achieved identity status have committed to an identity after much questioning and critical analysis. Those in the moratorium status are exploring identities but are still uncommitted. They have experienced some form of identity crisis that did not lead to further exploration and identity commitment. This can result in instability as the adolescent tries out different identities and experimenting with various ways of being. Adolescents in the foreclosed identity status commit to an identity without exploration and their commitment reflects parental beliefs and expectations. They have not faced a crisis of identity, yet they have committed to an identity. They do not separate from their family and are not influenced by friends, classroom material or co-curricular experiences. Finally, those in the identity diffusion status have not explored identity issues, have not experienced a crisis related to identity development and have not committed to an identity. Phinney (1990) explains that
individuals are not likely to explore all identity domains at the same time. So adolescents could explore one dimension while leaving the others unexplored. For adolescents of color, this means that unlike their White counterparts, they are more likely to explore their racial and/or ethnic identity. This could be explained by Cooley’s (1922) argument that the parts of our identity salient to us are those that people notice and by which they define us. For adolescents of color, this will be their race or ethnicity. So while their White counterparts may be exploring the general question of “Who am I,” adolescents of color might be simultaneously considering the same question with the consciousness that who they are cannot be separated from who others perceive them to be.

Marcia (1966) also proposes a strict linear progression from a diffused or foreclosed identity through a period of exploration before reaching an achieved identity state. He maintained that individuals who had successfully completed the identity development process and attained an achieved identity state enjoyed higher levels of psychological well-being than others who were less successful (Seaton et al., 2006).

Although Erikson’s theory is the foundation for later identity development models, it does not explain issues that are specific to racial and ethnic identity development (Chestang, 1984; Foster & Perry, 1982). In order to incorporate African-American students into psychosocial theories, McEwen, Roper, Bryant & Langa (1990) suggest other factors that must be considered, one of which is the development of ethnic and racial identity. McEwen et al. (1990) argue that
foundational theories and their revisions are developed with Eurocentric values and assumptions and do not take into consideration that the “Who am I?” question for individuals of non-dominant cultures could be complicated by the challenges of developing an identity in oppressive environments.

Prior to the 1970s, there were no identity models specific to African Americans (Helms, 1990), or applicable to African-Americans and other ethnic minorities (Chickering & Reiser, 1993). Models that existed at that time were based on a deficit model that focused on deficiencies inherent in Black identity (Cross, 1991; Helms, 1990). A typical example is Erikson’s description of Black identity as precarious. According to him, “any disruption of the ‘child like’ demeanor of the Negro identity … would thrust these Negroes into a dangerous and evil identity stage” (Erikson, 1959, p.37). Erikson also said that a positive Negro identity was “mild, submissive, dependent, somewhat querulous, but always ready to serve, and with occasional empathy and childlike wisdom” (Erikson, 1959, p.37). Warren (1965, p.17), in response to the “Negro identity” spoken of by Erikson, confirmed that the African American feels “alienated from the world to which he is born and the country of which he is a citizen, yet surrounded by the successful values of that new world, and country, [so] …how can the Negro define himself?” At the time that Warren (1965) wrote, African Americans felt alienated and estranged because of the refusal of the rest of society to see them as valuable and deserving of access to things that would lead to a healthy identity. Much earlier than Warren, DuBois (1903) had written about the
“dual consciousness” or double identity of the African American. In his famous equation of the African American identity with a split identity, he said:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife- this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face (DuBois, 1903, p.4).

Erickson (1968) later acknowledged that history and experience play a role in the identity development of people of color. As a result, he proposed a more “inclusive” identity model that would include historical, cultural and religious influences on minority identity development. Therefore, in order to understand the healthy identity development of minority groups such as African Americans, researchers must account for the distinct cultural, spiritual, historical, educational, economic, and social realities of these groups (Burt & Halpin, 1998). In compiling my interview questions, I considered questions that would help me understand the cultural, educational and social realities of the participants.

William Cross: Black racial identity development/Psychology of nigrescence

Cross (1971, 1978, 1991, and 1995) is best known for his theory of Black Racial identity Development which was first introduced in 1971 and has undergone three revisions. Grounded in the context of the civil rights movement, stage models like Cross’s began to appear in response to the Black experience
with oppression. Cross’s early work was problematic in that he started from the premise that before blacks experience identity, they are not conscious of race (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). This model, referred to as the psychology of nigrescence or the psychology of becoming Black was introduced to explain the transformation of African Americans during the 1970s from “Negro” to “Black,” from self-hatred to self-love. As the first of the racial models originally developed primarily for African Americans to understand the black experience in the U.S., Cross’s Black Racial Identity Development Theory is divided into five stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment (Cross, 1995). The first two stages, according to Tatum (1997) are the most relevant to adolescents.

1. Pre-encounter stage: Blacks at this stage hold one of three attitudes toward race: low-salience, social stigma, and anti-Black attitudes. Those with a low-salience attitude consider their blackness insignificant to their well-being and identity. They do not give much thought to race or racism. Those who hold social stigma attitudes, in addition to having low-salience, are ashamed of their race. Individuals with anti-black attitudes are the most extreme types of pre-encounter individuals. This is the stage at which Black individuals absorb many of the values and beliefs of the dominant White culture, chief of which is the belief that “White is right” and “Black is wrong” (Tatum, 1993). The individual is likely to have internalized negative Black stereotypes, may distance himself or herself from other
Blacks and may value acceptance by Whites above acceptance by other Blacks. In this stage, there is no examination or exploration of one’s racial identity and there is no meaning attached to the individual’s group membership.

2. Encounter stage: Cross describes the encounter stage as one that occurs in late adolescence and early adulthood, but Tatum (1997) states that research suggests the opposite— that an individual’s racial or ethnic identity may begin as early as junior high school. This stage is usually precipitated by an event that forces the adolescent to confront racism and see him or herself as a racial being. Being a target of racist remarks or racist acts causes a heightened awareness of racism and the significance of belonging to a marginalized group. Cross calls this an identity metamorphosis. The resulting feelings are anger, guilt, and anxiety for having experienced the pre-encounter stage. According to Cross, Blacks in this stage work hard to find a positive Black identity by seeking relevant information.

3. Immersion/Emersion stage: This is the stage that Cross (1995) refers to as the vortex of psychological nigrescence. Individuals become proud to be called Black and almost radically immerse themselves in everything Black. Contrary to the pre-encounter stage, White is now considered to be evil, oppressive, and racist and Black is considered to be superior. Individuals at the immersion stage are no longer raceless, but they are still actively seeking a Black identity. The ensuing racial pride leads
individuals to focus on the richness of their racial heritage and seek relationships with only Blacks. It is also important to note that some individuals at this stage will go to extremes to confront White authority and may be perceived as being too vocal or maybe even violent. The emersion stage occurs with a decline in the strong emotions of the immersion stage. At this stage, individuals may meet other Blacks who have a healthy racial identity. There is a movement away from a romanticized notion of blackness to a more serious understanding of Black issues (Ford & Harris, 1997).

4. Internalization stage: At this stage a new racial identity has been formed and is now being integrated into the individual’s life. Contrary to the identity formed at the immersion stage, this new identity is more authentic and balanced. This identity, which is highly salient to blackness, can take on manifestations like biculturalism and multiculturalism. Cross (1995) explains the benefits of the internalized identity: to defend and protect the individual from the psychological consequences of living in a race-conscious society; to provide a sense of belonging; and to assist individuals in their interactions with people from other cultures.

5. Internalization/Commitment: In this final stage, individuals take actions that reflect their new-found sense of blackness. This commitment to issues that affect all minorities leads to multiculturalism and pluralist interests (Ford & Harris, 1997).
Cross (1995) stresses that not all individuals complete these five stages. Some might regress, while some may get stuck at a certain stage. It is possible for an individual to stagnate at the immersion/emersion stage, for example, or keep going back and forth as he experiences a new crisis (Parham, 1989). The determining factor for how each individual navigates each stage is dependent on personality, experiences, resources and experiences. Cross’s model outlines racial identity as a dynamic progression. Contrary to traditional models that show growth occurring linearly in a stepwise fashion, contemporary models describe racial and ethnic identity as a lifelong process (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999).

The Minority Identity Development Theory, based on Cross’s work, was developed by Atkinson, Morten, & Sue (1998) in response to the experiences of Native-Americans, Hispanics, Asian-Americans and other ethnic groups that have been historically oppressed by a White majority. Therefore, recognizing and overcoming the psychological effects of internalized racism and oppression is the central theme in the racial identity development of people of color.

*Janet Helms: People of color racial identity model*

Helms’s (1995) developed a status model of racial identity in White Americans. She argued that race and ethnicity are important to Whites as well as non-Whites. Although adolescents from minority racial or ethnic groups have higher levels of ethnic identity than majority culture youth (Phinney, 1990), it is still salient for all adolescents. Helm’s (1990) model of racial identity
development is made up of four conceptualizations: the Black identity development theory, the People of color identity development theory, the White identity development theory, and the People of color-White Interaction model (formerly Black-White Interaction model). These theories describe the transformative process that Blacks and Whites undergo in order to achieve racial self-actualization. The first three theories describe the racial identity statuses of individuals from the major racial groups in the U.S. and the conditions under which shifts in racial identity development occur (Thompson & Carter, 1997). The People of color racial identity theory focuses more on racially marginalized groups like Asian-American and Pacific-Islanders, Native Americans and Latino Americans rather than on Blacks alone. The fourth theory describes superordinate-subordinate interactions in various racial configurations, the nature of the interactions and how the relationships may affect either movement or stagnation in racial identity development (Thompson & Carter, 1997).

I will outline the four statuses found in Helms’s People of Color Racial Identity model (1995) since this is the model that encompasses various ethnic groups and their processes of identity development. The first status is conformity: a status of denigrating of one’s racial group and valuing White culture. The second status is dissonance: signifying the status of an individual person of color who is confused about his racial identity. The third status: immersion-emersion is a period of immersing oneself in one’s own culture and rejection of White culture. The fourth status is internalization-integrative awareness. In this status, the
individual of color values his own culture and others’ and seeks to understand and take action on behalf of both. This model mirrors the stages of Cross’s Black Racial Identity Development.

Helm’s (1994) racial identity interaction theory states that the adolescent’s level of identity, combined with others’ identities, can result in qualitatively different educational experiences (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). Helm’s outlines three interaction types that can occur in a school setting based on the ethnic and racial identities of all individuals involved. The first interaction type is the parallel relationship in which the educator and the student are at the same stage in their identity development. According to Helms, there is no chance of the educator helping the student develop since they are both at the same level of development. The second interaction type is the regressive relationship in which the student has a more advanced racial and ethnic identity than the educator. In this interaction, the educator tries to cause the student to regress because of the educator’s discomfort level, putting the student in a position to become frustrated and rebellious. Helms hypothesizes that such students either act out or become passive-aggressive, while the educators may become frustrated and punish the students’ behaviors. The third interaction type is the progressive relationship in which the educator is at a more advanced stage of identity development than the student. The educator, therefore, is in a position to identify the student’s ethnic identity struggles and can use his or her experiences to assist the student in identity exploration.
Helms (1994, p. 30) stated that “everyone with whom a child comes in contact in the school environment… is also at some stage of identity development.” Therefore, the racial interaction theory can be used to examine school interactions between students and school officials and students and their peers. One of the research questions guiding this study examined how school experiences help to shape the participants’ identities and the school interactions between the participants and their peers was salient. Holcomb-McCoy (2005) gives an example to support the former situation. A White seventh grade teacher asks her students to react to a lesson on the Revolutionary War, and an African American student writes that she did not gain much from the lesson which portrayed her ancestors as slaves. The teacher gives her a low grade because she believes that the race issue is not salient in this case. According to Helms, both student and teacher are in a regressive relationship because while the student is attempting to explore the meaning of her ethnic/racial group’s history, the teacher does not think it is relevant to the lesson.

Holcomb-McCoy (2005) also shows that regressive relationships can occur between adolescents from the same ethnic group. Since Helm’s (1994) claims that everyone in a school environment is at some stage of identity development, this can apply to people from the same ethnic group who are at different stages of their identity development and may not necessarily connect just because they share the same ethnic heritage. Clark (1989) argues that racial and ethnic identity take on new meaning in racially integrated schools, especially in
peer interactions, friendships and dating. Students who, with parental encouragement, form friendships across racial boundaries (Killen, lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002), soon begin to see changes in relationships as they become aware of group differences. These changes, which are especially apparent in interracial dating, lead to students segregating by race or ethnicity (Schofield & Francis, 1982).

With the changes in the ethnic and racial composition of the U.S. population, largely due to immigration, it has become important now more than ever to understand ethnic identity development. In contrast to identity developmental models that discuss identity developmental in stages, social psychologists are more interested in identity that is formed as individuals negotiate who they are in the context of whom society says they are as members of marginalized groups.

Jean Phinney: Three-stage model of ethnic identity development

Phinney’s (1989, 1990, and 1992) model of ethnic identity development is based on general identity models like Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1980). She used these models to show how individuals develop crystallized ethnic identities. Phinney’s research with minority adolescents found that their development of an ethnic identity was closely tied to their resolution of two conflicts that occur as a result of their membership in a non-dominant group. (a) They must resolve the prejudice and stereotyping from the majority culture toward non-dominant group
individuals and (b) they must resolve the dissonance of values between minority and majority culture. Rotheram & Phinney (1988) show that ethnic and racial attitudes in children appear to crystallize by the time they are about ten years old. With the increasing numbers of ethnic minority adolescents in U.S. schools, it is imperative that we examine the role ethnicity plays in the identity development of adolescents. Phinney’s three-stage model of ethnic identity development is similar to Marcia’s (1966), except that Phinney’s stages are based on individual exploration about the meaning of ethnic membership and the extent to which they had committed to or accepted the role that their ethnic membership plays in their life (Seaton et al., 2006). Phinney’s (1989) three stages of ethnic identity development are as follows:

1. Unexamined ethnic identity: This refers to a stage when individuals explore beliefs and attitudes about their ethnicity. Adolescents at this stage have not been exposed to ethnic identity issues. This means that race and ethnicity is not salient for these individuals. i.e. they have not started active exploration of ethnic issues. Just like with Marcia’s four-part model, if this exploration leads to acceptance of other people’s definition of the individual’s identity, that is if the adolescent makes a commitment based on parents’ or other adults’ ethnic attitudes, then a foreclosed identity is formed. Those who are disinterested and do not see the need for an ethnic identity to define who they are end up with identity diffusion.

According to Bachay (1998), adolescents at the foreclosed or diffused
stages risk accepting and internalizing negative stereotypes about their ethnic groups.

2. Ethnic identity search (see Marcia’s moratorium): In this second stage, there is an increased interest in ethnic heritage. Adolescents at this stage are exploring without making any commitment. When individuals observe the values of friends and family members of the same ethnicity, they begin to reflect on what it means to belong to that racial or ethnic group. That is, the adolescent examines and accepts cultural differences between his or her own culture and the dominant culture. If strong feelings occur as a result of this reflection, it could take the form of anger towards the majority culture.

3. Ethnic identity achievement: This third stage is reminiscent of Erikson’s exploration and commitment stages. After exploring what it means to be a member of an ethnic group, the individual chooses to commit to that group. At this stage, the individual is able to assert a clear, positive sense of their racial or ethnic identity (Phinney, 1993). This process of search followed by commitment is referred to as ethnic identity achievement (Phinney, 1989). The feelings accompanying this stage are ethnic pride, belonging and confidence. Just as with the internalized stage of Cross’s (1995) model, Phinney & Alipuria (1990) suggest that an achieved ethnic identity, just like an internalized racial identity, serves as a buffer against the impact of prejudice and discrimination. “A bicultural identity
develops whereby individuals achieve a level of comfort with who they are in society” (ASHE-ERIC Education Report, 2002).

Phinney’s model, like Cross’s and Helms’s, posits that an achieved identity develops over time and that encounter experiences often lead to the exploration, examination, and eventual internalization of a positive, self-defined sense of one’s own racial or ethnic identity (Tatum, 1997).

During the discussion section of this study in Chapter five, I will position my findings within theoretical frameworks that will include Phinney’s three-stage model of ethnic identity development. This model will be used to identify the extent to which the participants have committed to or accepted the role that their ethnic membership plays in their life (Seaton et al., 2006).

James Banks: Typology of ethnic identity development

Worthy of mention in discussions around racial and ethnic identity is Banks’ (1976) typology of ethnic identity development. Banks cautions about assumptions that ethnic groups are monolithic and have homogenous needs and characteristics. Since ethnic groups are “highly diverse, complex, and changing entities” (Banks, 1976, p. 190), his typology attempts to outline the basic stages of the development of ethnicity among individual members of ethnic groups. From a multicultural viewpoint, Banks sees ethnic identity development as occurring in stages rather than sequentially. The aim of his typology is to help individuals
resolve feelings within their cultural group as well as between other cultural
groups.

His first stage is *ethnic psychological captivity* in which individuals may
experience ethnic self-rejection, low self-esteem, seek to become highly
acculturated and believe negative stereotypes of their cultural group. The second
stage is *ethnic encapsulation* in which individuals voluntarily separate themselves
and embrace their ethnic group exclusively. There is a feeling of superiority of
one’s ethnic group at this stage. The third stage is the *ethnic identity clarification*
stage in which individuals accept themselves and are able to develop positive
attitudes about their ethnic groups. The fourth stage is *bi-ethnicity* in which the
individual has learned to navigate effectively between two or more cultures. With
a healthy sense of ethnic identity, the individual’s view of society at this stage is
that of pluralism. *Multi-ethnicity and reflective nationalism* is the idealized stage
in which the individual is committed to an ethnic identity, feels positively towards
other ethnic and racial groups, and functions within several sociocultural
environments and ethnic cultures. The last stage in Bank’s typology is *globalism
and global competency*. At this stage, the individual feels positively about an
ethnic, national and global identity and is committed to function across cultures.

All the models I have addressed so far have a lot in common. They all
suggest that individuals begin their journey in identity development from a place
of unawareness or disinterest in racial or ethnic group membership. They all
speak of a period during which the individual explores his or her ethnicity and
then moves into a final period of positive self- and group- esteem. The last stages of all these models show an achieved identity that allows the individual to function in a pluralistic, multicultural and global capacity.

**Immigrant ethnic identity development**

As all adolescents go through the process of developing their social identity, the specific social identity that is salient for those from ethnic minority and immigrant groups is their ethnic identity. According to Fuligni, Witkow & Garcia (2005, p.799), the salience of ethnicity in the U.S. “virtually requires (emphasis is mine) adolescents to learn the ethnic and racial categories into which they are placed.” Phinney (1990) agrees that ethnic identity development is significant for ethnic minority adolescents because their minority status makes their ethnicity more salient in the eyes of society. For immigrant students, ethnic identity development takes on additional challenges because they are usually the majority in their countries of origin and are unaccustomed to the dominant ethnic categories in the U.S. Trueba (1999) and Trueba & Bartolome (2000) argue that immigrants manage to acquire and maintain different identities in different contexts simultaneously. These authors do not agree that immigrants can possibly have a simple unilinear acculturation or assimilation process from one culture to another. Rather their resilience is the result of their ability to become an “other” and participate in different worlds.
With the demographic changes caused by increased diversity of our immigrant population, and an increase in the numbers of foreign-born Black immigrants, questions about ethnic and racial identity, with regards to Black immigrants, have come to the fore. While there has been research on the experiences of various ethnic groups, fewer studies have focused on ethnic identity formation of Black ethnic groups. Even when these occur, the focus is on the ethnic identity development of Black Caribbean immigrant children (Waters, 1994). It is crucial that educators study and understand ethnic and racial identity development in Black African immigrant children (Rong & Brown, 2002) because racial discrimination is a key issue in the daily experiences of this population.

Rong & Brown (2002) agree that the formation of racial identity among immigrant children may vary from that of their U.S. counterparts. They discovered that identities are fluid and changeable over time and in different social contexts; that Black immigrants tend to move along a continuum from a national origin identity to a hyphenated-American or American identity; and that although foreign-born Black youths are likely to choose a national-originated identity (e.g. Jamaican), the length of time they have spent in the U.S. may cause them to choose a pan-national (e.g. Caribbean) or a pan-ethnic (Black-American) identity.

Waters (1994, 1999), in her work with Caribbean Black adolescents, points out that these young people choose an ethnic over a racial identity. This is a
result of the few options that immigrant youth have to either identify as non-immigrant Black Americans or as immigrants who have chosen an ethnic identity reflective of their parents’. What about immigrant adolescents from Africa? What ethnic identities do they choose on arrival in the U.S.? What about second generation African immigrant adolescents? Are there studies that examine the ethnic identity development process for this population?

A database search using the parameters “West”, “African” and “immigrants” did not yield results on studies about immigrants from this part of Africa. The search yielded mostly studies about West Indian blacks, but it also yielded one of the earliest studies on the immigration of Africans into the U.S. This study, by Reid (1938), showed that the dual adjustment that African immigrants faced then is still relevant today. The term used to define this group of immigrants at that time was “Africans, Black,” a coverall term employed by the Department of Labor’s Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, to cloak with racial identification all persons of “Negro extraction” admitted to or departing from the United States (Reid, 1938, p. 411).

Between 1899 and 1936, approximately 145,000 “Africans, Black” were legally admitted to the United States. Reid (1938) admitted then that Negro immigration had received only passing attention when compared to the myriad works on immigration problems and policies in the U.S. The author recognized the necessity of taking note of a group of people who formed 15 to 25 percent of the total Negro population in the cities where they settled. Their numbers were
significant because these “small aggregates of Negroes with their diverse
customs, traditions, institutions and ideas of homeland, are [were] not only
modifying their own culture to conform to the status accorded Negroes in the
United States, but are [were] in turn modifying the culture of American
Negroes….“ (Reid, 1938, p. 412). Significant to this study is the comparison that
Reid made of the adjustment of Negro immigrants to that of white immigrants.
The author spoke of the Negro’s dual adjustment which involves a reorganization
of status in terms of intra-racial relations, and recognition of the inter-racial
processes in the U.S. Reid (1938) had the following to say then- a statement that
is still true today as it was then:

“Every foreign-born Negro must readjust the concepts of “class” and
“caste” to which he has been accustomed in terms of the United States’
racial pattern. He has left a setting where he was one of the subjugated
majority, or a hybrid status thereof, to come to one where he is one of the
underprivileged racial minority…” (p.412).

According to Bryce-Laporte (1972), in the almost forty years following the work
of Reid (1938), “the black immigrant…escaped the concerns of the large majority
of mainstream social scientists and historians, even those who consider the topics
of immigration and ethnic inequality their special fields of interest (p. 30).

Another search using the parameters, “African”, “girls” and “immigrants”
yielded studies that focused mostly on African female circumcision; studies on
career aspirations of immigrant early adolescents that include almost all major
immigrant groups except Africans; and gender differences in academic
performance among Hispanic second-generation immigrant girls. There did not
seem to be studies specific to African immigrant girls. According to Suarez-Orozco (1999), the data on the mental health of immigrant girls is sketchy. This is especially true of African immigrant girls.

A search with the parameters, “African”, “immigrants” and “schools” resulted in studies that include the experiences of African immigrants in U.S. colleges and universities, tips from educators on how to educate immigrant children (none of which include West African immigrant children), and the transitional process for Caribbean immigrant children. Only one study emerged that was specific to a West African immigrant group. This study focused on the transition of Gambian children to New York City Public Schools. In this work, (Weiner, 2002), cognizant of the need to develop strategies to ease the transition of immigrant children from Gambia, West Africa, compares school life in Gambia with that of Bronx, New York. The study highlighted the difficulties in making transitions to a new country, new language and new culture.

There have been a few studies done on African immigrant identity issues both in the U.S. and abroad, yet a detailed search of databases reveal very little to no research on identity research specific to West African immigrant females. Malian immigrants from West Africa represent one of the most established immigrant communities in France and a study by Sargent & Larchanche-kim (2006) looks at the role of the state in shaping the everyday lives of Malian migrants and how they struggle to construct stable identities in the context of structural constraints.
Another project by Kusow (2006) looks at how Somalis understand blackness in their homelands and how it is defined in North America. The findings reveal the problems of racial categories and the situational nature of racial identities. Kusow (2006) shows that the increase in non-white foreign born immigrants to the U.S. draws attention to the fact that these newcomers bring racial and ethnic identities with them. Therefore, researchers are looking beyond the meaning of racial categories from the historical black-white dichotomy to a situation of multiple and hybrid identities (Gilroy, 1993). Keaton (2005), in a multi-year ethnographic study of African origin Muslim teenage girls, focused on national identity politics in France where youth who self-identify in terms of ethnonational origins and are stigmatized as a result, choose to self-identify as French, even though they are not perceived as such. Keaton argues that arrogant assimilation is still expected from these immigrants.

Other studies that focus on other African groups in the U.S. and the dilemma they face of constructing identities within a racialized society include Gibau, 2005; Nesbitt, 2003; Forman, 2001; & Rassool, 1999). Forman (2001) looks at the processes through which Somali youth encounter new social systems and struggle with varied identity positions that are prescribed or embraced among their peers. A recurring theme is the double-consciousness of African immigrant adults and youth which forces them to negotiate new identities and no longer depend on the security of nationality and identity (Nesbitt, 2003). Gibau (2005) presents the case of Cape Verdeans in Boston whose diasporic identity is
constructed through negotiation between “Cape Verdean Americans” and “Cape Verdean immigrants.” The community under study shows how immigrants of African ascent reshape boundaries of racial categories by creating a space for cultural differentiation (Gibau, 2005). This study also lends to the argument that racial and ethnic categories are expanding and challenging our traditional notions of race and ethnicity (Gibau, 2005; Kusow, 2006). Yet, we are cautioned not to view racial/ethnic identity development as a straight-line assimilation with homogenous outcomes (Rong & Brown, 2002).

One of the studies most relevant to the Black immigrant experience is a study of the socialization, culture and identities of Black immigrant children by Rong & Brown (2002). They confirm that Black immigrants have been less researched compared to immigrants from other groups. They add that immigrants from Africa have been specifically excluded from research on issues encountered by other Black immigrants. Rong & Brown (2002) argue that “the lack of research on Black immigrants denies the American public and policy makers opportunities to explore the many urgent and intriguing issues concerning Black immigrants; as a result, the special needs of these immigrants have been neglected” (p.249). The authors go on to say that the presence of Black immigrants in urban areas provoke many questions which include one that is relevant to my research, “How do they identify themselves as similar to and as different from American Blacks in terms of race and ethnic identity, and why?” (p. 249).
According to Watson (2005), ethnic identity research, which is central to the psychological functioning of members of racial and ethnic minority groups, is fragmentary and inconclusive. The distribution of studies, Watson says, has been on African-Americans, with a few on Asian-Americans, Hispanics, American-Indians, or African immigrants. African immigrants who come to the U.S. have a concept of identity that has multiple shifting layers of meaning (Watson, 2005). Since African immigrants differ from one another in terms of culture, African immigrant identity development will depend on individual levels of acculturation (Watson, 2005). “The problem is that many Americans hold a monolithic view of the Black community” (Rong & Brown, 2002). Another factor that influences African immigrant identity development, according to Watson, is the density of the immigrant population in which individuals find themselves. African immigrants who live in populations where the density of their ethnic group population is high will have a different experience with ethnic identity than counterparts in areas with low ethnic group density.

Racial stratification cannot be overlooked as a factor in shaping the perceptions and attitudes of people in the U.S. (Rong & Brown, 2002). “For immigrants from racial minority groups, a crucial part of assimilation is the process of developing racial identities” (p.252). As the identities of immigrant minorities are reconstructed, they may lose their ethnic identities (Bashi & McDaniel, 1997). Physical attributes like African features and skin color place African immigrants at the lowest level of the racial hierarchy. This causes some
Black immigrants to emphasize their ethnicity or nationality in an effort to de-emphasize their race as defined by American stereotypes (Bashi & McDaniel, 1997). There are limitations to the work done by Rong & Brown (2002). Because research on the education of Black immigrants is limited, their study focuses on the life experiences of Caribbean Black immigrants. As they rightly conclude, this makes it difficult to provide a complete picture of the entire Black immigrant experience.

Some recent research has examined how other groups make sense of their identity. For example, Chen, Lephuoc, Guzman, Rude & Dodd (2006) and Alvarez, Jueng & Liang (2006) have studied Asian-American racial identity development; MacDonald-Dennis (2006) has studied the impact of anti-Semitism on Jewish identity development; and Vaquera & Kao (2006) have examined how racial and ethnic backgrounds intersect among Hispanic adolescents and the salience of racial and ethnic identification in friendship choices among Hispanic adolescents (Kao & Vaquera, 2006). Portes & Rumbaut (2001) and Rumbaut (1994) as cited by Fuligni et al. (2005) have studied how immigrant children assume nationalistic identities like Mexican or Chinese rather than panethnic or hyphenated identities like Latino or Asian- American, as they progress through adolescence. Studies about other groups include the impact of multiracial identities on the behavioral health of multiracial adolescents (Whaley & Francis, 2006) and Campbell & Eggerling-Boeck (2006).
The extent of the research on identity issues of other racial and ethnic groups only magnify the dearth of research on how West African immigrant girls learn to construct their ethnic identities in the U.S.

**Examining African immigrant identity using Cross’, Helms’ and Phinney’s models**

The models of racial and ethnic identity development already discussed, namely Cross’s and Phinney’s, and Helms’ people of color identity development, are appropriate for understanding the African immigrant experience in the U.S. Watson (2005) focuses on *adult African immigrants* and the ways they experience the first of the three stages of minority identity development. According to her, adults experience this first stage (*pre-encounter/unexamined*) in their home countries where they are the majority and their African identity is the norm. She suggests that they do not give much thought to race or racism in their home country, but I argue that this may be a simplistic assumption to make of people, many of whom come from post-colonial nations and possess an awareness of the differences between their racial identity and that of their former colonialists.

Singh (2007), in his article titled, *Confronting colonialism and racism: Fanon and Gandhi*, describes how Fanon and Gandhi “confront[ed] the violence of racism embedded in colonial domination and control by seeking emancipation through political action” (p.341). This speaks to the link between colonialism and racism, and as Singh (2007) puts it, “Fanon understood the colonial world as permeated with race” (p.342).
At the pre-encounter stage, African immigrants from postcolonial countries may have absorbed the belief that “White is right” and “Black is wrong,” or as Fanon as cited by Singh (2007) argued, assimilation and integration meant two things to the British colonialist: it meant becoming “White” and, also, that the Black man was not good enough as he was. Therefore, although there may not be an examination or exploration of one’s racial/ethnic identity at the pre-encounter stage, any meaning attached to being a member of an ethnic group is localized to the nation of origin. For example, immigrants from Nigeria may have identified themselves ethnically as Ibo, Yoruba or Hausa before migrating to the U.S. Once in the U.S., their identity becomes national (Nigerian) or pan-national (African).

Phinney’s (1989) and Cross’s (1991) models suggest that individuals at the pre-encounter/unexamined stage may have positive feelings about their ethnic/racial group membership which are not results of exploration (see Erikson and Marcia), but results of blindly accepting what their family and close friends teach about group membership. According to Helms’s People of Color Racial Identity model, African immigrants at this first stage are in a status of conformity. They may, on arrival to the U.S., go through a process of devaluing aspects of their culture and ethnicity and embracing the myth that everything “White” is better.

The second stage of ethnic/racial identity development (encounter/ethnic identity search/dissonance) is the period when African immigrants, like all ethnic
groups, may immerse themselves in an ethnic identity. This can occur on arrival to the U.S. and could be precipitated by an event(s) that forces the immigrant to confront racism and see him or herself primarily as a racial being in the U.S. For the first time, African immigrants who have been the majority in their countries suddenly find themselves as minorities in the U.S. Being targets of racist remarks or racist acts could cause heightened awareness of racism and the significance of belonging to a marginalized group. According to Helms, the individual may experience confusion about his or her racial identity in this status. I posit that this confusion is likely to pertain more to children and adolescents than adults. A third stage is the immersion-emersion period when individuals immerse themselves again in their culture and ethnicity and reject the White culture. In this status, there is intense national and ethnic pride.

Another stage of ethnic/racial identity development (internalization or achieved ethnic identity) is characterized by “an awareness that individual and group power and success depends upon acquiring the internal skills necessary to experience a desired level of personal and group freedom and power (Watson, 2005). This status in Helms’s People of Color Racial Identity Theory is a period of positive racial identity. In this status, individuals value their own and other peoples’ culture and seek to understand and take action for both. To reiterate Cross’s (1995) explanations, the benefits of the internalized identity are to defend and protect the individual from the psychological consequences of living in a race-conscious society; to provide a sense of belonging; and to assist individuals
in their interactions with people from other cultures. African immigrants’ sense of ethnic identity is balanced by an appreciation of other cultures, as well as the majority culture (Watson, 2005).

**Relationship between ethnic/racial identity and school experience**

The notion of Black identity formation has led to studies that show a variation in the way minority children self-identify and the subsequent effect on their schooling process (Ogbu, 1987; Portes & Zhou, 1993). Some studies that examine the implications of identity and school experience are (Gibson, 1991, 1995; Waters, 1991, 1994; Rong & Brown, 2001 & C.C.Lee, 1993). Fuligni et al. (2005) contend that when it comes to schooling in the U.S., ethnic minority groups are stereotyped according to their attitudes towards schooling and their academic performance. At the higher end of the spectrum of those who are said to value academic success the most are Asian Americans and at the lower end are African Americans and Latinos. Of course research has shaken these stereotypes to the core. Hogg (2003) links level of identification with a social group to the level of internalization of the values of that group. This means that ethnic identity has implications for minority adolescents’ academic achievement (Fuligni et al., 2005).

According to Tatum (1997), school experience influences the development of racial and ethnic identity. In her widely-read and widely-referenced work, ‘Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?’ she
speaks of the identity issues faced by minority adolescents in integrated schools. For adolescents who live and interact in communities where people look like and act like them, going to schools where they are the minority triggers the saliency of ethnicity which may lead to exploration (French, Seidman, Allen & Aber, 2006). Rong & Brown (2001) report that the ways immigrant children choose to identify produce different perceptions of race relations which could result in different levels of effort and success in schools. They argue in their study that youth who choose to identify as Caribbean Blacks tend to live in environments that emphasize ethnic ethos, self-defined identity and social networks. These children tend to identify opportunities and see the reward of their hard work. In contrast, Rong & Brown (2001) argue that those who identify as Black Americans expect less reward for their hard work, focus more on racial discrimination and tend to do less well in schools. The correlation between ethnic identity development and academic achievement has been noted (Phinney, 1989; Phinney, 1992), yet it is still not determined how and why the correlation exists (Fordham, 1996).

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) are well-known for their ascribing oppositional identities to Black students from different socio-economic backgrounds when they fail to perform well academically so that they are not perceived as “acting white.” According to Holcomb-McCoy (2005), these identity perceptions cause students to devalue academic excellence and adopt self-defeating attitudes that lead to school failure. Ogbu (1991) has also argued that ethnic identifications that
immigrant children and their families choose have significant implications for this group that he refers to as voluntary immigrants.

Since Fordham & Ogbu’s work, other studies have challenged the association of ethnic identity strength and academic achievement. Phinney (1992) argues that students with more developed levels of ethnic identity performed better in schools than those with less developed ethnic identity. Sandoval, Gutkin & Naumann (1997) found a close relationship between African-American adolescents’ academic achievement and racial identity attitudes. Fuligni, Witkow & Garcia (2005), in their study on the implications of ethnic identity on adolescents’ academic motivation and achievement, concluded that the strength of their ethnic identification was relevant to their academic adjustment. Despite the mixed opinions of researchers on the influence of ethnic/racial identity development on school experience, researchers like Banks (1993) and Sleeter (1994) are among those who support enhancing adolescents’ ethnic identity development for better academic achievement and general school experience.

The studies listed above have linked school experience, which includes academic achievement, with ethnic identity development. Rong & Brown (2001) make the following recommendations to educators to ensure that they recognize the identities that their immigrant population is bringing to school and provide services based on this recognition. They suggest that:

1. Educators need to recognize and respect the various identities that Black immigrant children bring to school
2. Educators need to recognize and understand the difference in Black immigrant children’s perception of race and ethnicity which may derive from their life experiences in their countries of origin.

3. Educators need to develop culturally relevant curricula that take into consideration the cultural capital that the students bring with them to school.

4. Educators need to identify each child’s preferred identity and avoid the assumption that all Black immigrant kids are the same. According to Rong & Brown (2002), this recognition will promote children’s self-awareness, self-confidence and self-belief— all factors that will enhance children’s school experiences. These authors make critical mention of the challenges of the Americanization that first-generation Black immigrant children and their peers born in the U.S. to Caribbean or African parents experience. The fact that they do not speak like their parents or exhibit the same cultural patterns causes them to be labeled Black American, regardless of how they choose to self-identify.

5. Educators should be aware of the tensions that exist when Black immigrant children are torn between identities and address each situation appropriately.

Studies that have examined the link between ethnic identity and school experiences have focused mostly on African-America adolescents and the
correlation between the strength of their ethnic identity and school performance (Wong, Eccles & Sameroff, 2003; Oyserman, Harrison & Bybee, 2001, & Chavous, Bernat, Schmeelk-Cone, Caldwell, Kohn-wood, & Zimmerman, 2003). None of these studies examined above deal with ethnic identity and the school experiences of West African immigrant females. So this void in the connection between ethnic identity and academic achievement among adolescent girls from this part of the world will also be addressed in this study.

CONCLUSION

A close look at the influx of immigrants from Africa, Asia and Latin America since the eighties indicates that Africans have established a noticeable presence in the U.S. The African foreign-born population in the U.S. is growing. Grieco (2004), from the Migration Policy Institute, confirms that the largest group of the African foreign-born in the U.S. is made up of people from West Africa. In comparison to major immigrant groups, their numbers may not appear significant enough, but they are significant, nonetheless.

Just as a review of literature on immigrants from 1980-2000 reveals limited research on African immigrants, similar reviews of literature on Black immigrant ethnic identity have revealed very few studies about African immigrant identity. African adolescents, like their counterparts everywhere, ask the same questions about their identity. The quintessential task of adolescents- that of defining themselves in comparison to society at large- pertains to all immigrant
children who must construct identities that will enable them to thrive in their new environment (Suarez-Orozco, 1999). For these children, their racial and ethnic identity is particularly salient as most of them acquire minority status for the first time on arrival to the U.S. The issue of ethnicity for these children is very critical in schools where they may struggle to fit into already existing ethnic groups- only to find that there is none quite appropriate. These challenges of identity formation are seen in cultural dissonance, inadequate cultural guides, and a social mirror that reflects back negative images (Aronowitz, 1984). These cause immigrant adolescents to feel torn between attachment to parents’ culture and peer pressure to participate in mainstream culture (Suarez-Orozco, 1999). Because of their physical appearance, they are easy targets of personal and institutional racism faced by other groups of color in the U.S. Yet, they soon discover that their ethnic backgrounds separate them from other marginalized groups. These children move across “discontinuous social spaces” as evidenced by their ability to speak one language at home, listen to African American rap with their friends and learn in mainstream English in schools (Suarez-Orozco, 1999). If an achieved identity is crucial for a healthy, well-adjusted citizenry, then it is crucial to begin to examine the processes in the identity development of West African immigrants specifically.

Suarez-Orozco (1999) has confirmed the scarcity of research on immigrant girls as a whole. She points to research consensus that the boundaries between the identities appear to be “more fluid and permeable” for girls than
boys. Waters (1996) discovered in her study of Caribbean teens that girls seem to be more easily able to assume bicultural competencies and make successful bicultural adjustments. Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco (1995) have also attested to the fact that bicultural strategies are critical to individuals’ wellbeing and future outcomes.

Since there is an even greater scarcity of research on West African immigrant girls, this study tries to shed some light on the challenges they face in their identity formation and the role of the home and school in this process. Just as research on immigration has focused largely on the adult immigrant experience, the lens has been focused largely on men, thereby denying us knowledge of the gendered experiences of immigrants. Since specific issues facing immigrant women have begun to gain attention in the last twenty years, it is time that the voices of females from West Africa are added to the mix. Educators of these girls, in the cities that they have chosen to settle, will benefit from a greater understanding of their home and school experiences and how these might affect their ethnic, social, and cultural identity development.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the methodology and theoretical frameworks that guided the process of understanding the experiences of the participants through their narratives.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I will discuss the methodology and theoretical framework that guided this study. This discussion will include how my position as a Nigerian immigrant parent and familiarity with certain concepts, local foods and cultural and social practices common to Nigerians and Ghanaians affected my choice of topic, interpretation of data, participant selection, development of interview questions, as well as the interview transcription and data analysis process.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of West African immigrant adolescent girls as they negotiate ethnic identities while growing up in the U.S. More specifically, this study examined how home and school experiences shape the ethnic identities of young immigrant girls and what their stories might teach us about their educational and socio-cultural needs. Because of their dual status as blacks and immigrants and the interest that their experiences hold for me (Rong & Preissle, 1998), the proposed outcome of this study was to describe the relationship between home and school experiences and identity construction of West African
immigrant girls and to show how, for immigrant youth, their identity development requires the usual challenges of adolescence complicated by a process of racial and ethnic identification (Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003). An understanding of the experiences of these girls will allow both educators and immigrant parents to accommodate their needs in school and home situations. The findings of the study have implications for African immigrant communities, teachers, teacher education programs and policymakers.

Qualitative rather than quantitative methods of inquiry were employed in the investigation of the following research questions: (1) What ethnic identities do adolescent girls who are growing up in West African immigrant families in the U.S. adopt? (2) What role do home experiences play in the ethnic identity construction of West African adolescent girls? (3) What role do school experiences play in their ethnic identity construction? (4) How are the girls negotiating identities between home, school and society and what challenges accompany this negotiation?

**Theoretical Framework**

How can I understand the voices of Black women, give them a space to share their, otherwise, silenced experiences, and tell their stories, except through a Black feminist epistemology? Since a review of the literature reveals the missing
voices of adolescent West African immigrant girls, how can the study participants
tell their stories that are otherwise missing from mainstream literature except
through the empowering stance that Black feminist thought affords? There is
distinct disparity between the knowledge the participants have gained from lived
experience and the knowledge that exists in mainstream literature. Therefore, this
study is anchored in and informed primarily by Black feminist epistemology. Like
all specialized thought, Black feminism reflects the interests and standpoint of its
creators (Collins, 2003). Collins (1991) argues that any definition of Black
feminism should include the special angle of vision that Black women bring to the
knowledge production process. According to her, “Black feminist thought
consists of specialized knowledge created by African-American women which
clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women. In other words, Black feminist
thought encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women’s reality by
those who live it” (p. 22). Black feminist research is research that empowers; it is
research that gives space to oppressed women to tell their life stories, to share
their “theories” that have not been utilized in mainstream educational research
(Dillard, 2006). At my first meeting with the participants, I re-introduced them to
the research topic and informed them of the paucity of research on West African
immigrant girls. I assured them that they were the experts on their own
experiences.
A core theme of Black women’s standpoint is the belief that Black women are activists by the mere fact that they are mothers, teachers and community leaders who are concerned about the well-being of their children (Collins, 1991). The fact that this research is partly a result of personal interest in the subject being researched attests to my concern, as a Black mother, for the well-being of my children and their peers who share similar cultural and ethnic backgrounds. An examination of traditional scholarship, which has been dominated by white males, reveals that Black women’s experiences have been significantly excluded (Collins, 2000). This exclusion and the need for self-definition in traditional sites of knowledge have led to the use of alternative sites like music, narratives, daily conversations and so on as locations for articulating core themes of Black feminist consciousness (Collins, 2003). Therefore, I will be utilizing the narratives generated from interviews with the participants to understand how they make sense of their experiences as girls growing up in West African immigrant homes. Because of the absence and invisibility of women of color in the social sciences, Black feminist epistemology makes the race and ethnicity of the researchers and respondents a focal point (Madriz, 2003).

Collins (1991) argues that although being Black and female may expose one to certain common experiences, this does not guarantee that the resulting group consciousness automatically develops among all women; yet the “connection between experience and consciousness that shapes the everyday lives
of all African-American women” (p.25) is the compelling reason behind my work with West African immigrant girls. Just as countless other Black women’s experiences have flowed into their life work, my experiences as the “other” even in my home country and the fact that I am raising two adolescent girls in a culture where they experience the double marginalization of ethnicity and racism, have led to my current research. So there is a relationship between my experiences, my consciousness and my work.

I heed Radford-Hill’s suggestion that “the essential issue that black women must confront when assessing a feminist position is as follows: If I, as a black woman, ‘become a feminist,’ what basic tools will I gain to resist my individual and group oppression” (1986, p. 160)? According to Radford-Hill, a feminist stance should be one that is willing to engage in social change- the success of which is gauged by its “ability to factor black women and other women of color into alternative conceptions of power and the consequences of its use” (p.160). Since “Black feminist thought aims to develop a theory that is emancipatory and reflective and which can aid African-American women’s struggles against oppression” (Collins, 1991, p. 32) and since narrative research is a methodology that can be used by researchers who have “liberatory” hopes for their research (Bloom, 2002), I also worked from the perspective of Freire’s (1970) critical theory of emancipation, empowerment and liberation through education.
Freire seems to be the least likely person to be included in discussions on a Black feminist theoretical framework or any feminist work for that matter, due to criticisms of his exclusion of women’s needs in his earlier work (Weiler, 1991; Llyod, 1992; Weiler, 2001). Yet, his theories of liberation through education and the “transforming power” of education focus on the role that educators play in the empowerment/disempowerment of their students. In the case of West African immigrant girls, this study examined the school experiences of these girls through their stories. The traditional system of education that exists in many of our educational institutions utilizes the “banking concept” of education (Freire, 1970). According to Freire (1970), knowledge imparted through this method “is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (p.58). In this instance, learning is not reciprocal.

“Teaching the whole person means to know the whole person, including her or his cultural background” (Pang, 2005). This study examined what the girls perceived their teachers’ consciousness of their ethnic and cultural backgrounds to be and whether these were utilized in classroom instruction. Utilizing the cultural capital that the girls bring with them to school will mean that teachers are willing to learn from them. In this instance, learning is reciprocal. hooks (1994) references this reciprocity of learning in her argument that “there must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamics, that everyone contributes. This means that the experiences of these West African
immigrant girls matter and if their ethnic and cultural identities are not acknowledged in the schools, then the possible contributions they could make to the learning environment is ignored. The need for acceptance crosses all cultural and ethnic backgrounds and immigrant students may face misunderstandings based on their accented speeches and non-U.S. based customs and negative stereo-types as perpetuated by the media. When their peers and teachers are unwilling to accept, understand and learn about these differences, these students can suffer from a diminished sense of self and belonging (James, 1997).

Continuing in this train of thought about the cultural capital or funds of knowledge that children bring to the classroom, I also worked with Gay’s (2000) culturally-responsive pedagogy, since this study investigated the girls’ experiences with and responses to an inclusive curriculum and the ways school curriculum contributed to shaping the girls’ ethnic identities. Gay’s (2000) principles of cultural responsive pedagogy include making the invisible visible through accurate representation of history in the curriculum. Culturally responsive teaching, which includes the personal, institutional and instructional dimensions, challenges teachers to create a classroom environment which supports all students regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This study addressed only the instructional dimension of culturally-responsive pedagogy because teachers and school officials were not interviewed for this study.
Since this study examined the ethnic identity development of West African immigrant girls, I used Phinney’s (1989) model of ethnic identity development as a guide to identify where the respondents fit in Phinney’s ethnic identity development stages. These stages are unexamined ethnic identity, ethnic identity search, and ethnic identity achievement and are based on individual exploration about the meaning of *ethnic membership* and the extent to which adolescents commit to or accept the role that their ethnic membership plays in their life (Seaton & Sellers, 2006). Given the fluidity of identity, stage theories of ethnic identity development may be problematic, especially if they suggest some form of permanency on the continuum. I am aware of this problem and do not suggest, by using Phinney’s model, that the participants’ positions on the continuum are, in any way, static or indicative of permanence.

**Rationale for qualitative inquiry**

I chose qualitative inquiry as a research paradigm because “qualitative research attempts to understand and make sense of phenomena from the participant’s perspective” (Merriam, 2002). This research paradigm was most appropriate in helping me understand “what meaning [the participants] give to their lives” (p.19). I also realized that quantitative inquiry will not effectively measure or quantify the richness of the participants’ life stories. Pinar (1988) says of qualitative research that it is politically progressive and epistemologically
sophisticated, because “it understands that a basic meaning of human life is movement, conflict, resolution, thesis and anti-thesis opposing each other in ways which give birth to a new order of understanding in life” (p.151). Pinar’s (1988) argument may be partly true in that the understanding of human experiences cannot be achieved through quantitative research which uses “data and statistical analysis to test hypotheses and causal relationships, to measure and predict large-scale patterns, and to produce findings that are considered generalizable” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p.1).

**Narrative research**

This study uses narrative analysis as a methodology within qualitative research because of its “use of stories as data” (Merriam, 2002). Polkinghorne (1988) observes that narratives are “the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful,” (p.1) while Bruner (1986) describes this method of inquiry as a distinctive way “of ordering experience, of constructing reality” (p.11).

I opted to do narrative research because I realize that it is an efficient way to gather data about the everyday lives and experiences of these young women and it will aid in my investigation of how these girls make meaning of their experiences. In the words of Langellier (2003), “personal narrative situates us (me) not only among marginalized and muted experiences but also among the
mundane communication practices of ordinary people.” Feminist researchers particularly favor the use of women’s narratives as primary sources of data. This methodology is a counternarrative to a masternarrative that has excluded the voices and stories of women and people of color (Ellis & Bochner, 2003). It also acts as a deconstruction of, and an alternative to, dominant discourse in educational research (Ellis & Bochner, 2003).

The enthusiasm for narrative research as a different kind of academic inquiry dominated the 1980s and met with resistance and conflict over theory, methodology and politics in scholarly investigation (Casey, 1993). As the social sciences embraced interpretivism and scholars welcomed the break from the constraints of quantitative research, narrative as a research method gained acceptance. This acceptance has been slow due to opposition from strong proponents of positivism and the reliance on numbers as the most accurate and scientific way to measure social reality (Krueger, 1994). Collins (1998) argues that the debate about quantitative and qualitative research is actually a debate about research that is male, White and scientific versus research that is soft, subjective and female (of color).

The use of personal narratives and life stories in academic writing is a transgression of conventions; it is a form of resistance of social control that tries to marginalize or silence counternarratives and stories that transgress the canonical ones (Ellis & Bochner, 2003). The aim of personal narratives is to make
the work accessible and readable so that the reader is not just a passive consumer of the text, but a co-participant in dialogue. Because first-person accounts of experience form the narrative, the account can be in the form of autobiography, life history, interview, journal, letters and other mediums we choose to use to document our lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). I chose to document the experiences of the participants using interviews and journals.

Feminist writers like Smith (1979) have advocated that researchers begin with their own experiences. By doing this, they “incorporate their personal experiences and standpoints in their research by starting with a story about themselves, explaining their personal connection to the project, or by using personal knowledge to help them in the research process” (Ellis & Bochner, 2003). Narrative research focuses on the “self” for data collection and analysis and it promotes the use of narratives of the “self” as a location from which the researcher can do the work of social critic (Bloom, 2002). Therefore, I decided to make my personal narrative a part of this study, thinking, like bell hooks (1998, p.8), that “…it would be a simple task this telling of one’s story” and like hooks (1998), I discovered that telling one’s story is not as easy as it initially appears to be.

In her foreword to Bell-Scott’s (1998) Flat-Footed Truths, Marcia Ann Gillespie begins with the question, “How do we tell our life stories? Do we begin in the here and now?” After much self-reflection and struggling with several “appropriate” beginnings, I decided to begin in the present. What is it about my
life and my experiences that make me want to tell the stories of adolescent immigrant girls from West Africa—specifically Ghana and Nigeria? Or more importantly, can I remember what it was like to be that young and have life experiences that mattered? I will begin with my own narrative in order to position myself for the reader. I learned from Dillard’s (2006) work that “my ways of being (my culture) and my ways of knowing (my theory), are a place from which I center and make sense of my work…” (p.12). I also learned that there are deep connections between being a Black researcher, mother, daughter, and scholar that informs my work.

**My narrative tale of positionality**

“As about all any of us gets to be in charge of is who we are in our stories…”  
- Lisa Kogan

As a 42-year-old mother who is raising three girls and a boy in a Nigerian immigrant home and who has watched them negotiate their identities as Black children in the U.S., I acknowledge that there is a personal agenda to my study. But the reasons for this study also include my experiences as a young woman who was raised in Nigeria, who migrated to the U.S. at the age of 26 and experienced firsthand the complexities of cross-cultural interactions and how these impact who we become. I recognized prior to doing fieldwork that “the feminist, reflexive researcher’s perspective begins with an understanding of the importance of one’s
own values and attitudes in relation to the research process” (Hesse-Biber, 2006). My identity and my experiences affected every stage of this study- my choice of research topic and participants, my challenges with gaining entrée to the research site, and my interaction with the participants and the assistant principal who acted as liaison between the girls and me. This reflexivity was necessary in my role as a researcher who needed, at different times in the study, to take “a critical look inward and [reflect] on [my] own lived reality and experiences…” (Hesse-Biber, 2006, p. 129). These lived experiences are made up of “beliefs, backgrounds, and feelings” which positioned me to be a co-constructor of knowledge with my participants (p.129).

In the course of this study, I stumbled across a journal entry I made sometime in the first few years after migrating to the U.S. I do not remember the particular incident that caused me to make this entry, but I can tell that I had been confronted by someone’s ignorance about my heritage and their perception of my level of intelligence. I remember my plans to send the finished piece to either Essence or Ebony- a plan with which I did not follow through. This is the journal entry I made almost sixteen years ago:

I came back to the United States twenty-five years after leaving with my parents for Nigeria in West Africa. Ever since coming back, it has been a continuous learning experience for me. I have learned that Americans, in spite of all the progress in technology, are very ignorant about other parts of the world. So called “second” and “third” world countries are much more eager to learn about
the first world and have a lot to show for it. I was born in East Lansing, Michigan when my father was a graduate student at Michigan State University. He had come to the U.S. on a Rockefeller fellowship. In the summer of 1966, we all went back to Nigeria and there I went to school, got married and had a child before coming back to “the land of opportunities.”

Contrary to the erroneous impression that some Americans may have of countries they have never visited or bothered to learn about, I had the best education I could get in Nigeria. Nigeria had been colonized by the British until 1960 when she got her independence. Even then we still maintained the British system of education. I went to one of the best international primary schools, earned my secondary education at a very disciplined Catholic school and proceeded to the University of Nigeria, the first indigenous university in the country for my Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees. All my life I have been an avid reader of all I could lay my hands on. To a large extent, while I was in Nigeria, I knew a bit about the peoples of most of the world especially Americans. So my coming back to the land of my birth was something I eagerly looked forward to.

But since my return in April 1991, I have swung from disappointment to disbelief, from embarrassment to even a near-loss of the high self-esteem I possessed before stepping off the plane at the JFK airport. Americans do not believe that any education obtained outside the U.S., especially in Africa, can meet up to the standards they have. In fact they have such skepticism and fear of anything foreign that foreigners hardly stand any chance of obtaining the so-
called “American dream.” It is bad enough for African-Americans, not to talk of an African with a strange sounding foreign name. My first disappointment came when I found out that I did not stand a chance in the employment field because my degrees were foreign. How I prayed that someone would give me a chance to show what I had to offer intellectually. But I had no such luck…

I have included this entry here in its entirety. It stops abruptly and I obviously never finished this piece. But that does not mean that my experiences improved. Instead I learned how to negotiate my way through out the professional, cultural and social contexts in which I found myself. This was also a negotiation I had learned to perfect even in my home country where I experienced what it was to transverse cultural and geographical borders.

By the time I arrived in the U.S., I was no stranger to being “the stranger.” I was the African woman who was born in the U.S. to Nigerian parents, who was raised and educated in Nigeria and who spoke with a strange accent. I remember my first job. Like most immigrants, I had the false belief that I could re-enter the same job market I had just left behind. So I went through the same motions that I so readily recognize now- because I have been there. I see new immigrants seeking employment in the same careers and levels they occupied in their home country, only to realize that many of them have to start all over again.

I dutifully checked The New York Times everyday, looking for any position that seemed to match my qualifications. I was soon awakened to the reality of my status as an immigrant in the U.S. job market. In this reality, I had to
begin somewhere, and I started as a salesperson at Alexander’s, a now defunct department store. I remember very clearly being very self-conscious of my accented speech and the limited number of times I spoke during the job training. Here I was, in the summer of 1991, sitting with high school students and graduates who made up the majority of the new employees, yet I was afraid to speak lest I draw attention to myself. I wondered what my new colleagues would say if they knew that I had a Master’s degree and had worked in higher education before coming to the U.S. I also remember being apprehensive during the roll call because I knew that the young manager would stumble when he came to my name. I know what it is for people to say, “I am not even going to try to say your name” or “I’ll just call you by your first name” I know how my children feel about the long, dramatic pause that occurs every time their names are about to be called out.

Only a few weeks ago, I went to the bakery to pick up a cake I had ordered for my daughter’s 5th birthday. As I always have to do, I spelled out my last name so that the bakery attendant could retrieve the correct cake. Immediately she said, “I remember that weird name.” I thought of a very quick and appropriate response, but I bit my tongue, just picked up my cake and left. As I left, I remembered one of the study participants, Madeline, who says she always gets the same response when people learn of her last name, “You’re last name is weird. Where are you from?” This is one of the examples of the ways my experiences
have influenced this study. I wanted to learn what the experiences of my participants were with their names, so I included this in the interview questions. As I have discussed my findings from this study at conferences, the issue with the proper pronunciation of foreign names has consistently led to continued discussions, initiated by other conference attendees, long after the sessions have ended.

And all I have ever wanted is for someone to say, “Please teach me to say your name.” So I have learned to do just that. In my work, I come across students from different nationalities and some of their names are as foreign as mine. Yet, I have learned from my experience that these students know that I cannot say their names the same way a native speaker of their language will. They just want me to try- they do not want me, by dismissing their names, to dismiss them or the fact that they matter.

I also remember my second job about eight months after arriving in the U.S. After persuading the Academic Dean of a private college in New York that my accent would not interfere with my teaching of a College Writing class (he had expressed some concern because of a prior experience with another Nigerian who students could not understand because of her accent), I was entrusted with my first class. I remember assuring myself the night before my first class that, in spite of my accent, I knew the material and the students did not. As I taught the class that fall of 1991, my confidence increased as I saw the light bulb go off for
students who did not know a “run-on sentence” from a “fragment” at the beginning of the semester.

I have struggled with difference as I have risen through the ranks in my career, but I never cease to be amazed at issues that lie hidden in the recesses of my mind-issues that I am only vaguely aware of until they are triggered by something else. One of such issues came up during an assignment in my Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice class. The teacher asked the class to divide itself into two groups according to our racial identification. She had learned by experience to allow students to self-identify along racial lines. As I went towards the group of Black students that was forming, a male student kept repeating that he could not speak for others’ racial identification and could only speak for himself. He was referring to the fact that not everyone who appears to be Black necessarily identifies that way and I understood that he was speaking from experience. Needless to say, I was uncomfortable during this exercise because I felt like an intruder, like I was not “authentic.” When I brought this up in class the next day, the teacher asked me to consider the fact that there are African immigrants who choose not to identify with the African American community in the U.S.

Researchers have documented that Black Caribbean immigrants are likely to emphasize their ethnic identities for the sole purpose of distancing themselves from the African-American community and the racial stratification of Blacks in
the U.S. (Waters, 1990; Bryce-Laporte, 1972). This suggests that Black Caribbean immigrants will choose ethnic group identification [Jamaican, Trinidadian, etc.] over racial identification with African-Americans (Vickerman, 1999; Foner, 1985). Yet, research also shows that Black immigrants experience racial inequalities just like their native-born counterparts and ultimately identify with them around a shared racial group identity (Vickerman, 1999). Rogers (2004) emphasizes that, as Blacks, the immigrants “share a categoric racial group classification with their native-born counterparts” (p.10). Mills (1998) as cited in Rogers (2004) confirmed this stance by stating that “under the peculiar American system of racial ascription, the two groups [native-born Blacks and immigrant Blacks] are indistinguishable by phenotype” (p.10). This indicates that both groups are vulnerable to the same forms of racial discrimination (Rogers, 2004) and are more united than different through a shared legacy of slavery, colonization, imperialism and oppression.

I acknowledge that as a woman from the African continent with a different set of historical, social and cultural experiences, I may not particularly share the same historical, social and cultural experiences that have dominated the African American experience in the U.S. So I am sometimes found in that space where I argue within me that Black oppression is global and knows no hierarchy. I believe that Black people everywhere share the common history of some form of oppression and that this is enough to unite rather than divide us. I feel this
struggle most in my work which I hope will benefit all people of color regardless of the geographical location of their initial displacement. My struggle is for legitimacy to speak for or create the forum for people of color and women to feel empowered through the stories that they tell in their own voices.

In the preface to the second edition of her well-read *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, Collins (2000) shares how rethinking empowerment caused her to incorporate new themes in the current edition. One of these themes speaks to the need for U.S. Black women to continue to struggle, not only for their empowerment, but for the empowerment of women of African ascent, recognizing that there are “commonalities that join women of African ascent as well as differences that emerge from our diverse national histories” (p.xi). Also, in her book, *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks (1994) speaks about the influence that Paulo Freire has had on her work. She captures very well what I am trying to say. Freire’s writing allowed her “to place the politics of racism in the United States in a global context wherein (she) could see (her) fate linked with that of colonized black people everywhere struggling to decolonize, to transform society. It is this that draws me to Freire’s work- his global understanding of liberation struggles.

I have been asked during the course of this study whether I think that my parent-researcher role had positive or negative impact on the conduct of this study and/or interpretation of the data. As I explained earlier, this research is partly a
result of personal interest in the ethnic identity development of my teenage daughters and their peers who are also being raised in similar cultural and ethnic backgrounds. I am aware that there were times when I listened to the girls’ stories and heard them as a Nigerian immigrant parent. Although I did not interview the girls’ parents, there were moments during the interviews when the girls described various tense interactions with their parents and I was aware that I was making assumptions about what was going on in the parents’ minds. Yet, there moments during the interviews when I understood the interplay between the girls and their parents because I had witnessed the same in my home.

**Qualitative methods**

Feminist research draws “from a wide array of methods and methodologies” which may be the traditional kind, but which “ask new sets of questions that include women’s issues and concerns…” (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2006, p.4). Feminist researchers also understand that there has to be “synergy and linkages between epistemology, methodology, and method…” (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2006, p.4). In qualitative research, the most appropriate methodology and methods cannot be separated from the research project (Janesick, 2003). Madriz (2003) cites Black feminists like Collins (1986) and hooks (1990) who remind us that, women of color experience the triple subjugation of class, race and gender oppression. Feminist research is not based only on empowerment and emancipation of women, but ultimately on promoting social change and social
justice for women (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2006, p.4). Therefore Black feminist researchers must be conscious of this reality in their choices of research methods. Madriz (2003) says that not all methods are suitable for women, in general, and women of color in particular. The three methods I utilized for data collection were personal interviews, group interviews and participant journals.

*Personal interviews*

This study was conducted using personal as well as group interviews comprising of semi-structured questions. I utilized the personal interview as a research method because “it is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose. It goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views as in everyday conversation, and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge” (Kvale, 1996). Fontana & Frey (2003) describe interviewing as “one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings” (p.62). They state that this interaction between the researcher and the researched leads to “negotiated, contextually based results” (p.62). Gubrium & Holstein (1998), as cited by Fontana & Frey (2003), confirm that the interview is now “a means of contemporary storytelling, where persons divulge life accounts in response to interview inquiries” (p.63).

I began with the personal interviews in order to set the context for the group interviews that followed. The assistant principal provided a vacant room
that contained two desks, about five chairs, a computer which he said I could use if I wanted to search the Internet in between interviews, and a phone which he asked me to use if I needed to contact him. The interview questions were semi-structured to the extent that although I had a set of pre-established questions which I planned to ask each respondent, I relied mostly on open-ended questions and made allowance for participants who started to provide information beyond what I had asked. This led to “a greater breadth of data” (Fontana & Frey, 2003) than would be obtainable from a structured interview.

Although I had a set of semi-structured interview questions, I recognized during the personal interview, that one of my participants, Ekene, seemed to have been waiting for a while for an opportunity to share her experiences. Her responses to my questions were very rich and detailed. Her responses sometimes included answers to questions that I was yet to ask her. Her enthusiastic responses were explained in one of her journal entries where she stated that this “is the first time I feel safe to open up to someone” (2/13/08). At the moments when she seemed to deviating from the question asked, I allowed her to tell her story.

Each interview lasted between 30-60 minutes per participant and was audio-taped. One of the conditions for this research from the school district in which my research site was located was that my study should not interfere with instruction time. This proved very challenging as the assistant principal and I tried to work out a suitable arrangement. Since the school bus was the girls’ only
means of transportation, the interviews could not be conducted at the end of the day. The school runs a block schedule of classes which means that students take classes in four longer blocks compared to the eight shorter periods common to many other schools. This worked to my advantage because the assistant principal arranged with the students and teachers to take time at each end of a block without actually missing any work. The time constraints sometimes interfered with how much interview time I got with each participant.

I believe that the personal interviews helped me establish some rapport with each girl before the group interviews, and I also obtained questions for the group work from the personal interview process. While the personal interviews allowed for a more personal interaction between the participants and me, the group interviews allowed for observation of the participants in order to “note body language and other gestural cues that lend meaning to the words of the persons being interviewed” (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2003). The personal interview questions are included in the appendix.

*Focus groups or group interviews*

The focus group is a most appropriate methodology for the everyday experiences of women of color- women who use conversation with other women as a way to deal with their life experiences (Madriz, 2003). The gathering and sharing process has historically been a way that women have chosen to either
address individual, group, political or social concerns. This sharing process has been called “unedited, uncensored, woman talk” (Bell-Scott, 1994, p.13). During the group interviews, I observed that the girls were more relaxed and there was a sense of shared experiences as each girl recognized her story in another’s response. Sometimes, the participants responded in unison to a question posed to one of the girls because they could relate to the question asked.

Focus groups have been popular in market research but have just gained popularity since the late 1990s among some feminist and postmodernist researchers. Fontana & Frey (1994) agree that feminist and postmodernist ethnographers are concerned about the voices and feelings of the participants. Since the voices of women of color have been silenced for years in research projects, the collectivistic versus individualistic nature of focus groups will facilitate the exposure and validation of their everyday experiences and their individual and collective survival and resistance strategies (Madriz, 2003).

The two major techniques used by researchers to collect qualitative data are participant observation and interviews, and focus groups (or group interviews) utilize both techniques, while maintaining the status of being a unique and distinctive research method (Madriz, 2003). According to Morgan (1998, p.9), focus groups are “a way of listening to people and learning from them.” This research method provides a safe space for people from the same ethnic and gender backgrounds to share their experiences and allows the researcher to gather large
amounts of information. Group interviews allow for the questioning of several individuals simultaneously (Fontana & Frey, 2003). During the group interviews, I was also able to ask questions that I felt were not thoroughly answered during the personal interviews.

I conducted two group interviews on two different days. The first one, which lasted about one hour, focused on the role of the participants’ home experiences on their social, cultural and ethnic identity formation. The group interviews were conducted in the same room I had used for the personal interviews. We were a little late getting started because the assistant principal initially wanted us to use the library. When I discovered that the library was in use by other students and that the background noise would interfere with the interview, I asked if we could use the same room as before. By the time he found a key, and I had everyone settled, we had lost almost fifteen minutes.

The second group interview focused on the participants’ school experiences and how the school environment and their relationship with their peers and teachers helped to shape their identities. This second interview ended up being split into two groups of two girls, with each one lasting about thirty minutes. The split group interviews took place on the same day because the girls arrived separately in twos and at different times. They all could not make it at the scheduled time due to class conflicts. Again, I was cognizant of the fact that their school work and attendance was of top priority. I was torn between rescheduling the group interview and going ahead with the two girls who showed up. After
waiting a few minutes, I decided to begin with the two girls, hoping that the others would join us in no time. When it became apparent that they would not be joining us, I made a mental note to make new arrangements with the assistant principal. When I suggested returning on another day, he insisted that I complete the interviews that day to avoid disrupting the girls’ schedule.

The group interviews were audio- and video taped for effective data analysis. I wanted to be able to visually capture each speaker, especially on the occasions that more than one person was speaking at the same time. I brought my seventeen-year-old daughter along to conduct the video-taping, so that I could focus on asking the questions.

The advantages of the group interview over the individual interview are seen in what Fontana & Frey (2003) call “rich data that are cumulative and elaborative (p.73). They go on to say that group interviews aid recall. I observed this dynamics during the group interview when I saw the light go on in someone’s eyes because she could identify with the experiences of another. Yet, I also experienced some of the disadvantages of the group interview, which, according to Fontana & Frey (2003) include “the emerging group culture [which] may interfere with individual expression,” and the possibility of one person dominating the group. One of the participants, Ekene tended to provide very long responses which sometimes went off tangent. Although Fontana & Frey caution against paternalistic interviewing styles that “curtail any attempts to digress and
elaborate” (p.82), I wrestled constantly with trying to get her to stop so that I could obtain others’ responses.

Madriz (2003) argues that traditional interview techniques use highly structured questionnaires, the interviewer operates from a position of power, and there are limitations to the use of close-ended questions. I prepared an interview script made up of mostly open-ended questions for the group interviews, but I was flexible enough to allow the participants to direct the interview as needed. There were times during the interviews when a participant’s answer to a question caused a temporary redirection of the questioning so that I could learn more about her. The group interview questions are included in the appendix.

Participant journals

In addition to my use of personal and group interviews, I asked the participants to keep a journal of their experiences throughout the research process. I provided each girl with a small, colorful journal because I thought that the bright colors would encourage them to write. Journals are personal and private places where people can get to know themselves (Woodward, 1996). Journal writing is an experience that leads to learning from the present while becoming open to the future (Peterson & Jones, 2001) and because Corso’s (1999) work suggests that writing can have spiritual and emotional advantages, I wanted the girls to have a space for reflection on the interview experience. Since I was working within a
Black feminist theoretical framework, and my participants are female, I chose journaling as an additional method of data collection. This choice was based on Heydt’s (2004) study of journaling practices among males which revealed that females are more likely to keep journals because they are socialized to do so. I was also aware that there could be certain information that participants may not be comfortable sharing in a focus group. Caruthers & Smith (2006) found that students, who may have had difficulty sharing some experiences in front of their peers, were more open and honest in e-mail journal entries.

The journaling process did not work as well as I expected because the participants did not make as many entries as I would have liked. I considered making several trips back to the school to exchange journals with the girls, but the assistant principal, who was my main connection to the students, and the school district, were concerned about any disruption of instructional time. Therefore, the only way to make the journaling process a dialogic one was to resort to using e-mail as a journaling tool between the girls and me. I obtained the e-mail addresses of three of the four participants at the end of the study. One of them did not have access to e-mail. I hoped to carry out dialogue that would, otherwise, have been limited by my chances of returning to the school regularly to exchange journals. In the end, only one participant engaged in the e-mail exchange with me, so I had to rely on the journal entries of the other three girls. Other methods that I could
have considered using to aid dialogue are text messaging which is fast becoming a popular method of communication among adolescents in the U.S.

My attempt to employ the dialogical journaling method was the hope that the participants would be able to communicate their concerns, thoughts and emotions to me (Heydt, 2004), and that this exchange would allow for researcher feedback. I hoped for a mutuality and a dialogic opportunity which would create a bond between the participants and me (Heydt, 2004)- a bond that would lead to writing and response on an equal level based on the sharing of experiences. (Heydt, 2004) argues that the consequent safety promotes self-worth by reinforcing that the student’s feelings are valid and appreciated.

In her work with students who used their writing to confront their pain, Philips & Steiner (1991) referred to journaling as a personal experience that allows the writer to know herself better. As one of the participants, Amanda expressed in an e-mail exchange with me, “I will just like to thank you again for the wonderful opportunity you provided for me! Though you learn something from us girls, us girls can also say we learned something about ourselves. Thank you again!” Documenting thoughts and actions enable writers to become self-confident and begin to master the ways they think of the world around them (Heydt, 2004). When I asked what she had learned about herself, the same participant who communicated by e-mail with me stated, “Some things I learned about myself? I can honestly say that it (the study) had me think about my future.
With my parents expectations, I wonder if I will have the same for kids or not?”

Another participant, Abena, wrote in her journal, “[The study] has made me begin
to ask myself, ‘Who am I?’ A[n] African-American or Ghanaian?” The journals
helped the participants begin to think deeply about their identity and how their
future may be affected by the identity they choose.

Researcher journal and field notes

I kept a journal throughout the data collection process because I wanted to
record my reflections, questions and decisions on the problems, issues and ideas I
encountered during data collection (Merriam, 2002). I also used the journal to
record field notes in between interviews that occurred on the same day, and also
when I returned for member check and had to write down the additional
information I gathered from the participants. Therefore, I also regarded my
research journal entries, along with the participants’ journal entries as usable data.
Gaining access and entry are critical aspects of qualitative research (Janesick, 2003). I started the process of getting approval from the Human Subject Review Board in July 2007 and my application was eventually approved, after some modifications, by expedited review in August 2007. The Board was able to provide expedited approval because they believed that this study presented minimal risk to the participants. I received tentative approval from one school district while waiting for approval from the Review Board, but could not proceed with data collection when the approval came through because the schools were on summer break. Once schools resumed in August, I discovered that the population
I needed had moved on to high school and the required number of participants were not enrolled in that particular junior high school during this school year. After obtaining permission from the Review Board to change sites, I received permission from another school district to conduct my study in any one of the schools in the district.

I experienced initial difficulty in identifying the location of my study population. I was constantly directed to schools for recent non-English speaking immigrants (English as a second language (ESL) schools or Welcome centers), in spite of my explanation that Ghanaian and Nigerian immigrants are English speakers. I was eventually directed to my research site by one of the members of my dissertation committee. The assistant principal was pleasant and helpful and he facilitated my entrée to the site. Since African immigrants tend to settle in larger cities like Houston, Los Angeles, New York City, Washington, D.C. and Atlanta, I acknowledge that the challenge of identifying my study participants in those cities may have been minimal.

I had planned to gather participants through snowball sampling in which the school officials would help me identify one participant, who would, in turn, help identify the others. But the IRB process required that each participant self-select to participate in response to a school announcement of the study. The board was concerned about coerced participation of the girls and to ensure that school personnel would not be directly engaged in the selection of participants, I planned
to have school personnel make announcements for interested students to pick up information (which included the recruitment script\textsuperscript{12}, the assent and parental consent forms\textsuperscript{13}, and announcements\textsuperscript{14} of the opportunity to participate in the study) from the school office. I hoped to ask that homeroom teachers make the announcements in their classrooms, unless the school had another forum during which the announcements could be made. Eventually, it was the school’s assistant principal who made the announcements using the announcement script I provided.

The assistant principal was my only link with the participants. I soon discovered that he was very involved in multiple school programs. This affected his ability to respond to my phone and e-mail messages in a timely manner. It was a very frustrating experience for me to wait from November 2007 to February 2008 before I was informed that I had the number of participants that I needed. The assistant principal later told me that the delay had come from the girls not returning the consent and assent forms despite constant reminders from him.

The three strategies I used for selecting participants were purposeful, homogeneous and typical case sampling (Patton, 1990). Purposeful sampling was appropriate for finding information-rich cases, while homogeneous sampling allowed me to pick a group of participants that were similar in experiences and yet different in the uniqueness of their individual stories. The typical case sampling allowed me to highlight the similarities in the participants’ experiences.

\textsuperscript{12} See example of recruitment script that was included in the parents’ packet in the Appendix

\textsuperscript{13} See examples of consent and assent forms in the Appendix

\textsuperscript{14} See example of announcement in the Appendix
The selection of participants from the pool of interested students was not a difficult one because I needed 4-6 participants to accommodate the possibility of one or two participants dropping out of the study. I wanted an equal representation of girls from Ghanaian and Nigerian immigrant homes. All four girls, two ninth grade girls of Nigerian ascent, Ekene and Amanda, and two tenth grade girls of Ghanaian ascent, Madeline and Abena, who expressed interest in participating in the study, were recruited. Three of the participants were born in the U.S. while one migrated when she was 12 years old.

The girls all attend the same high school which is located in a mid-size U.S. Mid-West city. The school is a college preparatory high school which admits its students through a district lottery program. Therefore, the student population is very diverse. There are approximately 628 students and 36 teachers, bringing the student/teacher ratio to 17:1.\textsuperscript{15} The student body breakdown is Asian 3%; African-American- 64%; Hispanic- 2% and White- 31%.\textsuperscript{16} Since there is no category for African and other Black students, I assume that they are all counted among the African-American student population. Montclair is also an International Baccalaureate (IB) world school which awards the IB Diploma. Information retrieved from the school district website indicates that the school was recognized as one of 200 outstanding high schools in the nation by the United States Department of Education. All the participants commended Montclair’s efforts at an inclusive and culturally responsive curriculum. This was most evident in the

\textsuperscript{15} See Table 3:1 & Figure 3:2
\textsuperscript{16} See Table 3:2
Humanities curriculum. For example, Ekene arrived at our first interview with Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, an internationally recognized Nigerian author and text. She described the use of such a text as one of the reasons she chose to attend Montclair. All the girls also mentioned an African project that is a requirement in the ninth grade curriculum. Other efforts at teaching about Africa in the curriculum were through the inclusion of African folktales and history.

Once the participants had been selected, I arranged an initial meeting with them during which I provided them with more information about the study. This meeting, which lasted about thirty minutes, was an opportunity to meet them, and for some of them to meet each other formally, for the first time. Although two of the students were in a particular school-community outreach program, each girl did not know that the other was from a Nigerian background. The two Ghanaian girls informed me at this meeting that they were cousins. I was conscious of establishing trust and rapport with the girls since establishing this at the start of the study ensures not only their willingness to share their stories, but will enable me to capture nuanced aspects of their lives from their point of view (Janesick, 2003). I made arrangements with the assistant principal for the dates, times and location of the interviews before I left this meeting. I needed his involvement since he had knowledge of the school schedule and would know the most appropriate interview dates and times that would minimize disruption to participants’ schedule.
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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
<td>628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total teachers</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student/Teacher Ratio</td>
<td>17:1</td>
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</tbody>
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Table 3.1: Student and teacher ratio at Montclair Preparatory from [www.schoolsk-12.com](http://www.schoolsk-12.com)

Figure 3.2: Student and Teacher Population at Montclair Preparatory from [www.schoolsk-12.com](http://www.schoolsk-12.com)
Ghana and Nigeria were chosen as the focus of this study because, not only do they send the largest numbers of immigrants from West Africa (Bump, 2000), but they are former British colonies whose lingua franca is English. The categories of West African foreign-born in the U.S. include those who are voluntary immigrants and those who have sought religious or political asylum. Countries that have historically sent refugees to the U.S. have not included Ghana and Nigeria (United Nations Commissioner for Refugees, 2002). Therefore, assumptions about most African immigrants being English language learners whose social, cultural and educational needs are met through bilingual or refugee education do not necessarily apply to immigrants from Ghana and Nigeria.

This study focused on girls because while there are a few studies that focus broadly on the immigrant experiences of adolescents (Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003; Traore & Lunkens, 2006; Rong & Brown, 2002; Rong &

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Student Population</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>31%</td>
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Table 3.2: Percentages of student population at Montclair Prep (from Principal Leadership, June 2008)
Preissle, 1998), there is a critical gap in the literature about not only immigrant girls, but specifically immigrant girls from West Africa. This study also focused on girls because studies show that patriarchal practices are transported to the U.S. by immigrants and results in tension between the different generations in the home (Lee, 2005). Some of this tension arises from the differences in the ways male and female children are raised. Stritikus & Nguyen (2007) confirm that female children, unlike their male counterparts, are expected to maintain their family culture and tradition. This was confirmed by this study in that the participants’ parents expected them to maintain gender-specific cultural traditions like cooking and keeping the home.

**The consent process**

Obtaining permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for human subject research involves the informed consent process. The consent processes that were used in this study included the parental permission and the informed assent forms which contained a brief description of the study and the purpose of the research. The consent and assent forms also included the duration of the research (three months) and a statement about the opportunity for participants to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or prejudice. Copies of the assent and parental consent forms were provided to the participants as required by the IRB.

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17 The consent and assent forms are included in the appendix
Critical to the consent process was an assurance to both participants and parents that the girls would remain anonymous during the final write up of the study. They were assigned pseudonyms in place of their actual names. As required by the IRB, the audio and video tapes will be locked up in a safe box throughout the dissertation process and destroyed three years after completion of the study.

Because of my cultural knowledge and experiences as a Nigerian parent, I was apprehensive about the parents’ willingness to consent to their children’s’ participation in this study. I anticipated their concerns about issues of privacy. The assistant principal initially mentioned that one of the participants’ fathers wanted to speak with him before granting permission. A fifth participant never returned her packet and the assistant principal and I guessed that it was because she was a senior and was probably busy with the college application process and other senior year activities.

**Challenges of the interview process**

The challenges I faced during the personal and group interview processes were mostly related to time constraints. For my first meeting with the participants, the assistant principal got three of the girls, Abena, Amanda and Madeline from their classes at the end of the period preceding lunch. It turned out that these three girls had the same lunch period. The other girl, Ekene, had a free period at this
time. He asked the three girls to pick up their lunches and meet me in the library. Since lunch was about 45 minutes long and I had to wait for all the girls to arrive before we began, I had about 25 minutes to explain details of the study to them. I noted in my research journal later that day that the girls had been quiet which was expected since this was our first meeting. But, I could tell that they were interested in participating in the study. This was confirmed when Ekene introduced me to another student as her interviewer.

The time factor was also apparent during the personal interviews. The assistant principal suggested that all the personal interviews be conducted on the same day, so I arrived with the interview schedule that he and I had constructed during my first meeting with the girls. Abena was my first interview of the day. She is a sophomore who was born on the East Coast to Ghanaian immigrants. I noticed immediately that she was soft-spoken and tended to answer in few words. This was a little frustrating because I was conscious of the limited time I had with her. I made a mental note to ask some of the same questions again during the group interviews.

My second interview for the day was with Amanda. She is a freshman who was born in the Mid-West to Nigerian immigrants. I was also conscious of the time as I interviewed her and as my journal entry for the day reflects, I had learned from my first interview that it was okay not to follow the interview guide too closely. Next, I met with Ekene. She is a freshman who migrated from Nigeria.
when she was almost thirteen. Ekene had very lengthy answers to my questions. Again, with her, I was conscious of the time and although she gave very rich answers, I had to make quick and critical decisions about when to let her tell her story and when to move on to the next question. Ekene was also a fast talker and I knew from the start that transcribing my interview with her would be challenging.

My last interview for the day was with Madeline, a freshman who is cousins with Abena, and who was also born on the East Coast to Ghanaian immigrants. Our interview took place towards the end of the school day and was interrupted by announcements from the school principal through the public announcement system. We were also interrupted by the school bell that indicated the end of the school day, and since I did not want her to miss the school bus, the end of the interview felt rushed.

Another challenge I experienced was during the group interviews. Although Ekene was soft spoken, and had to be reminded several times to speak up, she was verbose in her responses and at times tended to dominate the conversation. I was concerned about giving every girl an equal chance at telling her story, but constantly struggled with the proper way to direct questions while someone seemed to be dominating the conversation.

The transcription of the interviews was challenging only when neither one of the transcriptionists could decipher some of Ekene’s answers. The few places
were labeled “inaudible’ on the transcription. One of the factors that worked to my advantage, though, was the fact that I was familiar with some of the words, concepts, names of places, and foods used by the girls during the interview. Therefore, during the transcription, I could insert some words that the other transcriptionist had omitted.

**Issues of power in the interview process**

It is believed that in traditional interviews, the interviewer consciously or unconsciously imposes his/her viewpoint and beliefs through the nature of questions asked and the choices given the research participants (Krueger, 1994). Feminist and post-modernist researchers consider as inappropriate a traditional method that forces the agenda of the researcher on the participants (Maynard & Purvis, 1994). Rather, they see the researcher as co-creator of knowledge- a role that is interpretive rather than descriptive of “objective” truth (Clifford, 1986).

The decision on how the researcher presents herself is critical to the interview process (Fontana & Frey, 2003). I deliberately chose to dress casually during the personal and group interviews (Fontana & Frey, 1977) because I wanted to minimize the appearance of formality. I was conscious of my position of power as interviewer from the beginning and set out to create some form of co-ownership of the study by changing the sitting arrangements during the interviews. The personal interviews were conducted in a space that the school had
provided and I chose to sit at the side of the table rather than at the head to avoid
the appearance of speaking from a place of authority. By allowing the participants
to sit at the head of the table, I wanted to accord them some sense of power in and
ownership of the interview process. Hess-Biber (2006) confirms that “feminist
researchers are particularly concerned with reducing the hierarchy between the
researcher and the researched” (p. 128).

In addition, I positioned myself as learner during the interview process by
sharing my personal reasons for the study. I informed them that I had daughters
who were about the same age as they are and had observed their process of
constructing their ethnic identities. Like one of the girls, Amanda, expressed in
her journal, “…though you learn something from us girls, us girls can also say we
learned something about ourselves” (Journal entry, 3/10/08). Her journal entry
confirmed that she understood and recognized my position as learner. This
reciprocity of learning addresses the concern among feminists that the researcher
and the researched be “co-constructors” of meaning (Hesse-Biber, 2006). This
decision to give the participants a voice in this process (Hesse-Biber, 2006) is
why I also utilized member check for issues of validation. I returned to the study
site to share the initial findings with the participants because I wanted them to be
involved in the interpretive process to ensure that I was accurately interpreting
their stories.
At different times during the interviews, I found opportunities to relate with something a participant had said. When Madeline shared that she was born on the East Coast, I informed her that I had lived there as well, and when Ekene mentioned the city where she had lived in Nigeria before migrating to the U.S., I realized that I had spent a year there as well. I also began each interview by informing the participant of the power she had by being a voice for West African female adolescent voices that are missing from the literature. I made sure I repeated this at different points throughout the study.

Before this study began, I was aware of the possibility that my research participants could see me as a “mother figure” and that this could lead to the assumption that I would be listening to their narratives from the position of critic, judge, disciplinarian or whatever role their natural mothers play in their lives. I was concerned that this could be a cause for inhibition in the narrative process. My choice of the focus group, in addition to individual interviews, as a method of data collection was to create a feeling of “safety in numbers” for my research participants. I also believed that it would afford the participants the opportunity to witness firsthand my interaction with the others. I saw this play out during the group interviews because the girls were obviously more relaxed than during our one-on-one interactions. The comment that Ekene made in her journal, “I really enjoyed the interview and it is the first time I feel safe to open up to someone”
assured me that she felt safe with me during the interviews. In her journal entries, Abena also thanked me for “letting me take part in [your] study.”

Feminist research requires that the researcher ensure that the participants are not just providers of information but potential agents of social change (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2006, p.4). This means that the participants should feel empowered in telling their stories by the knowledge that others’ lives will be affected by their stories (Olesen, 1994). Collins (1991) also speaks of the empowerment that comes through the “process of re-articulation.” By recognizing that Black women can be theorists, Black women intellectuals can offer other Black women a different view of themselves and their world that differs from that held by the dominant group (Omi & Winant, 1986). The Institutional Review Board (IRB) process included questions about participant remuneration. In my response, which included material benefits of the study for the participants, I noted, “I will try to increase their awareness that they are not just providers of information but potential agents of social change.”

**Meeting for member check/member validation**

Although I will also address the issue of member check later under the section titled *Establishing trustworthiness- validity and reliability*, I decided to go into more detail about this fifth meeting with the participations because it turned into another data collection opportunity. I arrived at the school at the appointed
time, but the assistant principal could not meet with me because he was engaged in other duties. He asked one of the school office staff to get the participants and find a location for our meeting.

Three of the four girls were available for the meeting. Madeline had lunch during this period, and Abena had a difficult time locating her, so I decided to proceed with the meeting so as not to hold up the girls who were present. Meeting the girls again was like a reunion. The meeting was more relaxed and informal than the previous ones and I attributed this to the fact that this was our fifth meeting. Abena told me that she had seen my daughter’s prom pictures on the Facebook page of a mutual friend. She recognized my daughter from the day she came along with me to video-tape the first group interview. Some months after the study, I learned that both Abena and Madeline later invited my daughter to be their friend through Facebook.

I informed the girls of the purpose of our meeting- to share the preliminary findings and emerging themes and to get their feedback on the accuracy of my findings. I read each finding out and asked them to confirm whether it was accurate. This process allowed me to gather more information on each theme. In the process of discussing the themes, the participants provided more information or gave me updates on incidents that had occurred since the last time we met. I also used this opportunity to get clarity on any questions I still had. I did not

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18 Facebook is a social networking website through which people who have shared interests can interact with one another
record our conversation this meeting; instead, I took notes besides each theme as the girls responded. The notes I took either confirmed the emerging theme or provided additional insight.

**Data collection and transcription**

Fieldwork for this study was conducted between December 2007 and March 2008. I took field notes between each personal interview while I waited for the next participant and after each group interview, when I got home in the evening, I documented the events of the day in a journal. I also continued to make journal entries at the end of each interview day. These journal entries allowed me to express any feelings of excitement, frustration or humility at the opportunity I had been afforded to work with the participants. The journal entries also allowed me to track my thoughts and observations. I was not able to take notes during the interviews because I believed that I needed to give the girls my full attention. I wanted them to know that they were important and that I was interested in what they had to say. I relied on the tape and video recordings and my memory and I also entered notes as soon as possible after the interviews were over for the day.

At the end of the data collection, I converted the audio recordings, which were made on a mini handheld digital recorder, into mp3 files on my computer and transcribed all the personal and group interviews using Microsoft Word. The audio-tapes were transcribed verbatim and word for word rather than a more
formal written style (Kvale, 2007), with the exception of frequent repetitions of sounds like “um” or the interviewer’s frequent use of the word “okay” which were mostly eliminated. I included pauses, emotional expressions like laughter and sighing and emphases in intonation (Kvale 2007). Since this study is expected to be a “readable public story” and not for “detailed linguistic conversational analysis” (Kvale, 2007), I opted not to do a complete verbatim oral transcription that would require me to retain every word or sound uttered by the participants.

The data was transcribed twice, first by my daughter and then by me. After she completed each group of transcriptions, I went over them to ensure that she had accurately transcribed everything the participants had said. This exercise allowed me to complete any gaps or missing information in her transcription, and I also discovered that listening to the audio recordings over again, as I transcribed the data, allowed me to begin to identify emerging themes and patterns. There were a few instances when the participant’s response was not completely audible and these were noted as “inaudible” in parenthesis.

Kvale (2007) encourages researchers to transcribe their own interviews so that they can learn about their interviewing style. He also suggests that another advantage of doing one’s own transcription is that “(you) will have the social and emotional aspects of the interview situation present or reawakened during transcription, and will already have started the analysis of the meaning of what was said” (p.95). This suggestion helped when a word that was inaudible to the
first transcriber was deciphered later by me because I recollected from memory what the participant had said.

**Data Analysis**

The data collected through the personal interviews, group interviews and the journals are the focus of this study and will be analyzed in detail in Chapter Four. Since drawing conclusions from data collected through various methods may prove challenging (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006), I made sense of the data by coding and recoding, using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The constant comparative method allows the researcher to look for recurring themes, patterns and differences. Using the traditional cut-and-paste approach, data from the personal interviews, students’ journals and the group interview were coded for themes related mainly to participants’ ethnic identities, family ethnic identity, home experiences, school experiences and how all these impact the ethnic, cultural, social and national identities that the girls choose. I wrote up a summary vignette about each participant and examined each one separately and also in comparison with other participants. In Chapter Five, I will discuss what I found in relation to existing literature about the immigrant experiences of adolescent girls.
Establishing trustworthiness - validity and reliability of the study

Credibility, transparency, dependability and conformability are criteria that point to the trustworthiness of a study. These criteria can be implemented by using different techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Of the eight techniques suggested by Lincoln & Guba (1985), triangulation, peer review, prolonged engagement and observation, member checking, rich and thick description, external audit and negative case analysis, I used triangulation, peer review and member check.

Validity refers to the truth, correctness and strength of a statement and the validity of this study will refer to the degree that the methods I have used do investigate what I have set out to investigate (Kvale, 2007). In other words, the concern is for the quality of the knowledge produced and whether the study can defend knowledge claims (Kvale, 2007). The reliability of a study refers to the consistency and trustworthiness of the findings and whether the study can be reproduced by other researchers - that is whether the participants will give different answers to the same questions if they are being asked by someone else (Kvale, 2007). For this study, the group interview sessions were used to ask in more detail the questions asked during the personal interviews. The purpose of doing this was to check for consistencies or inconsistencies in the participants’ responses.
I audio-taped the personal and group interviews and video-taped the group interviews in order to ensure the trustworthiness of my data. Lincoln & Guba (1985) point to the link between trustworthiness in qualitative research and the credibility of the researcher in accurately presenting and interpreting the words of the participants. Before each interview, the participants were assured that they would be assigned pseudonyms during the final write-up of the study. They were also informed that transcripts of the interview and initial findings would be made available to them for member check or member validation for accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Kvale, 2007).

Connelly & Clandinin (1990) warn that narrative inquiry relies on criteria other than validity, reliability, and generalizability. They caution that the researcher not “squeeze the language of narrative criteria into a language created for other forms of research” (p.7) At the time they took this stance, there was no consensus on definite criteria for the conduct of narrative inquiry. Therefore, they suggest that each inquirer “must search for, and defend, the criteria that best apply to his or her work”(p.7).

Kvale (2007) refers to the three techniques of validation I used as three forms of “communicative validation” (p.125). The first form which I utilized in this study is triangulation of data. I chose the three research methods described earlier (personal interviews, group interviews and journals) because triangulation of data sources is a process of qualitative cross-validation (Wiersma, 2000). It
“validate(s) qualitative data by comparing interpretations of results from different data-collection methods” (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006). Denzin (1989) describes triangulation as a process of relying on multiple sources for data in order to reach a better understanding of phenomena. Although I had not planned to use the member check meeting to triangulate data, it turned out to be a useful process for assessing whether the girls were consistent in their responses to the interview questions.

Another form of validation I used was peer validation. This is when the researcher seeks validation from “scholars familiar with the interview themes and with the theories applied to the interview texts…” (Kvale, 2007, p. 125). One of my colleagues who completed her dissertation in May 2007 acted as peer reviewer. She had framed her dissertation on the experiences of female African professors in the U.S. using a Black feminist theoretical framework, so I knew she was familiar with the theories and methods I applied to the interview process. I asked her to review the study findings to double-check for recurring patterns and themes. Another form of peer review was the one that Merriam (2002) says is built into the dissertation committee. In this case, committee members read and commented on findings.

The third form of validation was member check or member validation. This refers to a partnership between the interviewer and the interviewee when “the interviewer’s interpretations refer to the subject’s own understanding of their
statement… and the interviewee becomes the relevant partner for a conversation about the correct interpretation…” (p.125). Connelly & Clandinin (1990) argue that “there may be a moment when one says ‘I have completed my data collection and will now write the narrative,’ but even then narrative methodologies often require further discussion with participants, such that data is collected until the final document is completed.”

I returned to the school for the fifth time to discuss the initial findings and emerging themes with the participants. This was to ensure validity through member check and to ask participants to comment on my interpretation of the data (Merriam 2002). The participants all agreed that the emerging themes captured their experiences.

**Ethical considerations**

This study was guided by the Codes of ethics outlined by Christians (2003). (1) **Informed consent**: As required by the IRB, the participants were provided an assent form which informed them of the “nature and consequences” of the study (p.217). It was important that the girls not feel any coercion to participate in the study. In order to ensure their voluntary participation, the IRB did not want them to be recruited by school official. They responded to an announcement of the study made by the assistant principal. An information packet that the participants took home to their parents included detailed information
about the study and the parental consent form. The detailed information was to ensure that the students’ and parents’ consent were based on “full and open information” (p.217) Prior to the beginning of data collection, I met with all the girls to discuss details of the study and provide them the opportunity to ask questions.

(2) **Deception:** This refers to any “deliberate misrepresentation” on the part of the researcher. I was honored to be allowed to conduct research at my study site and I appreciated the time that the school officials took to ensure that I had access to the participants and to a private room. This consciousness reinforced my determination to avoid any form of deception in my dealings with both the students and the school officials. The IRB process was very thorough because I was working with children and I had to be clear that there were not going to be any deceptive tactics on my part as researcher. I promised the girls at the end of the interview process that I would return for member check. When I realized that the academic year was about three weeks away, I scheduled a meeting through the assistant principal. I was very conscious of the promise I had made to the girls and I wanted to keep my word; (3) **Privacy and confidentiality:** Since codes of ethics insist on safeguarding and protecting the identities of the study participants and the study site, I used pseudonyms in place of the girls’ actual names. I also did not reveal the name of the school where the study was conducted. Christians (2003) cautions, though, that there is always a chance that
insiders will recognize pseudonyms and disguised locations, thereby making watertight confidentiality sometimes impossible. In addition, the IRB required that the data, which included audio and video recordings, interview transcripts and journals, be secured in a box that is accessible only to me. At several times during the study, the participants were reminded that their responses were confidential and that I was required to keep all study materials for three years before destroying them. I also had to include in my IRB application that there was going to be minimal risk for the participants’ involvement in the study.

(4) **Accuracy:** This has been covered above in detail under *Establishing trustworthiness—validity and reliability of the study*. Including techniques that have been used to ensure accuracy and validity—member check, peer review and triangulation—help guide against “fabrications, fraudulent materials, omissions, and contrivances” (Christians 2003, p.219) The request by the school district that I make a copy of the results available to them at the conclusion of the study also guided the accuracy of the interpretations. I knew that they wanted to learn about the participants’ experiences in order to better serve the district’s student population which includes students from other parts of Africa. The only way my study will assist school officials in meeting the needs of their students is to stay as accurate as possible to the participants’ stories.
CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have reviewed the ways my position as researcher influenced my research topic, theoretical framework and research methods. Since Black feminist methodology foregrounds the experiences of women who are silenced in mainstream research, I chose to provide the participants a space within which to tell their stories in their own voices. These narratives were obtained through personal interviews, group interviews and journals- methods that reflect the “synergy and linkages between epistemology, methodology, and method…” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p.4). In Chapter Four, I will present a portrait of each of the study participants and clearly outline the findings of the study.
CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the experiences of West African immigrant adolescent girls as they negotiate ethnic, cultural, social and national identities while growing up in the U.S. The study examined how home and school experiences shape the ethnic identities of young immigrant girls and what insights we might gain about their educational and socio-cultural needs.

I employed qualitative methods of inquiry in the investigation of the following research questions: (1) What perceptions do adolescent girls growing up in West African immigrant families in the U.S. have of their ethnic identities? (2) What role do home experiences play in the ethnic identity construction of adolescent immigrant girls of West African ascent? (3) What role do school experiences play in their ethnic identity construction? (4) How are the girls negotiating identities between home, school and society and what challenges accompany this negotiation?

Using personal and group interviews, I gathered data from the participants which I analyzed to make sense of the data by coding and recoding, using the
constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The constant comparative method allowed me to look for recurring themes, patterns and differences which I will be discussing in this chapter.

**Presentation of data**

Writing is a method of inquiry, a way of “knowing” (Richardson, 2003). It is not just an activity that occurs at the end of a study, but a method of discovery and analysis during which the researcher learns more about the participants and himself or herself (Richardson, 2003). In contrast to quantitative studies which can be interpreted through tables, figures and summaries, qualitative studies carry their meaning within the written text- their meaning is in the reading (Richardson, 2003).

According to Glesne (1999), “writing gives form to the researcher's clumps of carefully categorized and organized data” (p.155). Richardson (2003) argues that the researcher cannot “write the body of the text as though the document and quotation snippets are naturally present, valid, reliable, and fully representative, rather than selected, pruned, and spruced up by the author for their textual appearance (p.507). In Chapters Four and Five, I use quotes from field notes, interviews, students’ and researcher journals to give a snapshot into the general findings. Some of the quotes were edited where necessary for continuity.

In this chapter, I will begin with short profiles of the participants which will provide a snapshot of their backgrounds. Following the participant profiles, I
will discuss the overarching themes that went beyond the questions asked and which I saw recurring frequently. These overarching themes came up repeatedly in the way the girls think about themselves and in their relationships with their peers and families and are important for understanding the overall experiences of the girls. I will also include the sub-themes that capture the stories of how these girls choose to identify and how their home and school experiences affect their ethnic identity construction. The data was not presented separately for each participant but was synthesized under each theme and sub-theme to reflect commonalities and differences between the participants’ experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnic Background</th>
<th>Immigrant Generation Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abena</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Ghanaian</td>
<td>Second generation; born in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Nigerian</td>
<td>Second generation; born in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madeline</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Ghanaian</td>
<td>Second generation; born in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekene</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Nigerian</td>
<td>1.5 generation; born in Nigeria and migrated as an adolescent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Participants’ profile
Portraits of the participants

Amanda’s profile

Amanda is a fifteen year old high school freshman who was born in a Midwest city in the U.S. to Nigerian parents. She is the first of four girls in her family. Her parents met each other and got married in Nigeria. Amanda’s father was the first to migrate to the U.S., and like many West African immigrants, he had to settle down before bringing his wife over some years later. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1992) has referred to this process in immigration as family stage migration, an immigration pattern which occurs when a spouse migrates to seek work without the other spouse and children who join him or her later. His primary reason for coming to the U.S. was to attend school. When I first met Amanda, I noticed that she was a very confident young woman. She took time to answer my questions in a deliberate manner. She told me that even though her parents are Nigerian, she identifies as part American and part Nigerian. She identifies as part Nigerian because her parents are from there and because her family practices Nigerian customs and traditions. She identifies as part American because she was born here and the family also practices what she calls “American customs and traditions.” Many people do not know of her ethnic background until they notice her last name or she reveals it.

Amanda is very athletic and hopes to attend college on an athletic scholarship. She plans to be a pediatrician because she loves children and she wants to provide medical care to children in Africa. Even though she has never
visited Nigeria, she plans to spend some time there in the future practicing medicine. Amanda’s decision to practice medicine comes from observing her mother who is a licensed practical nurse. Her love for athletics sometimes causes friction between her and her parents. Amanda feels that American parents are more accommodating of their children’s involvement in sports. Her parents expect her to focus solely on her academics, but she wants to prove to them that she can be successful at both.

Amanda’s experiences at home expose her to Nigerian customs and traditions. Her family actively practices their culture and traditions by eating Nigerian foods, listening to Nigerian music, wearing traditional clothing and ensuring that their native language, Yoruba, is spoken at home. Her mother purposefully speaks Yoruba, both publicly and in private, and although Amanda understands but may not speak back in Yoruba, her mother is disappointed that her younger siblings do not understand the language. This has caused her to speak to her children solely in that language.

Amanda’s family also maintains a connection to the Nigerian community in their city by attending Nigerian social gatherings and worshipping at a Nigerian church. Her family expects Amanda and her siblings to also practice the traditions- most especially with speaking the language and showing respect to adults. In her community, adults are addressed as “Aunty” or “Uncle.” Amanda kneels down to greet her parents and other adults in the Nigerian community as a

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19 Yoruba is the major language spoken in Western Nigeria. It also refers to the ethnic group that lives in Western Nigeria.
sign of respect. She agrees with her parents that it is disrespectful not to do so. She also believes that both African and American youth should be respectful of adults. She translates this understanding to her relationship with her teachers whom she respects.

In school, Amanda has friends from different ethnic groups. She believes that ethnicity and race play no role in her choice of friends. What matters to her is that her friends are trustworthy and loyal and treat her well. She gets along very well with recently migrated Nigerian children, and she and her siblings are the only second generation Nigerian children in their church. Even though the other children are more fluent than Amanda in Yoruba, she still gets along very well with them. In fact, one of her best friends was born in Nigeria.

Amanda and her parents have not discussed the issue of marriage and the question of whether she is expected to marry a Nigerian has not come up, but she believes that she will be allowed to make that choice when the time comes. She believes that the race and ethnicity of the person will not matter as long as they love each other. Amanda is expected to learn how to cook, wash dishes and ‘do” hair, not only because she is a girl but because she is the first born. She is expected to care for her younger sisters by cooking for them. Her parents believe she will need these household skills as a mother and should also plan to pass these skills on to her own children. It is Amanda’s desire to pass these on to her own children as well. Although these gender expectations are sometimes a source of

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20 Kneeling down to greet adults is a common practice among the Yoruba of Nigeria.
conflict, Amanda agrees that if her mother did not learn how to do these things, she would not be able to pass them on to her.

Amanda’s parents are wary of American cultural practices like dating and sleep overs. Although Amanda understands that they are trying to protect her, there are still conflicts when she wants to visit friends or sleep over at their homes. Amanda is not interested in dating right now because she is juggling academics and athletics. She believes that in spite of her parents’ expectations of her, she will have their support as she navigates ethnic, social, cultural and national identities. According to her, “they support who I am. They always want me to be myself. They don’t want me to follow the crowd. They tell me, “Never be a follower, but be a leader.” So as long as I’m conscious of what I do and who I hang out with, then I’m free to be myself” (FG21, 2/28/08)

Abena’s profile

Abena is a sixteen year old high school sophomore who was born in a large city on the East coast. Her mother migrated from Ghana sixteen years ago and, like many immigrants from West Africa, she came to the U.S. to “start a new life.” She is the middle child and only girl in a family of three children. Her older brother still lives in Ghana and her younger brother lives in the U.S with the family. Abena identifies as Ghanaian and not African-American because, according to her, “my parents are Ghanaian.” She is perceived by others to be

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21 Personal interview quotes will be denoted by PI, focus group quotes will be denoted by FG, quotes from participant journals will be identified as PJ and quotes from researcher journal will be identified as RJ.
African-American and admits that most of her peers are surprised when they learn
that she is African. She has visited Ghana once, at the age of three; therefore, she
does not remember anything about Ghana or her visit. Abena plans to travel to
Ghana in the summer of 2008.

Abena is very successful in school because her parents have high
academic expectations of her and expect her to be a doctor. Her peers recognize
her academic abilities and sometimes seek help from her for their homework. She
has a close network of friends at school called “the African group.” This group is
made up of students from Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone. She also has a cousin,
Madeline, who attends the same school. Madeline was also a participant in this
study. Her relationship with “the African group,” and the fact that her school
includes her background as a Black and an African student in the curriculum,
makes school a welcoming environment for her. She agrees that having African
friends in school and a cousin with whom she can communicate in Twi\(^2\) help her
make a smooth transition from home to school on a daily basis. Abena also has
friends who are recent immigrants from Ghana. Her relationship with them is a
positive one, especially since they teach her about Ghana.

Abena’s family actively practices their Ghanaian culture and traditions.
They eat Ghanaian food, wear the clothing and speak Twi. Her mother is
multilingual and speaks English, Ga\(^3\) and Fante\(^4\). She makes a conscious effort

\(^2\) Twi is one of the languages spoken in Ghana
\(^3\) Ga is a language spoken in Ghana
\(^4\) Fante is a language spoken in Ghana
to speak Twi to Abena and expects her to respond in Twi as well. So, although Abena has not been to Ghana since she was three, she is relatively fluent in the language. Her mother considers the ability to communicate with her daughter in Twi to be a private method of communication when they are in a public setting. Abena’s family also attends community meetings and social gatherings. Like many Ghanaian immigrants, her family worships in a Ghanaian church.

Abena’s family expects her to maintain some of their cultural practices like showing respect to elders. This is one aspect of conflict that she sees between the Ghanaian and the American culture. In her community, adults are addressed as “Aunty” or “Uncle.” She practices this aspect of her culture in school where she shows respect to her teachers. Other expectations from her mother concern gender roles as they are practiced in Ghana. Abena’s mother expects her to fulfill certain gender roles in the home in preparation for marriage. She is expected to clean the house and cook meals. Abena believes that her mother wants her to become like her in terms of carrying out gender roles in the home. Another socio-cultural expectation of her mother’s is that Abena marry a Ghanaian. She does not agree with her mother and is confused that she is expected to marry only from Ghana. She believes that she should be allowed to marry whoever she wants. There are social aspects to Abena’s family’s expectations of her. Unlike many of her American counterparts, she is not allowed to date because she is “too young” and she is not allowed to sleep over at friends’ homes because her parents are distrustful of people they do not know very well.
Abena’s mother has polycystic kidney disease and needs a kidney transplant. She went through the immigration process of obtaining a visa for her brother to come to the U.S. to donate a kidney. Although the transplant was initially successful, the kidney failed last year and she is now waiting for Abena to turn eighteen to see if she can donate one of her kidneys. Abena understands that her mother needs to depend on her and her siblings to help out in the home when she gets tired due to the disease. Abena also believes that she has her family’s support as she navigates the terrain of ethnic, social, cultural and national identities.

**Madeline’s profile**

Madeline is a sixteen year old high school sophomore who was also born in a large city on the East coast to Ghanaian immigrants. Her family migrated to the U.S. in 1989 and lived on the East coast for about nine years before moving to the Mid-West. I learned during the study that Madeline completed her ninth grade education at another high school, so she was relatively new to Montclair when we met.

Madeline’s father migrated first and her mother joined him later after he filed and obtained immigration papers for her. She has three other siblings, two of whom were born in Ghana. They are twenty-four and twenty-five years old and migrated to the U.S. only six years ago. She describes herself as a quiet, reserved person who likes to have fun and “a calm, cool person” in comparison to the
boisterous personalities in her community who she says “get angry too much” and “always try to find trouble.”

Madeline identifies as Ghanaian, except in contexts, like in school or among her peers, where she believes identifying as such will cause her shame. These are usually in school contexts when she is among her African-American peers. In those instances, she identifies as African-American. She identifies as Ghanaian when she is in the Ghanaian community. Her shame could be attributed to the reactions she gets from her peers when they learn of her African heritage. She is confronted by their stereotypes of African as “poor” and “hungry.” Madeline believes that she is perceived to be African-American by her peers until her last name gives away her ethnic background. When her schoolmates find out she is African, they usually respond negatively by asking her “weird” questions. Madeline is self-conscious when her peers talk about her “behind her back.” Sometimes she cries and wishes she were from a background other than Ghanaian, but most of the time, she is proud of her heritage. Madeline’s parents expect her to be proud of her Ghanaian heritage and identify as Ghanaian. When they overhear her identify as African-American, they admonish her for not being proud of who she is. She admits that she is learning to disclose her ethnic background.

Madeline and her younger brother spent a year in Ghana when they were five and three years old. They were left behind after a family trip to Ghana because relatives in New York expressed concerns that she and her brother were
becoming ‘Americanized.’ They were concerned that Madeline and her brother were acquiring American slang and behavior and needed to be immersed in the Ghanaian culture. She arrived in Ghana speaking only American slang and returned to the U.S. one year later with “an African accent” and speaking only Twi. She and her brother had to attend tutoring sessions to restore their fluency in English.

Madeline’s experiences in Ghana included the difficult time she had adjusting to the hot weather in Ghana. Her complexion got darker from the heat and she lost her hair from braiding it frequently. Other difficulties she experienced were the mosquitoes which caused her to become sick and the frequent loss of power and electricity. But, she admits that there were positive experiences as well which included learning about the Ghanaian culture. Madeline feels that her family supports her as she learns to construct her ethnic, cultural, social and national identities. They want her “just to be myself and not be like other people out there. If you’re a true Ghanaian, just show it instead of just hiding it.”

Ekene’s profile

Ekene is a 1.5 generation or foreign-born Nigerian immigrant who migrated at age 12 to the U.S. She is sixteen years old and describes herself as a shy girl who hates to stand up and speak in front of people. She was soft-spoken, but outspoken, during our interviews, and admitted, “the only reason I’m
outspoken and I can be myself and think loud—is cause I’m comfortable with you, but when I’m outside, my voice will go down. You will not see me talk at all.” (FG, 2/26/08)

She identifies as Nigerian and is proud of her ethnic background. At school, people do not always know that she is Nigerian until she speaks and her accent gives away her ethnic background. She is the third child in a family of three girls and two boys. She started secondary school in Nigeria at a school where her mother worked as the school nurse. She was well known among staff and had many friends among the students because of her mother’s role in the school community. Although she migrated four years ago, Ekene misses Nigeria and her friends who are over there. She plans to go back to Nigeria to live after college.

Ekene was held back one year when she started school in the U.S. She was not happy to repeat the sixth grade and had a difficult time adjusting to school. She described her sixth grade year as sad and filled with pain. She was lonely and kept quiet most of the time. Ekene was conscious of her accented speech and did not speak much in school and this was misunderstood by her peers and teachers. She had to learn new ways of being in school. Her teachers spoke too fast for her; she did not know how to “work the locker;” and she did not “get half the assignments”. Her family did not know the difficulties she faced adjusting to school because she did not share her experiences with them. Her siblings had their own adjustment issues so she did not want to bother them with hers. Ekene did
not get any support from her peers, either, because they spoke carelessly and offensively to her. Many of her teachers were not of much help because she did not confide in them either. There were a few teachers, though, with whom she developed good relationships and they helped her with some academic problems and connected her to student groups. Ekene learned very early on to be strong in the face of the challenges she encountered with school adjustment.

Ekene has a group of friends in school with whom she sits and talks in the cafeteria. They are all Africans. She does not have a great relationship with second generation Nigerian immigrant children in her community because they are rude to her. She does not get the kind of support she expects from them.

Ekene’s family actively practices their culture and traditions. They speak both English and what she calls “Engli-Igbo”\(^{25}\)- a combination of English and Igbo\(^{26}\) words in the same sentence. She likes the fact that she can communicate with her family in another language especially in public spaces where they deliberately do not want to be understood. Her family eats Nigerian foods, listens to Nigerian music, watches Nigerian videos and wears traditional clothing occasionally. Ekene’s family does not attend a Nigerian church.

Ekene’s parents expect her to be respectful to them and the teachers in school. They also expect her to excel academically. She works hard and pushes herself to succeed. Her peers solicit her help with school and homework. She

\(^{25}\) Engli-Igbo is term used to describe the mixing up of Igbo and English in speech

\(^{26}\) Igbo is the major language spoken by the Igbo people from Eastern Nigeria.
wants to be a pediatrician and plans to return to Nigeria to practice medicine. She also loves cooking and is taking long distance culinary classes, with the support of her mother. She believes that being a pediatrician is a more stable job than being a chef.

Ekene is a very self assured young woman who knows what she wants. She does not feel pressured to conform to gender roles at home. This also includes not feeling pressured to marry from a particular ethnic group. Like the other participants, Ekene displays a certain amount of independence in forging her own identity. At several times during the interviews, she repeats the phrase, “You don’t force me to do stuff” and I inquired further as to why she kept repeating this. She assured me, “I’m really respectful. I really am rude sometimes, I really don’t care sometimes. Everybody in my house has their own characteristics. Me, I’m just me. You won’t find—everybody’s different in my house…”

These portraits show the similarities and differences between the participants’ home and school experiences and the role that these play in their ethnic identity construction. The issue of whether the girls were first, second or 1.5 generation immigrants was considered as I tried to wade through very rich data to identify the overarching themes of the study results.

**Emerging themes: Stereotypes, agency and identity**

An interpretive analysis of the interview transcripts, field notes, participant and researcher journals revealed **two** overarching themes that
characterized the experiences of West African immigrant adolescent girls as they negotiate ethnic, cultural, social and national identities while growing up in the U.S. The five themes that consistently appeared throughout the data analysis are: (a) the girls’ experiences with African-American stereotypes of Africans versus the girls’ stereotypes of African-Americans and the impact on participants’ choice of ethnic identity and (b) personal agency and the importance participants attributed to their sense of choice in their ethnic identity construction. Other themes that emerged during the data analysis were (c) the importance of family standards and expectations in relation to socio-cultural practices, choice of peers and academic achievement (d) the importance of immigrant peers for participants’ ethnic identity, and (e) the girls’ experiences with culturally-responsive pedagogy regarding the treatment of Africa in the curriculum and impact on their ethnic identity. I will explore these themes to further describe the participants’ perception of their ethnic identity and the role of home and school life in their identity construction. I have chosen actual phrases used by the participants to describe some of the themes and sub-themes.

In order to begin to understand the overall experiences of the participants, I will begin with a broad discussion of the overarching themes. These themes will be discussed at greater length as they come up in discussions of other relevant themes.
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Table 4.2: Themes and sub-themes which emerged from the study
Theme 1: The girls’ experiences with African-American stereotypes of Africans and the girls’ stereotypes of African-Americans and the impact on participants’ choice of ethnic identity

In trying to understand the participants’ ethnic identity of choice and the ways their home and school experiences help in shaping their ethnic identities, one theme that persistently emerged across my discussions with the girls was the participants’ experiences with their African-American peers regarding stereotypes about Africans and the stereotypes they, in turn, expressed about African-Americans. These stereotypes revealed tensions between the girls and their African-American peers and seemed to have influenced the ethnic identities that some of the participants chose. The girls did not attribute any of their experiences with stereotypes to their non-African-American peers.

Peer discrimination experiences among ethnically diverse youth could be troubling (Rivas-Drake & Hughes, 2008). Traore (2006) described the tension that arose between African and African-American students at a public high school. This tension was generated by the prevalence of mutual stereotyping between both groups of students. While the African-American students held strong stereotypes of Africa as a dark continent with wild animals roaming free, their African counterparts appeared to have bought into media-generated stereotypes about the lazy African-American on welfare who will not work (Traore, 2006; 2008). Gay (2000), in her argument for culturally responsive teaching points to the fact that both immigrant and native-born students of color may... encounter
prejudices, stereotyping, and racism that have negative impact on their self-esteem, mental health, and academic achievement (p.18).

I will begin by discussing the girls’ experiences with African-American stereotypes of Africans. This will be followed by the girls’ stereotypes of African-Americans and the impact that the mutual stereotyping had on the girls’ ethnic identities. As a preamble to this analysis, it is important to note that the student population of Montclair at the time of the study was 64% Black, 31% White, 3% Asian and 2% Hispanic.

There was no clear delineation between African-American and students of Black African or Black Caribbean ascent. The fact that the school had a predominantly Black student population could explain the frequency of contact between the African and African-American students. This, therefore, exposed both groups to the mutual stereotypes they experienced.

The girls’ experiences with African-American stereotypes of Africans

“You don’t look like one, so how are you African?” - Madeline

All four girls admitted that they were confronted by mostly negative stereotypes about Africans from their African-American peers. There was a persistently recurring theme in the participants’ and their peers’ statements about how Africans are supposed to “look” and it seemed that this was contrasted with an African-American look. As long as the participants did not fit the images that their peers had of Africans, they could pass as African-American. In reaction to
comments such as “You don’t look like one. So how are you African?” Madeline responds:


(FG, 2/28/08)

I wanted to understand where she thought these perceptions of Africans originated from.

Yeah, ‘cause usually what they be seeing on TV, they think that Africans just look dirty, nasty and poor, but I said, “No. Some are really beautiful.”

(FG, 2/28/08)

Yet, Madeline seemed to have also bought into the concept of a certain “look” that Africans have because she said somewhere during our interview, “I look like American, but then I have an African last name.” Madeline admitted that some of the stereotypes she experienced were of Africa as an exotic continent.

Some of them think it’s really cool, because they don’t have a friend that’s African, but they be asking me questions like, “So what do you guys do?” or “Aren’t you this?” and stuff and I tell them (FG, 2/28/08).

Yet, Madeline admitted feeling “left out” when she is among her peers and thinking “probably they might talk behind my back saying, “Oh, she’s African. She’s weird.” She did not have any proof that her classmates talked about her “behind her back” but their reactions to her ethnicity caused her to be suspicious. This, in turn, led to her reacting this way: “Sometimes I could cry, then I’ll be like, “Why am I in a Ghanaian family? Why can’t I just be an ordinary person?”

Somewhere else, Madeline said, “then they ask me all these types [of] different questions and sometimes I’m scared to answer them, because they might be like,
“Oh, she’s African” (in a derogatory tone). Madeline seemed to have internalized some of the negative stereotypes about Africans as evidenced by her wish to “be an ordinary person” rather than Ghanaian. In this case “ordinary person” could be referring to African-Americans or any group other than Africans. Her internalization of these stereotypes seemed to be source of the fear she felt about revealing her African heritage.

I’ll say I’m Ghanaian. Sometimes I like to hide because I’m scared to see what people might, you know, be like, “Eww, you’re from Africa?” But now I’m just used to it. (PI, 2/11/08)

Madeline’s choice to hide her Ghanaian heritage occurs when she is among her African-American peers and could be attributed to the stereotypes that she’s heard them express about Africans.

Amanda had also been confronted by stereotypes about the African look. It was during a class project on Africa, when Amanda tried to correct a classmate’s pronunciation of the word, “Igbo” that her classmates knew she was from a Nigerian background. Speaking of their reaction to this revelation, Amanda said:

Yeah, they have the stereotype ‘cause she [a classmate] said, “But you’re not dark.” And I said “Well, that’s the stereotype, because not all Africans are dark.” (PI, 2/11/08)

Amanda’s peer’s comment, “But you’re not dark!” when she learned of her heritage implies that African-Americans are not “dark-skinned” or “skinny” and also indicates an “othering” of Africans in contrast to African-Americans in terms of physical appearance.
Abena shared that she experiences some surprise from her peers when they learn that she is Ghanaian. Like Madeline and Amanda, she was born in the U.S. and does not “look” African. In response to how people perceive her when they meet her for the first time, she said, “Most of them are surprised when I tell them I’m an African… They’re surprised and they start asking me questions even though I’ve never really been there.” The surprise elicited by Abena’s revelation of her Ghanaian heritage could also be based on her not “looking” African.

Ekene’s experiences with stereotypes did not center on her looks as it did with the other participants. Instead she shared an experience with a male classmate who teased her about other aspects of her appearance. In this case, it was her hair, her “smell” and other “stuff” that caused her to stand out as the “other.” Ekene described her encounter with this student:

And there’s a guy that always teased me. He would make you really cry. Like you’d go home and just start crying. Like, “You have weird hair. You smell weird. You do stuff weird.” I was really sad (PI, 2/11/08)

In addition to the stereotypes about “the African look,” Amanda also described another stereotype which the other participants confirmed. It is a stereotype of Africa as a remote, backward, and mostly underdeveloped continent with wild animals running loose.

Well, when they found out [that her parents were from Nigeria], they said, “Do you see lions and tigers running across your bedroom when you’re there?” and I told them I’ve never been there before and they asked me do I want to go, and I said yes. But, also, another stereotype is how Americans display Africa on TV as they’re all poor, and they need water and stuff. I said it’s not even like that, because there’s a lot of…there’s like kings and queens in Nigeria. So, I told them they shouldn’t believe that. That’s a real big stereotype against Africa. (PI, 2/11/08)
During the group interview, Amanda reported this same stereotype about Africa. Only this time, it included questions about Africa and AIDS:

I wouldn’t say they’re negative, but like stereotypes—as in, oh, so there’s a lot of sick people there. “Do people have AIDS and HIV?” and I say, “Why would you feel that way?” They say, “Well, the TV commercials.” And I was like, “Well, no, that’s really not true. Africa’s a really beautiful place.” And I remember one of my friends was like, “So do you see lions and tigers running across your bedroom?” I was like, “Well, I’ve never been there before, so I wouldn’t know.” (FG, 2/28/08).

Amanda, like Madeline, attributed the stereotypes to media portrayals of Africans as poor and in need of basic necessities. Amanda’s peers’ comments also revealed their awareness of the media’s role in perpetrating these stereotypes. She countered their beliefs with the claim that Africa is a beautiful place and that there are kings and queens in Nigeria. The notion of the abundance of kings and queens in pre-slavery Africa was also repeated by Madeline during my interview with her. It is a notion that is popularly used by African-Americans to teach children that they have much to be proud about their African heritage. It is also a belief that helps Africans and African-Americans, at the receiving end of discrimination, counter and cope with stereotypes that they face. Amanda and Madeline chose this response to counter the negative stereotypes they faced.

Abena had also been asked questions about the perceived remoteness or distance of Africa from the U.S. The typical reaction she gets is, “how do you get from Africa to America?” To Abena, these are “funny” and “silly” questions. Ekene and Abena shared more details about stereotypes during the group interviews:
Ekene: They are so ignorant. “Do babies walk around naked?” “Do you have only tents in your house?” “Are you a princess?” [Chinwe laughs] “Oh, do they carry you all the time? Like carry you on carriages?” “Do they have corner stores? Do they have Walmart? Do they have McDonalds?” They’ll be asking—I’ll be like, “Okay, it’s more than I can take. We don’t have no mud houses, except for in the movies or like...really, I can’t even find that in my village. Mud houses, it’s like for kitchens or something. It’s so rare.

Abena: “Have you ever seen an elephant?” That’s one I heard. “No!” [exclaiming emphatically]

Ekene: Yeah, “Have you ever seen lions?” “Do you guys have a zoo?” Oh, yeah! [Chinwe laughs] “Do you see all these weird chimpanzees around your house?” I was like...I’ve never seen one!

Ekene later admitted, during the member check meeting, to feeling embarrassed at her classmate’s responses to lessons on Africa. She labeled their questions as “ignorant,” and explained that she responded to questions like, “Do they live in huts?” with “They are your ancestors, too!”

The stereotypes that the African-American students had about Africans were not limited to the examples I have shared above. Other stereotypical reactions were elicited by the participants’ foreign-sounding names. Their African-American peers had difficulty saying the names of the participants and in some cases linked these names to their perceived backwardness of Africa.

Stereotypes surrounding foreign names: “teach me how to say your name”

There is research that links Black- or foreign-sounding names to either job or housing discrimination (Carpusor & Loges, 2006; Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004) and this same attitude could possibly explain the reactions that the
participants experienced, to varying degrees, with their last names. The foreign-
name was one of the factors that attracted attention to the girls’ African heritage
and seemed to be a catalyst for some of the stereotypes already discussed above.
While Madeline was most affected by the stereotypes surrounding her Ghanaian
last name, as evidenced by her fear of the public mispronunciation of her name,
the other girls all described the difficulty that their peers and teachers had with
pronouncing their last names. These instances generally drew unwanted attention
to the participants. Madeline recounted an experience that occurred when she was
in fifth grade and how her parents had to come to school because another student
teased her about her last name. In this case, her foreign-sounding last name was
linked to the stereotype her classmate had about Africa as evidenced by the
derogatory remark, “Eww, she’s from Africa. She needs to go back where she
came from.” Madeline’s perception was that there was a link between the
student’s reaction to her name and the likelihood that her peers think of Africa as
“poor.” She explained that such incidents continued into her eighth grade.
Although she reported that the incidents with the mispronunciation of her last
name reduced as she entered high school, the memories of her fifth grade
experience have remained with her:

I remember I just moved down from the East Coast and they called my
name—my last name—and this girl was like, “Eww, she’s from Africa.
She needs to go back where she came from” …and ever since then, people
started making fun of it, ‘cause I heard it myself and it’s been like that
since eighth grade, but then as we came to high school, they got mature, so
some of them really don’t care (PI, 2/11/08).

Remembering how difficult that time was for her, Madeline continued:
I would cry and go home and I’ll be like, “Why are we Africans for?” and “All this stuff is not fair.” Then my parents had to come to the school to talk to the kids and, yeah. It was really difficult for me during that time, because people didn’t understand that—because all they think about is like, “Africa is poor so she’s [I am] probably from a poor country” (2/11/08).

Madeline shared how much it meant to her that her name be pronounced correctly. Although she was a sophomore at the time of this study, Madeline was already concerned about the mispronunciation of her name at graduation. During the member check with three of the participants (Madeline was absent), we discussed this issue with mispronunciation of names and her cousin, Abena, confirmed that Madeline was very concerned about the way her name would be pronounced at graduation and the attention she would attract. This concern was also revealed during our discussions about how she believed she was perceived by her peers in school.

Yeah, when they see me, they be like, “Oh, she’s just African-American.” But then when they be like, “So Madeline Boa...[long pause]” I’ll be like, “Yeah, that’s me.” [We both laugh] And then they’ll be like, “Whoa! I thought you was African-American. What happened to your last name?” I’ll be like, “Yep, I’m Ghanaian.” Then they ask me all these type different questions and sometimes I’m scared to answer them, because they might be like, “Oh, she’s African” (in a derogatory tone). Sometimes I tell my parents, “Can we please change our last name?” Because it’s so long and I don’t want to struggle and when I get my diploma, they’ll be like, “Madeline... [long pause]” Yeah, I don’t wanna walk across the stage and everybody’s laughing at me and they mess up my pronunciation. That’s the biggest fear I have right now is pronouncing my last name (PI, 2/11/08)

Madeline’s statements above confirm the surprise that her peers express when her last name does not match their perception of her heritage. Because she does not
“look” African, they are thrown off guard when they hear her Ghanaian last name and want to know “what happened to [her] last name.” This may appear to be a minor issue, but for a girl who is at an impressionable stage of adolescent development, it mattered enough to cause her to want a different name. Apart from having her name pronounced incorrectly during the graduation ceremony, Madeline said she was conscious of her name being called out by the teacher in class. Her consciousness of the pronunciation of her name probably originated from the negative reactions her peers have to her last name.

As soon as they say Madeline, I just raise my hand. And I was like, just call me Madeline B. Just call me that. And they be like, “What’s your last name?” And I be like, “Oh no. I don’t wanna explain.” But some people think it’s so cool, but sometimes I be like, “No. I just don’t wanna explain my last name” (PI, 2/11/08).

The other girls also experienced problems with the pronunciation of their names, but unlike Madeline, they seemed to be less affected by it. Speaking about her last name, Amanda said, “It’s pronounced Layole, but for some reason, people pronounce it as Loyola.” During the group interview she further explained, “I guess there’s an American last name as Loyola, so they don’t assume that it’s African…” Amanda did not seem to mind that people pronounced her last name incorrectly. Instead she appeared to understand why they had difficulty with it: “To me, it seems humorous to me sometimes, because compared to other people’s last names it doesn’t seem hard, but usually I don’t get mad with it, because I understand.”

27 -Like all participants’ first names in this study, Amanda’s last name is a pseudonym
28 -Pseudonym for the mispronunciation of Amanda’s last name
Abena’s attitude was similar to Amanda’s: They call me “Abena,”[the “e” is pronounced like the “e” in eagle] but my name is “Abena”[ the “e” should be pronounced like the “e” in “egg”] She continued, “And then the biggest one is my last name. I have to tell them that the ‘K’ is silent, so it’s “Boakye [pronounced Boachi].” So three weeks or a month or something, they’ll know how to say it.”

During our member check meeting, Abena confirmed that although she had been at Montclair for two years, there were still some of her peers who could not pronounce her name in spite of what she feels is its simplicity. Abena has decided to treat this situation as one she has to get used to. I decided to share with Abena that my children also have the same experience with their last name and that they are apprehensive at the beginning of every school year about the way their teachers and classmates will pronounce their names.

Like the other participants, Ekene experienced problems with the pronunciation of her name. During the member check meeting, she and Abena shared their experiences with being teased because of their names, but it did not seem to bother them to the extent that it did Madeline. In Ekene’s case, it was the perceived negative reaction of her peers and teachers to her accented speech that affected her more.

*Stereotypes surrounding accented speech*

In addition to their foreign names, the participants’ accent was another aspect of their identity that attracted attention to their African heritage and might
have led to the stereotypes they faced as Africans. I chose to include the issue of accented speech under the discussions on stereotypes because of the possible judgments that Ekene believed would be passed on her if she spoke out in school. She chose to remain quiet as a result. Nguyen (1993) confirms that immigrants to the U.S. are the object of national prejudice because of their accented speech or what is perceived to be “unintelligible English” (p. 1325). According to Nguyen (1993), it is the accent that attracts attention to immigrants and ultimately leads to accent discrimination. Brennan & Brennan (1981) set out to answer the question, “Do listeners practice social judgments that correspond to their perceptions of the accentedness of a speaker” (p. 207)? Their research examined the relationship between the degree of accent with which Mexican-Americans spoke English and the judgments the listeners had towards the speakers. They discovered that the presence of accented speech was linked to status within the larger society, with a high level of accentedness signifying a lower social status or what Munro, Derwing & Sato (2006) call “negative social evaluation.” Munro et al. (2006) confirm that minority accents are often perceived to be signs of ignorance while Lippi-Green (1997) argues that the media reinforce these views by associating negative stereotypes with speakers whose speech patterns are outside the “norm.” Ekene repeatedly told me during this study that she was quiet in school and it appears her quietness could be partly attributed to her not wanting to speak because of her accent. Although she did not make any direct attribution of her silence to any stereotypes she experienced with her peers, there may have been
covert reactions to her accented speech that made her think it was something to be ashamed of. In fact, her assumption that she would be viewed as talking “differently” alludes to a norm or a standard by which every speech is judged. By internalizing the perception that her accented speech was being measured against a norm, Ekene could be said to have chosen silence as a coping mechanism.

My teacher had problems with me, because I don’t really talk, ‘cause when I talk they might say that, “Oh, she talks differently.” I really didn’t feel like talking, ‘cause everyone spoke differently and the teacher, he speaks—like, I was used to people talking a little bit slower than they are—but he was so sharp. He spoke a lot of stuff. I really didn’t understand what he was saying ‘cause he was speaking so fast. (PI, 2/11/08)

The consequences of her not speaking were many:

…and sometimes, I really didn’t get half the assignments. Like, if you take your book home, you do the vocabulary. I did my vocabulary from [the] dictionary, and they were like, “No, you’re supposed to do it different.” So it was different for me, because I was like, “Well, how am I supposed to do it?” I didn’t ask questions. I just went home with my big-ass book [Ekene laughs nervously]. I carried a lot of books. I didn’t know how to work the locker. So I was just carrying everything. I was so stressed. I was angry. My siblings didn’t know what I was going through. They have their own part of the story, but mine was worse, ‘cause I was in middle school and it’s not fun. People make fun of you, torment you. I really didn’t have that many friends (PI, 2/11/08).

The only other participant to mention having an issue with her accent was Abena. Of her peers she said, “Like sometimes they’ll say I have an accent, the students will.” There was nothing in her story to indicate that she had ever experienced any negative consequences for having an accent. It is possible that Abena’s accent could be linked to her fluency in Twi. Unlike the other two second-generation immigrants, Amanda and Madeline, Abena was the only one
fluent in her ethnic language. Studies like Flege, Munro & Mackay (1995) suggest a link between fluency in an ethnic language and speaking English with a noticeable accent.

Not all the stereotypes that the African-American students had of Africans were negative. The same peers, who had certain negative stereotypes of the participants because of their African heritage, expected them to be successful in school because of the same heritage. In the exchange between Abena and Ekene below, we see that not all the stereotypes they encountered in school were negative. Their classmates expected to get homework help from them because, as they tell the participants, “You’re all smart.”

**Abena:** And they think because I’m African, I’m smart. I am smart, but they just [say], “Abena, did you do that part [of the schoolwork]?” I mean, we just learned this, why do you expect me to know before you [do], you know?


The stereotyping that occurred with the participants’ experiences was not one-sided. The mutual stereotyping that occurred among both groups of students was evident throughout the interview, particularly during the participants’ descriptions of their choice of ethnic identity. At the same time that they were trying to establish themselves as victims of negative stereotyping at the hands of their African-American peers, they were guilty of perpetrating the same attitudes. An examination of the role that the girls’ families played in their ethnic identity construction revealed that their families had equally strong stereotypes about
African-Americans. The data revealed that the participants’ choice of ethnic identities had also been impacted by the mutual stereotyping that was occurring between them and their African-American peers. That is, they chose identities that were either in opposition to what they perceived an African-American identity to be, in opposition to stereotypical perceptions of Africa and Africans, or they chose to identify strongly with their African heritage in resistance to the negative stereotypes with which they were bombarded. This will be addressed in detail after the following discussion on African stereotypes of African-Americans.

*The girls’ stereotypes of African-Americans*

“I am proud to be an African ‘cause I know I have a culture; you don’t.” - Ekene

Traore (2002) argued that the images that Africans have of African-Americans are from media depictions of African-Americans and vice-versa. The media’s role in covertly or overtly reinforcing and sustaining the mutual stereotypes that both groups have of each other was made apparent at various times during the interviews. The girls’ families were also another likely source of the stereotypes about African-Americans. According to Traore (2008), the media’s stereotypical depictions of Africans and African-Americans are “passively or outwardly sanctioned by … school environment and home settings” (p.11).

During our discussions on what ethnic identity Ekene chooses, she revealed a stereotype she held about African-Americans. She expressed surprise
at the fact that her African-American peers did not identify as African or
“appreciate their culture.” She assumed that there was a common knowledge
among her African-American peers that all Black people in the U.S. are of
African ascent and should identify as Africans. Instead she described her African-
American peers as “prejudiced” and “racist” when they expressed disdain for her
African heritage. Concerning the discrimination she experienced, Ekene admitted:

I’ll see some black people, I’ll think they are Africans and they can
understand you, but they’re really prejudiced and racists, like [when you]
come from Nigeria, they’ll be like, “Oh, you’re African!”[in a derogatory
tone] and I’ll say, “What are you? You are African, because your
ancestors are.” But I don’t think they understand the reason, like they
don’t appreciate their culture and they’re really prejudiced against us. (PI, 2/11/08)

Somewhere else, Ekene repeated the same sentiments:

Because that’s just the way they are… They always go and be prejudiced.
Even at this school, they look at you “Oh, you are African,” and I say,
“Yeah so are you.” (PI, 2/11/08)

Ekene’s comments reveal a source of tension between African immigrants and
African-Americans in the U.S. in general. These tensions arise from the
assumption that African-Americans are prejudiced against African immigrants
and vice versa. It seemed that the point she was trying to make was that she
believed Black people in the U.S. should understand that they are also of African
ascent and should form alliances with recent African immigrants. Ekene’s
stereotypes of African-Americans went beyond her claims that they did not
appreciate their culture to include claims that they are monolingual and do not
have a culture, in comparison to Africans like her who are fluent in another language and who do have a culture.

I am proud to be an African ‘cause I know I have a culture; you don’t. You just know English. I can curse you out in my language and you won’t hear a word I said.” (PI, 2/11/08)

The erroneous claim that African-Americans do not have a culture is significant because it indicates that Ekene’s belief that African-Americans, post-displacement due to slavery, did not construct a new culture that was unique to their experiences in the U.S. Her statements also do not take into account the residual effect of various African cultures on the African-American experience.

Amanda echoed Ekene’s sentiments when she shared the pride she feels about her Nigerian heritage. She felt she had an “advantage” in that she could speak a language other than English and that her family practiced customs and traditions that are different from those practiced in the U.S. During the group interview, she used words like “special” and “extraordinary” to describe how she feels about her Nigerian roots and the fact that she has “a background.” Again the notion of having “a background” as a person of West African ascent, appeared to be a covert comparison to African-Americans who, according to Ekene, do not have a culture or background.

Amanda’s comments during our discussions about her ethnic identity also revealed a covert stereotype that her family may have about Americans in general. She did not specify whether her parents made a distinction between Americans and African-Americans. This stereotype was revealed when she described her
family’s support of her decision to identify partially as an African and an American.

…they just expect me to act a certain way. Not to act as—I don’t know how to explain it. They want me to act as a Nigerian girl, but also as a well-raised American girl at the same time. (PI, 2/11/08)

I asked her to explain how a Nigerian girl acts:

Nigerian girls, well, they go to church, they praise God. They obey their parents. They greet their parents…And they—they’re respectful. They know the right thing to say in certain situations (PI, 2/11/08).

Amanda’s use of the phrase “well-raised” implies that there are some “negative” values and behaviors associated with being American. Therefore, her parents are okay with her identifying as American as long as she does not acquire any negative aspects of that identity.

Further discussions about the girls’ choice of ethnic identities and how they felt about themselves revealed more stereotypes about their African-American peers and African-Americans in general. Although she had earlier explained why she sometimes hid her African background, Madeline claimed she was proud of her heritage, a claim that she believed her African-American peers could not make:

“because there’s more things I can learn instead of just—most African-Americans, they don’t have a lot of stories they can [tell]. My parents’ grandparents were kings and queens during those times. Other people, they’ll be like, “Oh, I had that in my family.” They were just slaves, but I can say they [Ghana] have gold and all that stuff.”

Although she said elsewhere that she chose to identify as Ghanaian or African-American, depending on the context, she was now contrasting the ethnic
pride she feels as a Ghanaian to African-Americans whom she erroneously described as not having “a lot of stories to tell.” This statement indicates that she, also, like Ekene and Amanda, has bought into the stereotype that African-Americans have lost a connection to the history they had pre-slavery. Therefore, she was implying that they do not have much to be proud of. By referring to her African-American peers’ ancestors as “just slaves,” Madeline revealed a disturbing and distorted notion of African-Americans as having no other identity other than the one that defined them during four centuries of slavery. Yet, it is interesting that this is the same group she chooses to identify with when a Ghanaian identity seems to be a less attractive option.

In describing how they feel about their ethnic heritage, the participants were mostly proud that they are “from somewhere,” as Abena described it. When I asked her how she felt about her Ghanaian heritage, she answered:

Good. I’m proud of my heritage because most people, they don’t know where they’re from…I’m from somewhere(PI, 2/11/08).

In a journal entry, Abena repeated the same sentiments about being from “somewhere”:

Thank you so much for letting me take part in your study. It has made me begin to ask myself, “Who am I? An African-American or Ghanaian?” But like I told you at sometime I consider myself a Ghanaian, because I am happy to have a background, to actually be from somewhere…” (PJ, 02/26/08)

The recurring stereotype of African-Americans as having no known roots is present in Abena’s comments just as it was with Madeline’s and Amanda’s. By “most people” who “don’t know where they’re from,” Abena is presumably
referring to African-Americans. As was the case with Madeline, there’s a sub-text of an oppositional identity that wants to distance itself from African-Americans or maintain some advantage over African-Americans. The implication is that African-Americans, who were displaced because of slavery, cannot trace their African roots the same way African immigrants can. I posit that there’s a likelihood that by claiming to have roots, unlike their African-American peers, the participants are choosing to maintain an “advantage,” (Amanda’s terminology), or an edge over their African-American counterparts. This could be interpreted as a defensive posture against the stereotypes they have confronted about their heritage. Since most of the participants and their peers acknowledged the role of the media in creating these stereotypes about Africans and African-Americans, the media may be playing a very critical role in creating and maintaining stereotypes about Africans and African-Americans. In other words, the media may have succeeded in pitting these two groups against each other by creating a racial hierarchy. It is this hierarchy that someone like Madeline recognizes and uses to her advantage when she navigates between an African and an African-American identity.

Traore (2008) argued that African stereotypes about African-Americans could be coming partly from subtle media messages about African Americans and partly from pre- and post-migration misconceptions and stereotypes about African-Americans which African immigrants bring with them. Perhaps the girls are merely repeating sentiments they have heard in their families or communities.
I will address the issue of families as a source of stereotypes when I discuss the findings on participant’s home experiences, although I will mention here that discussions surrounding the issue of marriage and sleepovers revealed family stereotypes about African-Americans such as “they are bad…they can take you anywhere” and “I don’t want anything bad to happen to you.” These were the responses Madeline got when she asked to sleepover with her friends. Another stereotype surfaced during discussions about marriage. Madeline’s parents cautioned her about marrying “certain” African-Americans because they are “bad” and “they beat their wives.” In this last example, the parents attributed the source of this stereotype to the media.

There were many other instances during the interviews when the participants either made stereotypical comments about their African-American peers or repeated stereotypical comments that their families had made. These instances of mutual stereotyping will be addressed as they arise during further discussions of study findings.

**Summary: the impact of mutual stereotyping on participants’ ethnic identities**

The participants’ perception of how they are perceived by their African-American peers, their own stereotypes about African-Americans, and how this impacts their sense of ethnic identity is relevant to this study. I wanted to understand if the way they believe they are perceived by African-Americans, and
how they themselves perceive African-Americans, had any impact on the participants’ choice of ethnic identity. For example, if the girls’ were perceived by others as being African, and if the reactions accompanying these perceptions were negative, did that determine how they chose to identify subsequently? Did they internalize these negative stereotypes or did they choose African identities in opposition to the negative stereotypes? Or if the girls had negative perceptions of African-Americans, did they choose an African identity in opposition to an African-American identity?

The above analysis of the data revealed the theme of African-American stereotypes of Africans and African stereotypes of African-Americans and how this might impact the way the girls choose to identify. The data indicated that the girls were usually perceived by their peers and teachers to be African-Americans when their linguistic proficiency and physical appearances did not match stereotypes of how an African should “look” or “sound.” Peer perceptions of how they should look include, “poor,” “hungry,” and “dark” as depicted by the media. Except for Ekene, the only participant born outside of the U.S., and whose accent tended to give away her ethnicity, all the other girls were usually perceived to be African-American because they did not “look” like Africans. The data revealed marked differences in the ways the girls chose to identify.

I was curious to know how Madeline identified at those times when she hides her Ghanaian heritage and she responded that she identified as African-American:
Because people look at me like an African-American, but then when they found out, like, “You’re last name is weird. Where are you from?” Then I just say I’m African. I’m Ghanaian… When I’m usually in a Ghanaian community I can fit myself in, but when there’s a variety of African-Americans, I just be like, “Oh, I’m an African-American,” instead of I’m just an ordinary Ghanaian. (PI, 2/11/08)

During the group interviews, I asked whether people’s reactions to their African heritage caused the girls not to feel proud of their heritage and Madeline struggled to put her feelings into words.

Sometimes, I feel like I don’t want to be an African or Ghanaian at all. I just want to be just a regular person instead of just being a Ghanaian. (FG, 2/28/08)

Madeline repeatedly used the words “ordinary person” and “regular person” to describe the alternative to being Ghanaian. Because she had told me during the personal interview that she sometimes identified as African-American instead of Ghanaian, I knew that by “ordinary person” and “regular person,” she meant African-American. Madeline’s switching of ethnic identities is significant because she appeared to understand when it was favorable for her to identify as African-American. Her choice of an African-American over an African identity appears to be contextual and implies a, perhaps, not often discussed racial and ethnic hierarchy in the U.S between African-Americans and African immigrants.

Madeline seemed to have picked up on this “invisible” or unspoken hierarchical structure which may place African-Americans above Africans in the U.S. This means that there may be contexts in which choosing one identity over the other may privilege the person who is making the choice. In Madeline’s case, the African is the “other” with whom she does not want to associate in some contexts.
By choosing to hide her Ghanaian heritage in certain contexts, it could be that Madeline’s claim to be African-American, at those times, is in opposition to the stereotypical comments she has heard her peers express about Africans. Her claim to an African-American identity could also be a result of internalization of the stereotypes she has heard about Africa. Her use of the word, “ordinary” to qualify the word, “Ghanaian” in the above statement is remarkable because it reveals how she feels about being Ghanaian in the contexts where she identifies as African-American. Her peers’ stereotypical comments about Africans seemed to have an influence on her use of the word “ordinary” to describe being a Ghanaian.

Unlike the other three participants, Amanda was the only participant who claimed to be both Nigerian and American. She said:

I partially think of myself as Nigerian…and also as an American. So I think when people meet me for the first time, they categorize—they put me in the category as an American. (PI, 2/11/08)

Because Amanda is of Black African ascent and could be perceived as African-American because of her physical appearance, I concluded that her comment that people “put [her] in the category of American” when they meet her for the first time referred to her being mistaken for an African-American. Amanda reported that she did not hesitate to reveal her Nigerian identity in class even though she could have continued to let her peers think she was African-American. This suggests that she is proud of her Nigerian heritage and is not afraid to reveal it in spite of the negative images her peers have associated with that heritage.

Although Amanda chose to identify as both Nigerian and American because she
wanted to acknowledge both aspects of her identity, it appears that her choice of
an American rather than African-American identity is a deliberate one. Others’
initial perception of her as an African-American and the stereotypes she may have
associated with that identity may play a role in her decision to claim an American
rather than an African-American identity. I would also like to point out here that
Amanda repeatedly said “my parents are from Nigeria” during the personal and
group interviews. I believe this is indicative of how she sees her self. She makes
sure to clarify that it is her parents, and not she, who are from Nigeria. I would
like to point out here that throughout the interviews, Amanda consistently referred
to her American rather than African-American identity. I asked her to explain
why she claimed to be both Nigerian and American, and she explained:

    I think I won’t just say that I’m an American, because my parents are from
Nigeria, but at the same time we use Nigerian customs and traditions, so I
won’t just claim myself as a Nigerian also, because we do American
customs and traditions also. (PI, 2/11/08)

Unlike Abena and Madeline who were also born in the U.S. to West African
immigrants, and who could also have claimed to be both Ghanaian and American,
but did not, Amanda said she wanted to acknowledge both aspects of her heritage.
She thought that identifying as Nigerian alone would mean denying her U.S.
citizenship. The above statement does not indicate that she had any stereotypes
about African-Americans that caused her to choose an American identity.
Although Amanda had also been confronted by stereotypes about Africans, she
did not indicate that it affected her identification with her Nigerian heritage,
although it could be part of the reason she claims an American identity as well.
Abena clearly defined herself as Ghanaian by virtue of being born to Ghanaian immigrants, but her choice of ethnic identity did not appear to be impacted by any negative comments made by her peers. Instead, she made comments such as “I’m proud of my heritage because most people, they don’t know where they’re from…I’m from somewhere.” In a journal entry, she commented, “I consider myself a Ghanaian, because I am happy to have a background, to actually be from somewhere…” Such comments suggest an “othering” of, possibly, African-Americans who “don’t’ know where they’re from” It seems that it was her own stereotypes of African-Americans that impacted her decision to identify as Ghanaian. Ekene was the only participant not born in the U.S., yet her choice of one identity- Nigerian- was similar to Abena’s choice of one identity- Ghanaian. She did not appear to have a stronger ethnic identity than Abena, who was born in the U.S. and who was the only other participant to strongly identify with her parents’ ethnic background. So age at immigrating or immigrant generation status did not appear to have played a role in how the participants chose to identify. Ekene’s choice of a Nigerian and African identity appeared to be in opposition to her perceptions of an African-American identity which she claims is lacking in culture and indigenous language. By emphasizing what she believed to be the advantage she has over her African-American peers, I believe her choice of an African identity may be in resistance to the discrimination and stereotypes she has encountered. Compared to the other girls, Ekene appeared to have been affected most by her African-American peers’
stereotypes of Africans, hence her resistance to identifying as anything other than Nigerian and African.

In general, most of the participants’ responses revealed that there was an “othering” of both African-Americans and Africans by the respective groups. It appears that the participants’ African-American peers have picked up on the negative stereotypes that exist about Africans and may disassociate themselves from that image by distancing themselves from Africa. Hence, reactions like, “Eww, you’re from Africa?” are indicative of a lack of knowledge of their shared ancestry with their African peers. The participants themselves either tried to disassociate themselves from an African-American identity, favor an African-American identity in some contexts or embrace both an African and an African-American identity. While Ekene appeared to choose a Nigerian identity both as a reactionary response to the stereotypes about Africa and also in opposition to what she believed about African-Americans not having a culture and a native language, Madeline had acquired the ability to switch identities when it favored her. Amanda claimed an American, rather than an African-American identity, as well as her Nigerian identity as long as she heeded her parents’ advice and chose the “positive” aspects of being American.

In addition to the mutual stereotyping between the participants and their African-American peers, another overarching theme that appeared throughout the data was personal agency and the importance participants attributed to their sense of agency in their ethnic identity construction. At various points during the
interviews, the participants wanted to establish that they had minds of their own. They seemed to exhibit, through their agency, an understanding of the role that they themselves were playing in the construction of their ethnic identities through the socio-cultural practices they chose to adopt.

**Theme 2: Personal agency and the importance participants attributed to their sense of choice in their ethnic identity construction**

“I’m never pressured [to do] something that I don’t want to do”-Amanda

“My mom doesn’t force me. You don’t force me to do stuff”-Ekene

Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain (1998) theorize that people across divergent worlds are “engaged in similar identity-making processes” (p.3), because they use cultural resources around them to construct their identities. These identities, they argue, “are possibilities for mediating agency (p.4). Holland et al. (1998) describe personal or individual agency as the power that people possess to act purposely and reflectively in situations where they or others may consider alternative courses of action. In this study, I use the term personal agency to describe the participants’ responses to the ways home and school experiences have sought to shape their identities. The term reflects the girls’ conscious and deliberate decisions to choose who they want to be in the socio-cultural contexts in which they have found themselves. Therefore, as they are confronted by family and school expectations to define themselves in a particular way, the girls have shown that they have their own voice. Bakhtin (1981) argues that finding one’s voice is necessary for agency and examples of the girls’ finding
their voices include their use of phrases like, “I choose to,” “I feel that’s right,” and “You don’t force me…,” and “I decide…” As much as the girls described how their home and school experiences helped shape who they were, they were able to differentiate between, not only their family values and peer values, but also between parental expectations and their sense of who they want to be. Holland et al. (1998) refer to this position as a “space of authoring,” (p.169) a term that explains the futility of a simplistic notion of transferable identities or, in the case of this study, a simplistic notion that the participants’ families and their communities could possibly reproduce their identities in these girls. To varying degrees, the girls were similar in maintaining authorship in certain aspects of their identity. Therefore, no two of the participants had the exact same ethnic identity, even when their immigrant backgrounds appeared to be similar.

During the personal interviews, Madeline and I discussed peer pressure and peer expectations to conform because I wanted to understand if she experienced conflict between parental and peer expectations. One of the areas she had experienced such conflict was with the issue of dating. Her friends were allowed to date and they did not think it was “cool” that Madeline could not. It did not appear that her friends’ perception of her as not being “cool” caused her to want to conform to their expectations. Instead she was able to stand by her parents’ expectations and values. Madeline explained,” I’m just laidback. Because my parents taught me to just settle yourself and just wait ‘till the right time. And I feel that that’s right.”
Usually, I’m talking to my friends and they be like, “My mom, she don’t care if I have a boyfriend or not. It’s just cool to have one.” And I be like, “My parents don’t accept that because they think I’m too young and I need to focus on my school.” And then my friends be like, “Oh, that’s wack. You should just hang around with boys. They’re so fun.” And I’ll be like, “No, that’s not the right thing.” When the time is right, then I’ll decide if I…yeah. Sometimes I feel pressure, like my friends think that since I don’t have a boyfriend, I’m not really cool (FG, 2/28/08).

Madeline exhibits personal agency in her choice to wait “till the right time” to date, not only because of her parents’ expectations, but because she feels it’s “the right thing” to do. Although her parents accept the fact that attraction to the opposite sex is a natural part of adolescence, but caution against getting intimate, Madeline’s stance is, “So I’m just to myself. I choose [not to date].” In this case, her decision is guided by her family values as well as her own sense of what is right for her. She later described other ways that she displays personal agency in her choice of peers. In describing the role that her teachers, her cousin, Abena, and her immigrant peers played in her school experience, Madeline portrayed herself as a young woman who knows the importance of making personal choices about the right company to keep.

My teachers [are] the one[s] that I’m relying [on] right now and Abena, my cousin, herself and my other friends. Other than that, I really don’t get much too close to the other people that I think that won’t show me the right path (FG, 2/28/08).

Somewhere else she said, “I just hang around with who I feel comfortable with.”

Amanda also echoed sentiments similar to Madeline’s. Her response to the question about peer pressure and conflict between parental and peer expectations revealed that she purposefully chose friends who had the same values as she and
her family. She assured me that she did not give in to peer expectations on dating, “I’m never pressured for something that I don’t want to do.” Like Madeline, Amanda also exhibits personal agency in her decision not to be influenced by her peers who are allowed to date. Her academic work is priority at the moment.

Yeah, because I haven’t thought—I mean, right now, the fact that I’m going to Montclair Preparatory, I want to sit down and be able to focus on my studies. It’s [dating] not something right now that I’m concerned about. I’m concerned about my studies (PI, 2/11/08).

Another area where Amanda displays personal agency is in defense of her decision to have a group of ethnically diverse friends. Amanda maintained that “it doesn’t matter where they’re from. It just matters who they are” She did not feel pressured to form friendships with only her immigrant peers. Also, during our discussions about respect for adult authority, Amanda confessed that she was aware of the influence her friends were having on her with regards to the disrespect they have for their parents. She acts on this awareness by purposefully choosing to “pay close attention” to the moments when she is tempted to be disrespectful because she does not “want to come off [as being] disrespectful.” On the question of whether she was expected to marry from within her parents’ ethnic group, Amanda established the fact that the ultimate decision on who she chooses to marry will be hers:

It’s my decision, but I don’t think—it wouldn’t matter if they’re white, black, African, or Asian. I don’t think it matters the race as long as I find someone that I’ll love and he loves me, it’ll be okay (PI, 2/11/08).

Like Madeline and Amanda, Ekene also displayed agency in her response to family or peer expectations. She indicated that it was her decision “to marry
[from her] tribe when the time comes. Even though she knew that her father would prefer that she marry a Nigerian, her decision to do so was personal. She did not want to deal with conforming to a new set of cultural expectations by marrying outside her ethnic group. Ekene repeatedly used the phrase, “You don’t force me to do stuff” throughout the interview. She used this phrase when we discussed gender expectations, eating ethnic foods, and dressing in ethnic clothing. Ekene also showed some agency in our discussions surrounding academics. She attributed her reasons for choosing medicine, rather than culinary training, as a future career, to the fact that the latter “is not always going to give you a job.” According to her, “to get a good education is really good cause you need something to fall back on.” This could be a decision Ekene has reached all by herself. It is possible that this decision has been somewhat influenced by her parental expectations for academic success. Unlike Madeline whose parents decided to send to Ghana to live for a year, Ekene said it was her personal choice to return to Nigeria to live. She called it her “ultimate goal” to return to Nigeria where she already has well-established relationships. Lastly, Ekene made a personal choice to not conform to her peers’ behaviors as a recent immigrant trying to fit in. When she “started learning all the bad stuff that they used to do and try and fit in,” she cautioned herself to “Just drop it, because you are not going to fit in.” Her coming to this self-realization revealed what I thought was unexpected wisdom for her age.
Abena did not display personal agency to the same extent that the other participants did. Instead, it appeared that she tended to agree with most of her parental expectations and did not show much resistance. When we discussed her mother’s expectations that she learn to cook and keep the home as preparation for marriage, Abena’s response was “I don’t really have anything to say. I just do whatever she asks me to do.” This was also repeated during our discussions of her family’s academic expectations. Her indication that she was expected to be doctor led to my asking her, “So you’re saying that it may be possible that you’ll kind of pursue a career that your parents want?” and her response was, “Kind of…I already know she[my mother] wants me to be a doctor.” Knowing that her mother wants her to be a doctor seemed to be the deciding factor for Abena’s future career. At the conclusion of the study I asked all the participants if they agreed with their parents’ expectations of who they should be and Abena’s response was, “Mmhmm. Anything they expect me to do like, yeah, that’s how I am.” In contrast to Ekene who seemed to resist being told what to do, Abena showed the least resistance out of all the participants.

Summary: the impact of personal agency on participants’ ethnic identities

All the participants, except Abena, showed agency in their negotiation of socio-cultural and ethnic identities. Amanda, Madeline and Ekene used phrases like, “I choose to…,” “I am never pressured…” and “You can’t force me…” to indicate that were able to think for themselves at the same time that they were
willing to respect for their parents’ authority. Abena seemed to go along with her parents’ expectations without much resistance. Yet, though the three participants repeatedly showed some agency, it is possible that they were not aware of where their parents’ expectations ended and where their agency began. There were other instances during the interviews when the participants either exhibited agency through comments regarding parental or peer expectations. These will be addressed as they arise during further discussions of the study findings.

In addition to the two overarching themes of this study, (1) the girls’ experiences with African-American stereotypes of Africans versus the girls’ stereotypes of African-Americans and the impact on participants’ choice of ethnic identity, and (2) personal agency and the importance participants attributed to their sense of choice in their ethnic identity construction, other themes emerged that capture the home and school experiences of the participants and the role that these play in their ethnic identity construction. These were: the importance of family standards and expectations in relation to socio-cultural practices, choice of peers and academic achievement; the importance of immigrant peers for participants’ ethnic identity; and the girls’ experience with culturally-responsive pedagogy regarding the treatment of Africa in the curriculum and impact on ethnic identity.
Theme 3: The importance of family standards and expectations in relation to socio-cultural practices, choice of peers and academic achievement

Immigrant family ethnic socialization has been identified as the primary influence of ethnic identity, and the roles of both parental child-rearing style and parental cultural socialization in the identity and adaptation of immigrant youth have been addressed by researchers like Rosenthal & Feldman (1992). Family ethnic socialization includes cultural values, attitudes and ethnic practices, like food, language, participation in ethnic associations, etc. (Quintana, Castaneda-English, & Ybarra, 1999). Analysis of the data reveals that the participants’ families are strategic in ensuring that they are passing down socio-cultural expectations to their children. These include ethnic practices, involvement in the ethnic community, standards and expectations about respect for adult authority, dating, marriage, choice of peers and finally, academic achievement. The data also reveals tensions between the parents and the girls in the negotiation of socio-cultural practices and expectations. Although the parents are intent on connecting the girls to their ethnic heritage, the girls appear to be engaged in negotiating which aspects of their African identity they want to maintain.

Sabatier (2008) acknowledges the tensions that occur when parents who have migrated to improve their life and that of their child, “try to adapt by seeking a balance between the need for cultural and self-continuity… and the need to adapt to the new environmental practical demands...” (p.189). It appears from the data that the primary reason behind the families’ efforts to maintain socio-cultural
practices is to ensure, not only cultural continuity, but that their children stay adopt the family ethnic identity. I would like to first address this as a likely motivation for the families’ maintenance of ethnic and socio-cultural practices.

*Family expectations for ethnic identity and socio-cultural continuity as the primary reason for ethnic and socio-cultural practices*

The data reveals that most of the participants believe that their parents’ expect significant allegiance to the family ethnic identity. It appeared that the parents wanted the girls to choose an African identity, sometimes in opposition to an “American or African-American” identity. The participants describe, not only, their parents’ efforts at maintaining ethnic ties to the families’ national origins, but also their expectations that the family ethnic identification will be passed down to future generations. The girls, on their own part, want to maintain some agency in their choice of ethnic identity. They understand that their parents intend to pass on an African identity, and while the girls choose certain aspects of this identity, they exercise some agency in constructing their own ethnic identities. The ensuing tension is described below and captures the tension between the participants’ struggles to define who they want to be and their parents’ expectations.

Abena and Madeline share similar experiences in how their families expect them to identify. Abena’s family expects her to identify as Ghanaian and she shows little resistance by choosing a Ghanaian identity. Throughout the study, Abena is consistent in her choice of a Ghanaian identity. Madeline indicates that
her family also expects her to identify as Ghanaian and are surprised when they overhear her identify as African-American. Their response is, “Why are you scared to tell them that you’re Ghanaian? Just be proud of who you are.”

Madeline explains, “Well, I’m trying to learn to confront to [sic] people that I’m really Ghanaian instead of being an African-American.” This response demonstrates a tension occurring as a result of Madeline’s decision to switch identities and her parents’ expectations that she proudly identify with her Ghanaian heritage. Madeline’s earlier description of how she switches identities is confirmed here because it is apparent that her parents have witnessed this situation and have not been pleased with her. Her responses during the group interview also confirm the way her family expects her to identify.

—they just care about the actions I show, just to be myself and not be like other people out there. If you’re a true Ghanaian, just show it instead of just hiding it. (FG, 2/26/08)

It is not very clear who the “other people out there” refers to, but it could be Ghanaians who choose other to identify otherwise. Her parents’ statement implies that in comparison to being “like other people out there,” being “a true Ghanaian” means publicly identifying as such.

As the only foreign-born participant, I expected minimal tension between Ekene and her family with regards to her ethnic identity. Since she migrated at age twelve, my assumption was that she would already be well-grounded in her ethnicity by the time she arrived in the U.S. Ekene confirmed my assumptions by identifying as Nigerian, yet my interview with her reveals moments of tension
between her and her parents with regards to ethnic identification. In one instance, she balks at their expectation that she dress in native clothing for church and social gatherings. She admits that although she loves Nigeria, she does not necessarily want to wear Nigerian clothing. Her school experiences with discrimination, and stereotypes about Africa and the impact that this had on her school adjustment, may have played a role in her resistance to wearing native clothing.

I like my nationality. I like my country ‘Cause coming here, when I was in school, I really did not appreciate it. I did not like all those parties [where] you gotta dress up… and tie all the robes… you go to church… things like that…I was so annoyed with it. You don’t force people to do what they don’t want to do. I was forced, like, literally to wear those… It was annoying. You’ll be like, “I just want to wear something different” They’re like, “Well, everybody is doing this.” I don’t wanna be like everybody. That’s me. I do not like to be like everybody else. I wanna stand out…(PI, 2/11/08).

Her parents’ expectations that she dress in Nigerian clothing does not seem unreasonable since “everyone is doing this,” but Ekene resists their attempts to get her to attend social gatherings dressed in native clothing. She exhibits some personal agency in her comments about not wanting to be like everyone else and in her desire to be herself in spite of her parents’ expectations. Ekene also reports some tension with her mother who is impatient when she learns that there are some aspects of the culture that Ekene does not know. She expects Ekene to show the same dedication to learning about her culture as she does for other things that are of interest to her: “My mom will be like, ‘(sighs) what do you mean you don’t know. You learn other things that you like…””
Amanda’s parents are a little more flexible about which ethnic identity label she chooses. Like her, Amanda claims that her parents identify as Nigerian and American. Speaking of her parents, Amanda says, “…even though they were born in Nigeria, they claim [to be] both Nigerian and American.” This may explain why Amanda is comfortable with identifying as both American and Nigerian. Although her family acknowledges their Nigerian heritage and U.S. citizenship, their efforts at maintaining ethnic practices and connection to the ethnic community reveal their intentions of preserving their African identity. Amanda’s earlier statement that “… they just expect me to act a certain way…they want me to act as a Nigerian girl, but also as a well-raised American girl at the same time” speaks to her parents’ acknowledgement of her dual identities, even while they expect her to “act” as a Nigerian girl.

Having described the tensions between the girls’ choice of ethnic identity and their parents’ expectations, I believe I have established what could be the underlying reason for the families’ standards and expectations in relation to socio-cultural practices. Next, I will discuss the value for respect for adult authority which guided the relationship between the girls and their parents and is reflected in the manner in which the girls responded to their parents’ expectations.
Respect for adult authority and its role in family maintenance of socio-cultural practices

“A lot of my friends, they don’t respect their parents at all” - Amanda

Literature exists that describes the value of respect for parents and other adults among many ethnic groups. Harwood, Miller & Lucca Irizarry (1995) used the term, “Proper Demeanor” to describe respect, one of the major child-rearing values held by working-class Puerto-Rican mothers. They discovered that Puerto-Rican mothers were concerned that their children engage in appropriate behavior which would indicate that they were well brought up. These appropriate behaviors included respect for others, especially adults. Kagitcibasi & Sunar (1992) explored the role of culture in the socialization of children and identified the concept of respect for adults and authority in their work with Turkish families living in Germany, as being critical to the socialization process. In close analysis of the data on the participants’ home experiences and the impact of parental socio-cultural expectations, a sub-theme of respect for parents and adult authority emerged across all the participants’ responses. I believe that the parents were mostly successful in communicating their standards and expectations to their children because of the cultural value the families place on respect for adult authority.

I asked Amanda if she saw any distinctions between her parents’ socio-cultural expectations and what she perceives to be the expectations of her peers’ families, and she specifically chose to address the value her parents place on
respect for elders and authority. When I asked this question of all the participants, I did not particularly expect them to address the issue of respect, but they all consistently mentioned it as their initial response. I believe that this is an indication of the value that their families place on respect for adults. Amanda’s parents’ concern that she not “catch on” to the American culture has to do with disrespecting adults by talking back to them. Amanda admits to the challenges of “holding back” from talking back to her parents and attributes this struggle to peer influence:

…my parents think that I’m catching on to the American culture more than the Nigerian culture… so I definitely need to pay close attention to that, because I don’t want to come off disrespectful and I’m not actually being disrespectful. I don’t want them to think that. So I have to pay close attention, like am I being disrespectful? Am I being respectful? So there’s a lot of differences. A lot of my friends, they don’t respect their parents at all. Sometimes it seems like I catch on to that and they say something, but I hold it back. I don’t want to say nothing, but I think the fact that I hang out with them so much, I catch on to what they do. And I portray that to—I display that to my parents, so I don’t want them to think that at all. But there’s a lot of differences (PI, 2/11/08).

In the above comments, Amanda compares the Nigerian culture, which values respect of adults, to the American culture which, she says, is characterized, in this case, by children who “don’t respect their parents at all.” Considering that she is the only participant who claims to be partially Nigerian and partially American, she seems to be identifying more with her Nigerian than her American culture in this context. She is astute in her recognition of the influence that her American peers are having on her and acknowledges her struggles to stay true to the values by which she has been raised. This comparison of Nigerian and American values
is a reminder of an earlier quote by Amanda which states that her parents want her to “act as a Nigerian girl, but also as a well-raised American girl at the same time.” When I asked her, then, to explain how a Nigerian girl is supposed to behave, she responded that among other things, “they obey their parents. They greet [e.g. Good morning, etc] their parents…And they’re respectful. They know the right thing to say in certain situations.” So by comparison, a “well-raised” American girl would be one who exhibits these same characteristics. Amanda’s statement also reveals a stereotyping of Americans by her parents. By linking her talking back to them to her “catching on to the American culture,” Amanda’s parents are implying that American children are disrespectful, a statement that does not take into account that there is no monolithic American culture or value system and that there are American families who expect their children to treat adults respectfully.

Amanda also describes the practice of addressing adults in a proper manner as another way she shows respect to her parents. She addresses her mother as ‘Ma’am” or “Yes, mom” and when her friends overhear her on the phone, she has to explain why she addresses her mother that way. The reactions of her peers to the respect that she displays towards her parents include admiration and mockery.

When I’m on the phone and I say, “Yes, Mommy. Yes, mom.” Everyone’s like, “Yes, mom.” [mocking her] Everyone’s mocking me, “Why do you have to say yes to her like that?” And I just explain that it’s respectful, so for American and African culture, you should also always answer your elders like “Yes, Ma’am” or at least “Yes.”-PI (2/11/08)
Amanda also describes the Yoruba practice of kneeling down as a sign of respect when greeting elders and admits that she does not mind observing this tradition.

… you have to kneel down… That’s disrespectful towards them if you don’t do that. So before I never did that…, but when they[her parents] sat down and explained it to us that, it’s traditional, you have to do that, then now I—[do it].- PI (2/11/08)

It is apparent that Amanda has adopted the value for respect as part of her African identity. She understands that it distinguishes her from many of her peers, and sometimes subjects her to mockery. Yet, she seems to appreciate this difference and tries to educate her peers as to why they should adopt this practice regardless.

My interviews with the other participants reveal similar parental expectations with regards to respect for elders and authority. Just like with Amanda, Abena’s response to the question of whether she has experienced any conflict between Ghanaian and American cultures refers to respect for elders:

Yeah, sometimes…Like talking back to elderly people. Something like that. Yeah, respect. In Ghanaian, when you’re talking to the other person, even if you don’t know them, you have to call them Aunty or Uncle. But here, they just call you by your first name (PI, 2/11/08)

By using the phrase, “here, they just call you by your first name” Abena, like Amanda, contrasts the way African and American children address adults, thereby implying that there is a correlation between the manner in which children address adults and the respect they show them. The implication is that it is difficult to disrespect someone whom you have addressed as “Aunty,” “Uncle,” “Sir” or “Ma’am.” I asked Abena if she translates the respect she has for her parents to her teachers and her response indicates that she does: “Yeah. I mean, I
don’t call them [teachers] Aunty and Uncle, but…” She respects her teachers even when she does not address them the way she addresses adults in her community.

Abena, like Amanda has chosen to identify with the aspect of their African identity which values respect for adults and authority.

Just like the other participants, Ekene’s family expects her to adopt the practice or respecting adults. Speaking of her parents, she states, “They want you to be yourself, respectful to everybody, ‘cause in Africa, or Nigeria, or Ghana, everybody is nice, respectful. You always respect your elders or else you get rapped [refers to being disciplined].” Like Amanda, she finds herself in situations where she has to choose whether to talk back to her parents or not. She is the only participant who admits talking back to her parents, especially when she feels she is not being heard. Although Ekene acknowledges that she is wrong for talking back to her parents, her excuse is that she is only standing up for herself. I have already discussed Ekene’s experience with being silent in school because of her accented speech and the stereotypes she confronted for being of African ascent. She referenced these as her reason for speaking up at home.

Like sometimes your parents don’t understand you. You try to explain stuff. They’re [like] ‘I’m right. You’re wrong. You just need to explain to them. I’m kind of bad in the sense that I talk back to my mom or, like my dad … like I’ll be talking to you and you’ll be yelling at me. I should stay there and be quiet and say everything you say is right? I won’t do that. I have to defend myself. That is why I am different from everybody in my house. My mom is the one that goes, ‘Just shut up!’ No, I am not going to. I am defending myself. I like to defend myself since I can’t do that everyday of my life. I would like to defend myself at home ‘cause you’re going to blame something on me that I didn’t even do. That is wrong, so I just like to defend myself. (PI, 2/11/08).
It is likely that Ekene sees the home context as a safe place to have the voice that she does not have in school. Yet, when she disagrees with and talks back to her parents, she is aware that she is violating one of the cultural values that her family espouses.

The participants agreed that they are expected by their parents to accord other adults and authority figures the same respect that they show their parents. During the member check meeting, I was able to inquire more about the role that respect for authority played in the girls’ relationships with their teachers. The three participants present at this last meeting, Abena, Ekene and Amanda, all confirmed that they were expected to translate the respect they showed their parents and other adults in their community to school officials as well. They all agreed that they would get in trouble at home for disrespecting school authority. Although Ekene admitted to talking back to her parents sometimes, she described her mother as the disciplinarian in the home. “My mom is the discipline one. She’s like ‘be respectful, be nice, if you talk back to a teacher, you’ll get it from me’ and stuff like that.” Amanda surprised me by acting out what her mother’s reaction would be if she found out that Amanda had been disrespectful to a school official. She slapped her hands together\(^\text{29}\) to signify the disbelief that her mother would express and went on to make other gestures which my cultural knowledge enabled me to understand. Amanda dramatized the extent of trouble she would face if she disrespected a teacher.

\(^{29}\)This gesture is commonly understood in Nigeria to mean, “I can’t believe it.”
At the member check meeting, the girls revealed that their parents had the same expectations of respect from their peers. Amanda shared that her parents expect to be addressed respectfully when her friends call for her on the phone. Abena and Ekene also confirmed that their friends were afraid to call their homes because of their parents’ reactions when they are not properly addressed. When her friends call for Abena and ask, “Is this Abena’s house?” her mother usually responds, “No, this is my house.” Amanda shared that her friends have learned to address her parents respectfully when they call and now say, “Good afternoon/evening, this is so and so. How are you doing? May I speak to Amanda?” Sometimes, in order to avoid the formality, her friends call on her cell phone. Amanda also shared her memories of a time when her eighty-year old grandmother came to live with her family for a while. She witnessed, firsthand, the respectful manner in which her father treated her grandmother. This confirmed that her parents practiced values that they expected from her as well. Madeline was the only participant who did not provide much detail about her parents’ expectations of her with regards to respect. She mentioned this briefly when she responded to a question about her parents’ socio-cultural expectations of her. According to her, “expectations is [sic] you have to have a good education and be respectful, don’t talk back to parents and stuff.”

Overall, a thread of the value of respect for adults ran through the girls’ responses. The families were all similar in the value they placed on respect for adult authority and their expectations that the girls behave respectfully, not only
towards their parents, but to adults within the Ghanaian and Nigerian communities and at school. There was a lack of tension between the girls and their parents pertaining to the subject of respect, and even when Ekene disrespected her parents by talking back to them, she was very aware that she was transgressing a cultural value.

The value of respect for adult authority appears to have an impact on the participants’ ethnic identity in the way they have embraced this value and draw distinctions between themselves and their non-African peers who do not have similar values. There seems to be an “othering” of their peers as disrespectful of adult authority. In contrast, the girls speak of their own experiences with some pleasure because they understand their parents’ desire for them to be well-raised African girls who respect authority. By extending the respect they accord their parents to their teachers, the girls prove that they are meeting their parents’ expectations of proper behavior towards adults. And by identifying the absence of respect for adults in their peers’ behaviors, the girls make a distinction between them and their non-African peers that puts them in a more favorable position than their peers. Further examination of family ethnic practices will show the participants’ families’ efforts at connecting the girls to their ethnic heritage and the role that respect plays in the way the girls choose to respond.
Family maintenance of ethnic practices to ensure participants’ identification with ethnic background

“…my parents think that I’m catching on to the American culture more than the Nigerian culture.”-Amanda

Super & Harkness (1997) have identified the family as the primary socializing influence on children. For immigrant youth, this means that they are socialized by parents who retain the language values and customs from their home country or even send them to the home country to live with relatives (Umana-Taylor, Bhanot & Shin, 2006). In spite of their efforts at transferring these customs and values to their children, immigrant parents may be up against prevailing values and customs in the U.S. which may sometimes appear to be at odds with theirs. Data from this study confirms that this is true for the participants’ families. The guiding factor behind the family maintenance of ethnic and socio-cultural practices is to ensure that the girls do not “catch on” to the American culture but that they adopt African identities through immersion in socio-cultural and ethnic practices.

The data indicates that the families actively practice their culture and traditions and maintain a strong link to their ethnic community in the U.S. and their home country. There are similarities among the families in the ways they maintain their culture and traditions and one of the major ways is making sure their native language is spoken at home. Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey (1990) argue that language is a major contributor to ethnic identity, and although the participants are not all fluent in their native languages, most of the parents are
content with the girls just understanding when they are spoken to in the native language.

Ekene’s family speaks both Igbo and “Engli-Igbo30.” Although Ekene grew up in Nigeria, it now takes her a little longer to get her thoughts and words together when she needs to speak in Igbo. She acknowledges the benefits of speaking another language other than English. According to her, it is a language she speaks when there’s an emergency and she does not want anyone else to understand what she is saying.

But I am not as fluent, but if I have to, it’s like emergency, I really know how to speak everything. I’ll speak the whole thing. I have to think about it and speak the whole thing in Igbo if I have an emergency and I don’t want anybody to hear me (PI, 2/11/08).

Sometimes, for Ekene, the emergency situation includes talking about other people in Igbo, a fact supported by Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor (1977) who state that language is used for excluding non-members of a group from group matters:

Like me and my sister when we go to restaurant, when we hang out, going shopping. We will be like, “Look at what she’s wearing. That is so ugly. But we won’t say it in English ‘cause she’ll hear us or somebody, But we’ll say it in our language. We will just laugh, [inaudible] and start cracking up… (PI, 2/11/08).

Abena’s mother also expects her to understand their native language, Twi, and speak it publicly when she does not want anyone else to understand what they are saying to each other:

And my mom, she always speaks Twi with me. So I still know how to speak the language even though I haven’t been there…Like when we go out and she wants to tell me something, she tells me she wants me to

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30 - See notes on 7
respond in Twi … She doesn’t want me to speak English. That’s the only way… She don’t like when she says something in Twi and I respond in English. She don’t like that. [Chinwe laughs] We have to speak back [in Twi] (PI, 2/11/08).

Although Abena’s mother is multilingual (she speaks several Ghanaian languages like Ga, Twi, and Fante), Twi is the dominant Ghanaian language in their home. Like Ekene and Abena, Amanda’s mother is also concerned about maintaining their native language, Yoruba. She expects Amanda and her siblings to understand when she speaks Yoruba to them:

… anytime you see me and her talking, it’s Yoruba. Before she would say—she wouldn’t talk Yoruba to us. It depends what it is. Like, if we’re in trouble, [she’ll say] “Kiloshe!” But now it’s fully Yoruba, because she wants us to be able to speak it and understand it at the same time.

Just like Abena’s mother, Amanda’s mother prefers to speak Yoruba to her when they are in public, though she is embarrassed when her mother speaks too loudly for others to hear:

I think my parents—well, my mom specifically—I think she expects me to be able to understand what she’s saying. I don’t think she wants me to—she doesn’t force me to speak Yoruba back to her, but she expects me to be able to understand what she’s saying. So in the store, I remember one time she was like [very loudly], “Yetunde!” But she’ll speak Yoruba to me in the store and I’ll try to speak Yoruba back to her, but… It’s difficult, but at the same time, I will try to speak it back to her (FG, 2/26/08).

Ekene also describes feeling embarrassed when her Dad “yells” in public:

31 -A Yoruba phrase that could mean “What’s the matter with you?” or “What are you doing?” depending on the exact intonation and inflection. Amanda spoke this with an “accent” so I was not sure which of these she meant. Anyone one of these phrases could be used when a child is doing what he or she is not supposed to be doing. I lived in and attended primary and secondary schools in the Western part of Nigeria, so I understand Yoruba.

32 Yetunde is Amanda’s Yoruba middle name.
... there’s sometimes it’s just annoying. You’ll be at the end of the store and they’ll be at a different end. They’ll just be yelling stuff out and I’ll be like ‘Just shut up! Gosh! Yeah, he’ll just be yelling stuff. I’m like, “Just shut it.” Sometimes it’s appropriate, but dang…..(FG, 2/26/08).

I admit that I was a little uncomfortable that Ekene was speaking this way about her reaction to her Dad. I suspected that she was voicing thoughts she had at the time the incident occurred and that she probably had not addressed him directly, but I could not help the discomfort I felt. My discomfort was a result of my position as a Nigerian immigrant woman who also understands the value of respect for adults and, therefore, did not think it was appropriate for her to speak about her father the way she did.

I asked the other girls if they thought their parents sometimes speak inappropriately in public, and in unison they all responded, “Yes! Embarrassing.” and Madeline added, “They’ll be calling me by my African name, “Hey, Akosua!”…It’s so embarrassing.” The embarrassment at being identified with parents who speak the native language too loudly in public may appear to be a contradiction to the pride the girls say they feel about their ethnic heritage, but it could be argued that regardless of ethnic origin, most teenagers will be embarrassed if their parents speak too loudly in public. The embarrassment that the girls feel in this case could be complicated by the fact that their parents are “yelling” in languages other than English.

Like the other participants, Madeline says she is also expected to understand her native language. Although, she is not very fluent in her native language, Twi, she welcomes the opportunity to learn. The opportunity to speak
Twi with Abena is one of the benefits she enjoyed in her peer friendships with other immigrant children.

There are no differences in the family expectations that the girls at least understand the native language, even if they do not speak it fluently. The families are successful in communicating their expectations about the maintenance of their ethnic languages because of their understanding that language is a major contributor to ethnic identity. The girls, on their own part, seem to appreciate having another language that they and their families can use in private conversation. They appear to enjoy the distinctiveness of having a language other than English with which they can communicate with their families and other immigrant peers. This could be especially true for Ekene who is conscious of her accented speech in school. Having the ability to communicate in another language and not be judged for having an accent possibly impacted Ekene’s ethnic identity. In the school context she feels powerless and silenced because of her accent and in the home context she feels empowered because she can have private conversations with her family. For Ekene and the other girls, the impact of ethnic language maintenance on the girls’ ethnic identification can be seen in the contradictions between pride in having a private language they and their parents can use and discomfort with the unwanted public attention that the same language brings. In general, the girls embrace the aspect of their African identity which values the maintenance of the ethnic language.
In addition to their parents’ ensuring that the native language is preserved, the participants shared other ways that customs and traditions were maintained in their homes. Bankston & Zhou (1995) have reported that family membership in an ethnic organization translates to higher ethnic identity among their children. The data reveals varying levels of success among the families with ethnic organization memberships. The participants’ families belong to community organizations and attend social gatherings with Ghanaians, Nigerians and other Africans. At these gatherings, the girls have the opportunity to interact with children from the same background. Almost all of them attend a church that is predominantly Nigerian, Ghanaian or both. Ekene is the only one whose family attends “a white Christian church.” While ethnic church membership affords the other girls the opportunity to build same-ethnic peer relationships, Ekene is not as positioned to interact with other African children.

The participants eat Nigerian and Ghanaian foods, listen to music and watch movies produced in their parents’ home country. With regards to the clothing, there are varied responses, compared to the maintenance of the native language which yielded similar responses among the girls. Amanda wears traditional clothing to church while Ekene does not like to do so. She actually has a very strong opinion about not wearing traditional clothing like her parents want and this is a source of conflict between Ekene and her parents. Madeline’s reaction to wearing traditional Ghanaian clothing is:

Sometimes I don’t feel comfortable wearing it, because they be like, “Wow, you look so grown. You look like a mother.” And sometimes I just
wear regular clothes—not jeans, because our church is really strict about wearing that. I’m not trying to say… Most African-Americans when they go to church, they wear jeans and tops. We have to wear dressy outfits instead. But it doesn’t matter if you wear dressy outfits or African clothes. I just wear both (PI, 2/11/08).

Unlike Ekene who opposes her parents’ expectations that she wear native clothing because she wants to maintain a separate identity and not “be like everybody,” Madeline’s discomfort with dressing in native clothing comes from others’ reactions to her. Their reactions to seeing her in native clothing are that she looks too grown-up in them. Madeline’s contrast of her church’s strict dress codes to what African-Americans wear to church is somewhat distorted. In the above comments, she compares the “dressy outfits” that Ghanaians wear to her church to the “jeans and tops” that “most” African-Americans wear to church. I am not sure if this is a conclusion that she arrived at by herself, or if she is just repeating comments she has overheard, perhaps from members of her community.

Whatever the source of this information, it echoes the same stereotypes that she and the other girls expressed earlier. Unlike the other participants, Abena said that she does not feel any pressure to wear traditional Ghanaian clothing, even though her mother owns a store that sells Ghanaian clothing.

Another way that the families maintain their culture and traditions is through periodic visits to their home country and maintaining regular contact with family members. At the time of this study, Abena was planning to visit Ghana with her aunt during the summer vacation. The last time she visited was at age three and I believe that her earlier comments that she has “never been there [to
Ghana],” stem from the fact that she does not remember that visit. Ekene has not been to Nigeria since she left about four years ago. She admitted, though, that her family visits Nigeria regularly. Madeline’s parents also travel regularly to Ghana and like her cousin, Abena, she has plans to visit during the summer following this study.

Unlike the other three girls, Madeline was the only participant who had spent some time, about a year, in her parents’ home country. In response to relatives’ and friends’ concerns that Madeline and her brother were becoming “Americanized,” her parents left them behind after a trip to Ghana when she was five. Madeline confessed that they were both unaware of their parents’ plans to leave them behind.

Both of my parents came as a vacation. We thought we were just coming for a vacation to visit our grandparents. We saw them packing their bags and we was like, “Where are you going?” and they was like, “Oh, we’re coming right back.” And then they just left and we just stayed there like… “What are we going to do?” We spoke the slang, ‘cause I mean, [we lived in the] East Coast. I was five and my brother was three and we were just like, “Oh.” And one year later when they took us back to U.S., we started having an African accent (PI, 2/11/08).

Madeline admitted to having mixed feelings about her time in Ghana. Although she got to learn Twi and Ghanaian customs and traditions, she did not retain the language very long upon returning to the U.S. Instead, she and her brother had to attend tutoring sessions to improve their English.

11-It is becoming increasingly common for West African families to send some or all of their children back home to live and attend school. The belief is that it is the most effective way to ensure that they retain the culture and language. It is also believed that children who have adjusted well to this arrangement become well grounded in traditional values.
...We came here [back to the U.S.], our accents were—we had a bad accent, like we couldn’t speak no English, we just speak Twi and then our parents took us to tutors for English and then we started picking it up. And now I don’t know[how to speak] it [meaning Twi].

Madeline further described her experiences during the year she spent in Ghana:

…it was hot and I was really a little bit lighter, but then when I went there I got darker, and then I had long hair and a lot of Ghanaians, they’re really good at braiding, then when I came back it started falling out. And then over there they have poor source of water and I really got sick and just the fever, and the mosquitoes, and rain. I really didn’t get too used to that, but then a couple of months later I was like, “Oh.” But then when I came back to the U.S. I got sick again…. And we didn’t have a lot of light supplies and every ten minutes the light would go off and we had to go to others’ houses and go get the light to light our lamps.

I probed a little further to determine if there were positive aspects to Madeline’s experiences in Ghana and whether the purpose of sending her to Ghana was achieved. Although she said she “got to learn the dance and what foods they made,” her memories of Ghana appear to reinforce the stereotypes that her African-American peers have expressed to her about Africa. It is possible that she may have viewed her experiences differently if she had been much older during her stay in Ghana.

The participants are aware of family efforts to maintain contact with relatives in Ghana and Nigeria. In addition to periodic visits, the regular communication between their families on both continents is an example of the efforts that their families make to stay connected to their ethnic heritage. This connection is the reason Madeline and her brother spent one year in Ghana. It is the reason for the periodic visits home and the financial support that the girls’
families’ send to relatives at home. Madeline and Amanda are concerned that they may be expected to continue where their parents stop in providing financial assistance to their Nigerian and Ghanaian relatives.

Madeline: I always hear some of my relatives needing money and you always have to get money and give it to them… You’re always shipping money every month.

Amanda: Every week.

Madeline: Calling my house at 5 in the morning, saying, “I’m sick. I need this.”

Amanda: I need to go buy a phone card [She was repeating what she hears her parents say when they need to call Nigeria].

Madeline: Yes! We always go buy phone cards and just shipping money every week. It’s annoying and I feel like if I grow up, are they gonna make me do that? Because it’s really hard sending money every week. So sometimes I feel like I really don’t wanna do that (FG, 2/26/08).

I am aware of the practice within many immigrant communities of sending money to relatives in their home country. For many West Africans, the money is wired through Western Union. The time difference between the U.S. and countries in West Africa is the reason many of the calls for financial help come early in the morning. The girls’ concerns could stem from the reactions of their parents to frequent requests for financial help. Many immigrants are expected to continue to care for family members in their home country. Since many of them migrate because of economic hardship, the families they have left behind expect them to assume the role of provider by remitting money and other forms of assistance. Because the family structure in most African communities go beyond the nuclear family, to include extended family members, the scope of requests
could include first, second, third cousins and aunts and uncles. This reality could have been the source of the girls’ concerns.

In spite of Madeline’s experiences with spending a year in Ghana, and any reservations that Madeline and Amanda feel about providing financial help to relatives in Africa, all the participants agree that they would love to either visit, live, or work in their parents’ home country someday. They all hope to be pediatricians in the future and Ekene, Madeline and Amanda hope that their work will take them to West Africa. For Ekene, much more than the other participants, it is very important for her to be able to visit home again. When she left Nigeria at age twelve, she left many friends behind with whom she is still in contact. Ekene still misses her friends and describes returning to Nigeria as her “ultimate goal.”

Me, her [and my sister], we are planning on big things. I am going to do my thing and get my job and like work my money up then I’m gonna go back home and establish it…Yeah, that’s my ultimate goal…I wanted to go back home this year, but I couldn’t… But, we’re thinking about next year but I want to go home like seriously. I miss my friends (PI, 2/11/08).

Madeline also has plans to practice medicine, not only in Ghana, but all over West Africa.

I want to be a pediatrician and if I see a Ghanaian person, I want to help them if they don’t understand the English…Traveling to places… different parts of West Africa—Nigeria, Liberia, all those places (PI, 2/11/08).

Amanda speaks about her plans to help children in Africa when she becomes a doctor.

I’m planning to visit. When I grow up I wanna be…I want to make a difference. I don’t know how to explain it, because when I grow up I want to be a pediatrician. So when I grow up I want to be able to help those
stereotypes made. Those kids are sick and need food. I want to be able to
go help those people (PI, 2/11/08).

Her comments about “those stereotypes made” refer to the ways African children
are stereotyped in the media, and ultimately by her peers. Although she
acknowledges that the images of African kids as sick and hungry are stereotypes,
Amanda seems to understand that there is some element of truth to stereotypes
and plans to help remedy the situation.

It can surmised from the above discussion that there is a relationship
between the participants’ families’ socialization for cultural maintenance
(Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001) and the girls’ identification with their
ethnic background, to the extent that they all identify with Africa and want to visit
and live there at some point. Their identification with Africa and the desire to
work there may appear to be contradicted by their embarrassment at their parents’
speaking loudly in public or their reluctance to, sometimes, dress in the native
clothing; yet, the families’ ethnic practices seem to have significant influence on
the girls’ identification with their African heritage. This is especially true for the
second- generation participants who express their appreciation of having another
language and who say they benefit from interactions with members of their
community. These benefits include friendships with other immigrant children in
their community and exposure to the ways their ethnic traditions are practiced
within social and religious organizations in their communities. The implication
could be that African immigrant girls can negotiate which aspects of their African
identity they want to adopt and still feel connected to Africa to the extent that they
want to live or work there. They negotiate with their families to understand the ethnic language even if they cannot speak it. They may not have much control over family membership in ethnic organizations or immersion in ethnic practices and activities, but they can exercise agency like Ekene did on whether or not to dress in ethnic clothing. I describe this process as a selective adoption of aspects of their African identity.

The data reveals that the families do not stop with ethnic language maintenance and membership in ethnic organizations as a means of ensuring their children’s identification with the families’ ethnic heritage. Similar to their efforts at connecting the girls to their ethnic communities are the parents’ socio-cultural expectations and standards with regards to gender roles, dating and marriage. I have decided to discuss these together because the data revealed mixed reactions to parental expectations concerning these three issues.

*Family maintenance of socio-cultural practices as it relates to gender roles, dating and marriage*

“…girls clean and cook and the boys watch TV”-Abena

The contrast between ethnic and dominant cultural norms usually manifests in beliefs about gender equality, dating and marriage (Dasgupta, 1998). For example, some Asian-Indian parents’ choice of marriage partners for their female children is usually preceded by restrictions on dating (Das & Kemp, 1997). This is contrasted by the Western practice of permitting adolescents to date
and eventually pick their marriage partners. Studies like Lee’s (2005) indicate that patriarchal practices are transported to the U.S. by immigrants and result in tension between the different generations in the home. Some of this tension arises from the differences in the ways male and female children are raised. Stritikus & Nguyen (2007) argue that female children, unlike their male counterparts, are expected to maintain their family culture and tradition. Findings of this study suggest the possibility of West African immigrant families transplanting traditional beliefs about gender roles to the U.S. These roles include cooking, keeping the home and other activities that are gender-specific. Generally, the sub-theme of gender expectations is somewhat similar to the sub-theme of family maintenance of ethnic practices because although the girls’ experiences are mostly similar, there is evidence of individualism in some cases. Three participants, Abena, Madeline and Amanda confirmed that they are expected to fulfill certain gender roles at home, but Ekene expressed surprise when, during the focus group, she learned of the gender expectations the families of the other girls had of them. When I asked Abena if there were defined gender roles in her family, she described her experiences with her mother:

Like, for example, girls clean the house and boys, they just sit around, I guess. And we cook. They don’t cook. Stuff like that. It’s not really serious, but...Sometimes the boys cook too. Sometimes, like when the boy is watching T.V., we can’t, you have to go in the kitchen and help her cook. Something like that.

And when I probed further as to her mother’s explanation for such expectations, Abena responded “preparation for marriage.” She admitted “I just…I don’t really
have anything to say. I just do whatever she asks me to do.” Abena’s respect for her mother is evident from her response to her mother’s expectations that she learn how to cook in preparation for marriage. Yet, although she agrees with her mother about gender roles, there is evidence of tension due to her mother’s expectation that she stay in the kitchen.

But the number one thing is you always gotta stay in the kitchen. That gets on my nerves sometimes. Even when I’m doing my homework, [my mother says] “Come and watch when I’m cooking.” (FG, 2/28/08).

Since Abena and Madeline are cousins and come from similar backgrounds, their experiences are similar with gender expectations. They both responded in unison and in the affirmative when I asked during the group interview if their mothers expected them to follow in their footsteps. Initially, Madeline did not specify whether girls were treated differently in her family because of their gender. When I probed a little further, her response revealed that she was expected to fulfill certain roles in the house so that it would appear that her parents were doing their job as parents, and so that people would know that she’s “trained at home.” Although Madeline admits that she would like to tell her parents that things should be different in America than they are in Ghana, she knows not to voice her reservations. Instead, she says with resignation, “…I just have to do it. There’s no other choice.” Madeline’s resignation to her family’s gender expectations, while indicative of the respect she has for her parents also reveals some tension. Like Abena, Madeline does not think the expectations are “fair.”
…they [my parents] said that, “Back in my days, the girls do this so you have to do that.” And I can’t say, “Okay, that’s not fair. We’re in America. This is different. So I just have to do it. There’s no other choice.

By “it,” Madeline is referring to tasks such as “clean[ing] around the house or washing the father’s clothes.” She elaborates, “You have to prepare the dad’s food when he’s about to go to work. Clean his area and…basically, that’s it.” Her response to the same question about gender expectations during the group interview also confirms that her parents, like Abena’s, have preparation for marriage in mind as the reason for their gender expectations. According to Madeline, her mother says, “Come and watch what I’m doing so when you get married…”

In many African societies, the way a girl is “trained” reflects on her parents’ child-rearing skills, especially her mother’s. A mother wants to ensure that her daughters learn all the female responsibilities like cooking, cleaning and caring for the home. In addition to proving to the community that the girl has been raised well, it also proves to her future spouse and in-laws that her mother played her part in raising her well - hence the emphasis on girls being in the kitchen with their mothers. I have wrestled with this issue as a mother of two teenage daughters as well. I understand the importance of their learning to care for their homes, but I struggle with passing down traditions that will maintain current gender expectations that only females should do housework. This may apply in African societies that are still mostly patriarchal, but I understand that they are
being raised in a completely different context where every member of the household is expected to contribute to the upkeep of the home.

Amanda’s response to the question on gender expectations is not much different from the others. In her situation, there is an overlap between her parents’ expectations of her both as a female and as the firstborn. Her parents’ expectations are not only for her but for their future grandchildren. Their expectations are for Amanda to pass the traditional gender practices down to her children and grandchildren—something Amanda herself has come to accept. So despite the tensions that have arisen when she has not met her parents’ expectations, she has come to understand that the only reason her mother can pass down cultural traditions to her is because these were also passed down to her mother. Like Abena and Madeline, Amanda describes the tensions which arise as a result of her parents’ expectations, and admits that she accepts the explanation for their expectations “when she sits down and thinks about it.”

When my mom’s cooking in the kitchen, she expects me to be there watching her cook, so the next day I’ll be able to cook rice, I’ll be able to cook stew for them, but usually I’m not there in the kitchen so they get upset about that. And the fact that I’m the first born, they say that I have a lot of responsibility, because the ages [of my siblings] are from 15 to 6, and there’s a lot of years’ difference from that, so they expect me to be able to handle myself and my three younger sisters, so there’s a lot of responsibility that’s been thrown at me…because they said I’m gonna be a mother someday and I should be able to cook for my family and I should be able to teach my children how to cook and I should be able to do my children’s hair and do all that. At that moment, I disagree, but when I sit down and think about it—when I’m not as upset, I understand where they’re coming from, because if my mom didn’t learn how to cook, I wouldn’t have all these customs and traditions that I have right now, and I want to be able to pass that on—American and Nigerian customs and
traditions—to my children and my husband. I understand where they’re coming from (PI, 2/11/08).

The resignation that Amanda, Abena and Madeline show with respect to fulfilling gender roles in the home can be linked to the value that their families place on respect for adult authority. The girls do not put up much resistance to their parents’ gender expectations and although they acknowledge the tension between them and their parents, they all accept the gender roles thrust upon them.

Ekene is the only participant who does not feel that household duties are divided along gender lines in her family. I noticed her surprise when the other participants spoke about the expectations their parents had of them to cook, clean and keep house. She confirmed this in a journal entry:

I saw other people’s point of view. I did not know some parents expected so much from their kids. I always thought they want the best for them but also be yourself. The whole kitchen thing is weird to me and different, but I see where they are coming from (PJ, 2/22/08).

Ekene explains that in her house everyone is expected to do their share of the work. There are no differences between expectations for male or female children. Her interest in cooking is not in response to any expectations, but just because she loves to cook.

My mom doesn’t have to force me. I love to cook. That’s my passion… Even if you tell me not to cook, I don’t care. I’m gonna cook. But my mom doesn’t force me to do all those stuff like cleaning. She tells me it’s good for me to get the house tidy. It’s not necessary for girls to do this and girls to do that. My mom trained us to do everything, even girls and boys… Yeah, everybody in my house knows how to cook and clean and everything, just from years [of doing so] and stuff (PI, 2/11/08).
Ekene’s response during the personal interview confirms that her father cooks as well. According to her, “My dad will say [he] was born in the kitchen. [He] was raised there.” This is not typical of many African cultures, but supports Ekene’s claim that gender roles are not typically defined in her family. I had expected that being a 1.5 generation immigrant, and having spent her pre-teenage years in Nigeria, that gender expectations from Ekene’s family would be more defined, but as her reactions during the personal and group interviews and her journal entry reveal, her family’s gender expectations seem to be minimal in comparison to the expectations for the other participants. This dissimilarity with the other participants suggests that no culture is monolithic or universal and that there is individualism within families. Although all the girls’ families are West African and appear to share similar gender expectations, Ekene’s family speaks to the fact that there is not one particular mold into which all West African families fit. Therefore, to behave towards a child from a West African immigrant home with such an assumption would be unfair to the child.

The impact of gender role expectations on the participants’ ethnic identity can be seen in the tension between the parents’ efforts to raise “good” African girls who will not bring shame to their families. The “good” African girl knows how to cook and keep the home and understands the importance of passing these same traditions to her children. The participants show that they generally accept these expectations as seen in Abena’s resignation to the fact that “girls cook and boys watch T.V.,” Amanda’s comments that she “understands where they’re
coming from,” or Madeline’s statement, “I just have to do it. There’s no other choice.” An underlying theme in the relationship between the girls and their parents is one of relative conformity to parental expectations. Although these girls have adopted their own ethnic identities, some of which are in opposition to their parents,’ it is evident that they want to maintain a strong connection to Africa, African values, and an African identity. They understand that these values may sometimes set them apart from their peers, but they have taken personal responsibility for the kind of girls they are becoming by choosing to be agents in their ethnic identity construction.

The girls’ families also set standards for matters like dating and marriage. It is important to note here that all the participants were sixteen, except for Amanda who was fifteen. Their age at the time of this study will help in understanding their parents’ position on dating. As fifteen- and sixteen-year olds, it is not likely that their families will allow them to date. Unlike their American counterparts who may date at this age, it is not typical to see this practice encouraged in African immigrant homes. The participants’ families are as similar in their stance on dating as they are on the issue of gender roles.

Amanda and her family have not explored the issue of dating, but she acknowledges that she has given it some thought. She admits that she is more concerned about school and athletics than dating at this time. She also admits that the conversation about dating is not one she is likely have with her father. It appears that her mother will be more open to a dialogue. In fact Amanda said she
would go home after the interview and have a discussion with her mother concerning her views on dating.

During the personal as well as the group interview, Amanda maintained her choice not to date. She does not feel any pressure from her friends in school to go against her or her parents’ wishes. In fact statements such as “… I want to sit down and be able to focus on my studies…” and “[dating] is not something right now that I’m concerned about. I’m concerned about my studies,” are an indication of agency on her part because she is making a personal choice not to date at this age. On whether she feels any pressure to conform to her peers’ views on dating, Amanda says:

I feel that my parents’ and friends’ expectations are kind of on the same level. That if I don’t want to have a boyfriend, my friends will agree with me like, “No, he’s not good, da da da….” I’m never pressured for something that I don’t want to do (PI, 2/11/08).

Abena’s family’s response to the issue of dating is similar to Amanda’s. She is not allowed to date because her family believes she is too young.

Madeline’s parents fear that dating could lead to her becoming pregnant. She is more specific than the other participants about her parents’ reasons for why she cannot date. Her parents’ fears are founded on the stigma that is attached to teenage pregnancy and pregnancy outside marriage within many African cultures. Her parents use examples of Madeline’s school mates who have gotten pregnant to make their case about the extent to which premature relationships with the opposite sex can impact her future academic plans.
They believe that talking to boys will get you pregnant. That’s what they always think. They be like, “Don’t talk to those boys. They’re bad. You see these girls walking here pregnant at 16?” They think that that’s a big disgrace in Ghanaian culture, even in just African culture. Being pregnant at 16. You see there’s some girls over here pregnant and they’re 16 and my grade. My parents be like, “Look at them. You want to be like that? Stay away from those boys. I mean, you can talk to them, but saying you want a boyfriend. That’s really bad. And they say, “You can wait until you go to college and do whatever, but right now, just focus on your school.” They really think education is good instead of just being with boys (PI, 2/11/08).

Madeline repeated these sentiments during the group interview.

… And the boys, you gotta watch them and all this stuff. Yeah, ‘cause some of the boys are too much and more girls these days are getting pregnant so you better watch those boys (FG, 2/26/08).

Madeline, like Amanda displays some agency in her “choice” to stay away from boys in spite of the fact that some of her peers are allowed to date. Her parents accept the fact that adolescence is a time when most teenagers are attracted to the opposite sex and they are okay with her experiencing those emotions. It’s the consequences of being intimate with a boy that concern her parents:

Yeah, but they said you can like them or you think, “Oh, he’s cute. He’s a handsome guy.” But just getting too close, you might just do a “Oh Oh” and have a intimate relationship…So I’m just to myself…I choose (PI, 2/11/08).

Ekene’s response to the issue of dating surprised me. Just as with the issue of gender expectations in which her parents’ expectations were different from the other participants, she said she had different expectations from her family, concerning dating, in comparison to the other participants. She did not indicate her father’s preference when it comes to dating, but of her mother, she said:
My mom doesn’t have any problems with us dating as long as we’re safe… my mom doesn’t have problems with it and the way she trained us, it’s not a big deal.

I understood the phrase, “it’s not a big deal” to mean that her mother’s views on dating are somewhat liberal in comparison to the other participants’ parents. My surprise stemmed from my expectations that unlike the second-generation participants, her family, as more recent immigrants, would have stricter views about dating. So, I teased her by saying, “So they wouldn’t fall out of their chairs tomorrow if you said, “I want to date someone?” and her response was, “No.”

Again, Ekene’s response to the question on dating, similar to her response about gender roles, reveals the need for a non-monolithic view of the experiences of African immigrant children. My assumptions that, as recent immigrants, her family would be more traditional in their views on gender roles and dating, are dismantled by her parents’ expectations which appear to be more liberal in comparison to the other parents.’

Similar to some of their responses to previously discussed parental expectations, the participants showed minimal resistance to expectations that they delay dating and concentrate on academics. In fact, they seemed to set the same standard for themselves. I did not think that they were providing answers that they felt that I, as a Nigerian immigrant parent, would like to hear because they had been surprisingly direct in their responses to some other questions. Rather, it seemed that they had bought into their parents’ values and expectations concerning dating and adopted these values as theirs. The girls’ appeared to
understand the possible implications of dating, like teen pregnancy, and the eventual impact on their educational goals. They understood the shame that their various cultures associate with teenage pregnancy and had examples of sixteen-year old classmates who had gotten pregnant as a deterrent. The value that the girls and their families place on academic achievement will be discussed later and will clarify their lack of resistance to parental reservations about dating.

I thought it was remarkable that the girls showed such agency in the face of the pressures they may face from their non-African peers who are already dating. Considering that the girls are at a critical stage in adolescent development when being different from one’s peers could be an isolating experience, their choice not to date speaks to the strength of their identification with their African heritage and values, even while maintaining their individual ethnic identities.

The discussions about dating naturally led to the question about marriage and whether there were any expectations from their parents about the ethnicity of their future mate. In a study done among Sunni Muslim immigrants, Al-Johar (2005) discovered that constructions of personal identity influenced spousal selection and determined whether these relationships ended up endogamous (within one’s own community) or exogamous (outside one’s own community). Al-Johar (2005) found a strong correlation between the ethnic, religious, or “American” identities of the participants and the type of marriage that occurred. That means that the way people choose to identify will determine the ethnic identity of their future mate. The questions that arose during the discussions on
marriage were: (1) Was there a relationship between the ethnic identities the girls’
chose and the ethnicities of their future mates? (2) Was there a relationship
between the family’s ethnic identity and their expectations for the ethnicity of
their daughters’ future mates?

Amanda identifies as Nigerian and American. It also appears that her
parents are accepting of her decision to identify as both Nigerian and American.
Even though she and her parents have not discussed marriage and future spouse
selection, Amanda believes that the ethnicity of whoever she chooses to marry
will not matter.

…it’s my decision, but I don’t think—It wouldn’t matter if they’re white,
black, African, or Asian. I don’t think it matters the race as long as I find
someone that I’ll love and he loves me, it’ll be okay. (PI, 2/11/08).

For some of the girls, there is a connection between how they believe their
families expect them to identify and their parents’ preference for a same-ethnic
group mate. Since Madeline and Abena are expected to identify as Ghanaian, it is
no surprise that their parents prefer that they marry Ghanaians. Discussions
around marriage have already occurred in Abena’s home because one of the
reasons her mother provided for wanting her to learn how to cook and care for the
home is “preparation for marriage.” Abena ‘s mother desires that she marry a
Ghanaian because it will “be easier” for both her and her mother. It appears that
her mother believes that since Abena was raised with Ghanaian customs and
traditions, it would be “easier” for her to marry a Ghanaian. “Easier” in this
context probably means that there will be no need to deal with cross-cultural
challenges if Abena marries a Ghanaian. Although Abena has chosen a Ghanaian
identity which conforms to her family’s expectations that she identify as
Ghanaian, she still expects to marry anyone she chooses to, regardless of their
ethnicity. I asked how she felt about her mother’s expectations and Abena
responded, “Confused that she wants me to only marry a Ghanaian.” So, even
though Abena has chosen a Ghanaian identity, as expected by her family, she still
wants the option of marrying from outside her ethnic group.

In response to whether she is expected to marry a Ghanaian, Madeline
responds in the affirmative, although she refers to her parents’ expectations that
she marry only a Ghanaian as a “problem.” She further explains how even within
Ghana, there are stereotypes about different ethnic groups and how her parents
have reservations about her marrying from certain ethnic groups.

Ghanaian people think that Ewes do a lot of voodoo and they be like,
“Don’t marry that person. It’s really bad. Ewe people, I don’t like them.
Don’t marry them.” And I be like, “Mom, we’re just people. We’re just all
Ghanaians, so why Ewe?” And it’s like the Kumasi people and different
tribes, they be like, “You can’t marry that person.” (PI, 2/11/08)

These stereotypes also extended to African-Americans, some of whom Madeline
claims her parents perceive to be spouse batterers. According to her, her parents
use the images of African-Americans they have seen on television to determine
that some African-Americans would not make “good” husbands.

But African-Americans, they be like, “There’s certain African-Americans
that you can date, but a lot of them is bad. Look at them on the TV.
They’re beating their wives and all that stuff.” (PI, 2/11/08).
Madeline’s argument with her family reveals more stereotyping of African-Americans that is not helped by the media’s role in promoting such stereotypes. Such comments from her family might be responsible for some of the stereotypical statements that she made during this interview about her African-American counterparts. The comments are supported by research that indicate that some of the stereotypes that African immigrants hold about African-Americans may just be echoes of comments they have heard in their families (Traore, 2008).

Madeline feels that by not permitting her to marry people from certain parts of Ghana, or to “certain” African-Americans, she is limited in her choices. Her response to this dilemma is, “So what should I do?”

“First you don’t want me to date an African-American, but then you don’t want me to date—[certain groups] of the African culture. ‘Cause I have people that I like, I’ll be like, “Oh, they’re cute. Mommy, in the future, should I marry this?” “No! Their ethnic group is bad. This is how they [are].” I’m like, “Wow. So what should I do?” (PI, 2/11/08).

Madeline’s parents seem to consider the possibility of her marrying outside her ethnic group only if the person has a secured future or if the person’s “future is good.” I assume that by this she is referring to someone with a promising future, especially since she revealed that her parents want her future mate to be educated.

Ekene is the only participant who has decided on her own that she will marry someone from her ethnic group, without any apparent pressure from her family. She seems to have strong opinions about what she would and would not do concerning marriage just as she does with some other family expectations like wearing native clothing.
I really don’t care. As long as I like the person, my mom is down with it. As long as the person is not disrespectful. It’s always advised to marry a Nigerian guy. Me, I want to marry my tribe\(^{34}\). It’s hard to learn another language. I can’t do this- no more languages [referring to learning other languages like Spanish in school], ‘cause it’s too hard (FG, 2/26/08)

Showing some agency in the decision of the ethnicity of her future mate, Ekene states, “But you wont’ force me to marry a Nigerian if I don’t’ want to and they [her parents] won’t do that. They know me better.” Although she believes her father expects her to marry a Nigerian, Ekene said her mother would support whatever decision she makes as long as the prospective husband loves her and shares the same religious beliefs. Her mother’s only reservations would be if the guy was not an Adventist, which is the family’s religious affiliation. In this situation, it appears that for Ekene’s mother, religion might trump ethnicity as a deciding factor in Ekene’s choice of a future spouse. Ekene’s plans to marry someone, not just from Nigeria, but from the Igbo ethnic group, could be attributed to the fact that she is a 1.5 generation immigrant and was probably grounded in some of the customs and traditions before migrating to the U.S.

Although Ekene attributes her reluctance to marry outside the Igbo ethnic group to the difficulty of learning another language, I suspect that her desire to marry an Igbo man is linked to her desire to eventually return to and live in Nigeria.

Contrasting her family’s socio-cultural expectations with the other girls,’ Ekene makes insightful remarks about the other participants’ experiences with

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\(^{34}\) By ‘tribe,’ Ekene is referring to the Igbo, one of the major ethnic groups of Nigeria. The word ‘tribe’ is a leftover from British colonial rule when the different ethnic groups in Nigeria were referred to as ‘tribes.’
their parents’ expectations. She theorizes that the reason the other girls are expected to fulfill traditional gender roles at home and marry from within their ethnic groups is because they were born in the U.S. and are likely not grounded in the customs and traditions like her. According to Ekene, she had lived “half” of her life in Nigeria and formed connections with extended family. Therefore, she does not feel as pressured as the other girls whose parents want them to adopt the customs and traditions through gender roles and marriage to someone from the same ethnic group. Directing her question at the other girls, Ekene inquires:

—are you guys born here? [Everybody says yes] That’s why. I think the only reason they want… ‘Cause they might think that since you guys were born here, you guys will learn more of American cultures and you guys will forget how to cook your native food… I spent almost half of my life, like a lot of my life, in Nigeria and I’ve seen my grandparents and everything. That’s why mom doesn’t really get on my nerves. ‘Cause she knows we’re alright— (FG, 2/26/08).

The conclusions that Ekene reached seem to be a possible explanation for why she, as a recent immigrant, does not face the same pressures that the other girls do to adhere to expectations for gender roles, dating and marriage. It is possible that African immigrant parents face more pressure to pass on cultural values to second-generation children than they do to first and 1.5 generation children who ethnic ties to their homeland. Parents’ expectations that the girls practice gender roles and marry same ethnic spouses may be their only way of ensuring that the connection to their ethnic heritage is maintained and passed on to future generations. It appears, as demonstrated in Ekene’s case, that 1.5 generation
children, who have been raised in their country of origin, are more likely, than their second generation counterparts to voluntarily marry from their ethnic group.

Unlike expectations for ethnic language maintenance, dating, and other ethnic practices which elicited minimal tension between the girls and their parents, the expectations for same ethnic spouses generated some resistance from the girls. The girls mostly want the freedom to marry whoever they choose regardless of ethnicity. Amanda believes its her “decision” to marry whoever she wishes; Abena is “confused” that her choice of future mate is restricted to only Ghanaians; Madeline thinks it’s a “problem” that her parents hold stereotypes about African-Americans and certain Ghanaian groups that limit her choices and Ekene is firm on her decision to marry someone from her Nigerian ethnic group. It is likely that the girls are willing to negotiate with their parents and adopt certain aspects of their Ghanaian and Nigerian identities like language and gender roles, but for weightier and very personal matters like marriage, they all seem to want to have the final say. Marriage outside of one’s ethnic group has been found to lead to a gradual weakening of ties to one’s ethnic group (Lee & Bean, 2004). This may explain the parents’ desire that their daughters engage in endogamous marriages. The girls, on their part, seem to understand the reality of their social experiences. They are attending school where African peers are in the minority, so they are more likely to interact with non-African than African males. In fact, it did not appear from my conversations with the girls that they interacted with any African males in school. They seem to understand the conflict between their
parents’ expectations and their social reality and have chosen to be active agents by exercising some independence from this African ethnic practice of limiting spousal choice to the parents’ ethnic group.

In addition to maintaining ethnic practices and gender expectations, the participants’ families also influence their choice of peers. The families are protective about the company that their children keep, especially if the company involves non-Africans. It appears that the parents are more comfortable when the girls’ friendships are with other children in their ethnic community. It is likely that the concern that their children not “catch on” to American values that are divergent from family standards causes the parents to be cautious about their children’s relationships.

*Family maintenance of socio-cultural expectations through influence in girls’ choice of peers*

“Are you really sure you want to go sleepover? I don’t want nothing bad to happen to you.”-Madeline

Erikson (1968) argues that peer friendships play a significant role in adolescents’ identity development, in general. These friendships could be with peers who share the same ethnic background or they could be cross-ethnic. In this section, I will address the role that the girls’ families played in their choice of peers in the home context. Later, I will address the role of immigrant peers in the school context. The girls’ families appear to understand Erikson’s argument that peer friendships can impact the girls’ identity development, in general, and their
ethnic identity development, in particular. The data reveals parental attempts at influencing the girls’ choice of peers. By limiting or monitoring certain peer interactions and discouraging the popular U.S. practice of sleepovers, a practice not common in West African societies, the parents sought to maintain their role as the primary influence on their children’s ethnic identity development. Many of the interactions closely monitored by the parents were with non-African peers. This sub-theme will reveal the role that the girls’ families played in their choice of peers within the home and ethnic community contexts.

Abena, Madeline and Amanda described the role their parents played, particularly with their non-ethnic peer friendships. The families monitor the girls’ social interactions with their non-African peers, sometimes out of concern for their safety and, at other times, from fear that is born out of stereotypical beliefs. By ensuring that the girls are situated in contexts that will allow for same-ethnic friendships, it is implied that the parents are encouraging friendships with other African immigrant children. Most of the girls acknowledge that the immersion in ethnic activities and organizations has exposed them to friendships with other Ghanaian and Nigerian immigrant children.

Amanda is able to interact with and form friendships with children from African immigrant homes because her family attends a Nigerian church and other social gatherings within their community. She and her siblings are the only second-generation children in her church, but she gets along very well with her first generation immigrant peers, in spite of the disparity in ethnic language
fluency. There does not appear to be any conflicts between the two groups of children. Instead, she admits that her best friend is a first generation Nigerian immigrant who she met in church.

... usually, the kids that I meet, they were born there[Nigeria], but came here. We have a really good [relationship]—one of them are[sic] my best friends—we have a really good relationship(PI, 2/11/08)

Just like Amanda, Abena also has positive relationships with other immigrant children in her community. She describes her relationship with them as “close.” She continued, “They tell me more about Ghana, because I don’t know nothing about it.” Since they teach her about Ghana, then these are likely to be first- or 1.5 generation immigrants. Similar to Abena and Amanda, Madeline also has friends who are recent immigrants. Recently, there has been an influx of Ghanaian immigrants to her community and she finds herself playing the role of teacher to the children who want to acquire the American “slang.” Madeline’s best friend is also Ghanaian.

The impact of same-ethnic peer friendships on the girls’ ethnic identity is apparent. Their closest friends come from the African community and the girls are cognizant of the mutual support that the friendships provide to both them and their peers. While Abena has adopted the role of student in her friendships with ethnic peers who educate her about Ghana, Madeline’s role as teacher has helped recent Ghanaian immigrant children adjust to the U.S. The participants’ roles as mentor and student highlight the connectedness they feel towards their ethnic peers and ethnic background and may result in the general well-being of the girls.
Ekene describes the difficulty she had with connecting to immigrant children in the Nigerian community when she first arrived. As a recent immigrant, she did not get the support she expected from them. She probably could have benefited from the type of support that Madeline extended towards the new immigrants in her community. Ekene’s parents tried to encourage her to attend social events where she would meet other Nigerian children, but Ekene did not like these gatherings because they were not “fun” and she found the children to be “rude” and “obnoxious.” Speaking about other Nigerian children, she recounted:

They are really rude. They’re obnoxious. They think they are better than everybody. That’s why I really didn’t like clicking [connecting]. I hated our Nigerian parties ‘cause my Dad always forced us like, “You need to make new friends,” and stuff like that. I was like “It is not fun.” (PI, 2/11/08)

The absence of a connection to fellow immigrants left Ekene without the support system that Abena, Madeline and Amanda developed with other children in their community. She attributed this to the fact that she was a recent immigrant, and “because [her peers who] were born here [in the U.S.] … went to elementary school here, they made new friends, they have friends. When I came here, I didn’t have nobody.” She reasoned that most of the second generation Nigerian immigrant children in her community had built relationships through the years and as a new immigrant, it was difficult for her to make a connection. Although Ekene attributes her difficulty with making friends to her age at the time of migration, I believe that her family membership at a “white” church played a role as well. The church context was crucial in exposing Abena, Madeline and
Amanda to friendships with and support from other immigrant children. By positioning the girls’ to establish relationships with same-ethnic peers who share similar values and cultural ties to Africa, the parents facilitate the role of same ethnic peers in the identity development of their children. The families also seek to maintain some influence in their choice of peers through the restrictions they place on sleepovers and visits to the homes of their non-African peers.

The participants’ all have similar experiences with their families with regards to sleepovers. Abena’s family is very cautious about sleepovers. Speaking about her mother, she said, “she doesn’t allow me to go to sleepovers.” Abena does not indicate that there has been any tension in her family concerning sleepovers. It appears that she accepts her mother’s stand on the issue. This is no surprise since Abena, on more than one occasion, has shown little resistance to family expectations. Amanda’s experience is similar to Abena’s. According to her, her father “does not believe in sleepovers and going to your friend’s house.” She describes an incident that occurred the day before we met for the personal interview. She wanted to go to a classmate’s home to practice an African dance for a school assignment and an argument ensued between her and her father who was reluctant to let her go. Although she understood his concerns, she was still upset at what she perceived to be a harmless request.

Me and my dad got in an argument because I needed to go to my friend’s house to practice our African dance that’s due today and he doesn’t believe in that at all. He doesn’t believe in sleepovers and going to your friend’s house and…So we just had a long discussion about that yesterday, like a really long discussion. I got in trouble, because I was so mad, like I don’t understand. And because I know he doesn’t believe in that, and I
respect that, because it just shows how they’re concerned. So I said okay, but I thought they would make an exception just for the fact that it’s for school. So he understood that. So he still took me over there but at the same time it really hurt him, so I explained to him that I’m not purposefully hurting him, I just needed a place to practice…Basically it’s him and my mom concern[ed] about where we’re at, what we do, so he said we just needed to be careful…Yeah, be cautious of where we’re at and who we hang out with (PI, 2/11/08).

The tension that Amanda describes here demonstrates her desire to form relationships with her peers even as she understands her father’s concern about the company she keeps. In this exchange, we can see the respect she accords her father even though she disagrees with him. This is indicative of her understanding of and respect for the value her family places on adult authority.

Madeline’s family expectations concerning sleepovers are similar to Abena’s and Amanda’s. Their reservations about sleepovers and parties also stem from concern about her safety. The only difference is that Madeline’s parents’ concerns come from stereotypes they hold about Americans:

If it’s a Ghanaian party, they don’t care, but if it’s an American, they be like, “No, they’re bad. They can take you somewhere. You gotta be home at this time.” But if it’s a Ghanaian, they’ll be like… [more relaxed] Yeah, but if I go sleepover with my American friends, they’ll be like, “Are you really sure you want to go sleepover? I don’t want nothing bad to happen to you.” Then we argue about it, saying, “They’re like other people.” But if I go sleep at a Ghanaian’s house, they be like, “Oh, it’s fine. You can do whatever.”(PI, 2/11/08)

Their fear that she could be “taken somewhere,” or that “something bad” could happen to her during a sleepover could stem from television reports on missing girls, some of whom have disappeared when they spent the night at a friend’s. Madeline’s parents seem to be more comfortable if she is sleeping over
or attending a party at a Ghanaian home. The notion that their child is safer in a Ghanaian home than in a non-Ghanaian home, supports the complicit role that the participants’ parents play in transferring stereotypical beliefs about Americans to their children. Her parents’ reluctance with her sleeping outside the home also possibly stems from their concern that she will be influenced by her American peers. Madeline describes her parents’ concern that she is dressing like her American peers. Comments like “You trying to be like them? That’s not good.” And “No, I don’t want you to follow [imitate] them” capture the fears that Madeline’s parents have about her becoming “Americanized” through peer influence.

And then the clothes, sometimes I like to wear clothes that some people wear, like the jeans and stuff. Like my parents be like, “You trying to be like them? That’s not good.” I’ll be like, “This is how people dress now. This is the life. So I should just wear whatever I want.” They be like, “No, I don’t want you to follow them” (PI, 2/11/08)

As with the other participants, Ekene’s family is concerned about her safety when it comes to attending parties, especially late in the night. They are also concerned if there is no adult supervision at these parties. At the time of this study, Ekene had never slept over at a friend’s house, but she was considering doing so with one of her friends. She believes she will have her mother’s support “because…my mom knows her family, and since her family and my family are really close, it’s not a problem.” Again, there is an underlying theme of parents’ concern for safety in this and all the other responses. Being close friends with the
family with whom Ekene plans to spend the night changes the dynamics of the situation.

By influencing their children’s choice of friends, I believe the families were trying to ensure that they develop relationships with peers who share the same values and culture as they do. The status of their peers as first or second generation immigrants did not deter the participants from developing friendships with them. Instead, the girls and their peers took advantage of each others’ cultural knowledge and lived experiences and built relationships based on their common ancestry. I believe that the participants’ ethnic identities were enhanced through the connections they made with their peers. For example, Madeline may have felt empowered in her role as teacher and as someone who is positioned to orient recent immigrant peers to their new home country, while Abena may have seen her peers as her connection to the African continent. Despite the tensions between the girls and their parents with regards to dating, marriage and choice of peers, the participants’ description of their interactions with their parents revealed a consistency in the respectful manner with which they responded to their parents’ expectations of them.

The above descriptions of family efforts at socialization for ethnic identity and cultural continuity can be summarized as follows: West African immigrant parents are concerned that their children might be torn between competing Western and African values and socio-cultural practices. They understand that they have to make conscientious efforts to immerse their children in ethnic
practices through the maintenance of the ethnic language, membership in ethnic organizations, retention of cultural values like respect for authority, sexual purity, same-ethnic relationships, and ultimately marriage to a same-ethnic partner. They desire to raise daughters who will not bring shame to the family, but who will embrace the values by which they have been raised. They mostly expect the girls to adopt an African identity like their parents.

The girls, on their part, respect their parents’ efforts at socialization and want to maintain ties to their African identity and heritage. But they understand that they are different from their newcomer peers and those being raised in their parents’ home country. They appreciate having another language which they can use for private conversations, yet they do not particularly want to dress in ethnic clothing; they understand their parents’ concerns about their choice of peers, but they want to participate in practices such as sleeping over at friends’ homes; they mostly understand that adolescent dating is not a culturally acceptable practice among African immigrants, but they want to have the freedom to choose their future spouse. Finally, the girls have arrived at the decision, without any apparent coercion from their families, to live and work in Africa in the future. This implies a level of parental success in connecting them to the African continent. It is apparent that the girls have learned to negotiate what aspects of their African identity they want to adopt, especially aspects that will distinguish them as “respectful” and “well-raised” girls in their ethnic communities and in the school.
context. Another cultural value that the girls all embrace, and which distinguishes them in the school context, is the value for academic success.

The standards that the families set for their daughters include high expectations for academic success. The participants’ parents, like many immigrants who come to the U.S., show that their reasons for migrating include self-advancement, so they place a strong emphasis on maximizing educational opportunities (Ogbu, 1993). Ogbu (1993) continues, “the expectations which motivated emigration continue to influence the way they [parents] perceive and respond to events, including schooling…” (p. 485). Akiba (2007) argues against the belief held by some educators that immigrant children perform better academically if they and their families culturally assimilate into the dominant society. Instead, he posits that children from immigrant families which retain their ethnic values, artifacts and practices tend to excel in school. The data from this study indicates that the participants’ families made efforts to retain ethnic values that include high expectations for academic success. Under the next sub-theme, I will describe findings on how the parents’ academic expectations translated to school success for the girls, and how peer perception of them as smart African girls impacted the girls’ ethnic identities.
Family maintenance of socio-cultural expectations for academic success and impact on participants’ ethnic identity and academic success

“They want me to be a doctor. What if [I] don’t want to be a doctor?” - Abena

Immigrants who have migrated to the U.S. for better opportunities are likely to view education as a means to getting ahead (Ogbu, 1993). They also tend to translate this to the academic expectations they have of their children (Ogbu, 1993). This study revealed that the participants’ families place a high premium on academic success and expect their children to excel in school. The African immigrant’s value for education is supported by research that refers to African immigrants in the U.S. as the most educated immigrant group (Massey, Mooney, Torres & Charles, 2007). Since the former British colonies of Ghana and Nigeria contribute the greatest number of African émigrés to the U.S. (Massey et al., 2007), it is assumed that the value that the participants’ families have for education is not out of the norm. Growing up in Ghanaian and Nigerian communities where they are reminded regularly of the value of education results in a consciousness that, for the girls, does not include school failure. Children who are expected to succeed academically will live up to their families’ expectations for academic success. The girls in this study were all successful in school because they understood that failure was not an alternative for them and their families.

The data reveals very high expectations for academic success for all four participants. These expectations translate to academic success for the girls which
have earned them the reputation of being smart African girls. Their academic success, just like their choice not to date, sets them apart from the rest of their peers. When I asked Abena what her parents’ expectations of her were as a girl from a Ghanaian background, I was referring to their expectations in terms of her maintaining family customs and traditions. Instead, she responded, “First of all, good grades,” and explained that her mother wanted her to be a doctor, “Like every African parent.” She further explained that her family’s academic expectations are that she get “All A’s,” and her mother’s response if she gets a B is: “Oh, good job, but you should try harder.” Her family’s academic expectations were also the first thing she mentioned when I asked her if there are any conflicts between her parents’ expectations of her and who she wants to be.

They want me to be a doctor. What if you [I] don’t want to be a doctor?...I like doing hair, right? So one day I was just playing around. I wasn’t serious. “Oh Mom, I want to be a hairdresser.” “No!” [Her mother responded vehemently] We have enough of those. I want a doctor! I want a doctor!”

I probed further to see if Abena’s choice of a future career had been impacted by her parents’ expectations. She confirmed by saying, “I already know she wants me to be a doctor” and “I want to be a [medicine] doctor.” This response implies that Abena’s choice of a future career is somewhat influenced by her mother’s expectations. Although she indicates that she wants to be a doctor, it is clear that she has not arrived at this decision entirely on her own. Regardless of whose idea it is, Abena seems to take pleasure in knowing that her mother’s expectations drive her academic performance in school. She appears to understand that her
mother’s high expectations of her are based on the value that African immigrants generally place on academic success, hence her comment about her mother wanting her to be a doctor, “like every African parent.” The impact of her mother’s expectations on her ethnic identity can be understood by considering what it means to be a Black adolescent who is reputed to be smart. Some studies have linked academic achievement among Black students with the concept of “acting white” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Weis, 1985). These studies have shown how the fear of being labeled as “acting white” can negatively affect the school performance of Black students. The participants in this study did not appear to experience such negative reactions to their school success. Instead, their status as smart African girls seemed to fuel their determination to live up to this reputation.

The subject of Amanda’s parents’ expectations for her academic success came up during the interview when she described her experiences with being raised in the U.S. by Nigerian parents. Her response revealed a conflict between her parent’s academic expectations and her athletic aspirations.

Sometimes I feel like it’s difficult, because to me, it seems sometimes they don’t understand what Americans do—I don’t know how to explain it, but sometimes it seems like they want me…they want me fully in academics and I do academics and athletics…and I enjoy doing athletics and academics, but they say that I need to get my priorities straight that they think that it seems like I care about my athletics more than my academics. So right now I’m just trying to prove to them that to me, always academics will come first, but I also like the athletics too. So I’m just trying to show them that I care about my studies also (PI, 2/11/08).

Amanda seemed to be comparing her parents to American parents who she believes encourage their children’s participation in sports. Since it is not
uncommon to see children from Nigerian and Ghanaian homes involved in school athletics in the U.S., her parents’ concern may have been that her academic performance not be impacted by her involvement in sports. She describes her parents’ reluctance to accept her complaints of being tired after practice and not being able to study. Their reaction usually is, “… if I [she] should have time to practice basketball, I [she] should have time… for my [her] studies.” Later in the interview, Amanda admitted that she has not resolved a more recent conflict with her mother about whether she could participate in track. She was concerned because track was beginning the day after our interview: “So now she doesn’t want me to do track, and track starts tomorrow, so I don’t know what I’m gonna do.” Amanda’s plan was to “go home and beg her…”

When Amanda shared her future plans to practice medicine in West Africa with me, I wanted to know if it was her desire or her parents’ that she become a doctor. Her response indicated that she chose this profession by herself, without any coercion from her parents. In fact she described her dreams of attending college and studying medicine on an athletic scholarship.

My mom is an LPN nurse and I remember when I was little… I used to play with her doctor stuff, but it’s just the fact that I adore kids and I want to help them when they’re sick …I feel that they would never force a career on me, but at the same time, they want me to have a good career. My dream always was to grow up to be either a pediatrician or OB/GYN and my mom understands that, but at the same time, I’m a very athletic girl. So…, I feel like I’ll be able to get the scholarship off of basketball. (PI & FG, 2/11/08 & 2/26/08)).

Although Amanda’s dreams seem to be no different from the dreams that many of her non-immigrant peers have, she appears to have made a connection between
her parents’ high standards for academic success and a successful career in medicine. The impact of her parent’s expectations on her identity are also apparent in her plans to practice medicine in Africa. Therefore Amanda has made the connection between her present school success and her future success at impacting lives in Africa. By embracing her parents’ value for education, Amanda is also embracing an aspect of her African identity that causes her to stand out among her peers in the school context.

Similar to Abena and Amanda, Madeline’s family also have high expectations of her academically. Like Amanda’s parents, they believe that education should be Madeline’s priority right now.

They think that your child always has to have this type of grade to succeed and go to college and finish their masters, their bachelors, whatever, get this certain degree. That’s their high expectation; just education comes first, then whatever. But they [are] really strict about that. They just want you to keep going till you go to college and become somebody (PI, 2/11/08).

She acknowledges the impact of their expectations on her school performance. Her initial semester in high school was challenging, and proved to her that her parents “are really right” in their advice about studying hard.

I used to be like, “Oh, they’re just whatever.” But then I realized my freshman year, I was like, “My parents are really right.” Because my middle school year, they always be like, “Madeline, study hard. High school’s no joke.” I’ll be like, “It’s gonna be easy.” I struggled first semester and I was like, “My parents are really right.” So I got to think about it and was like, “… I really need to be serious.” And now I’m getting better (PI, 2/11/08).

Like her cousin, Abena, Madeline’s parents also want her to be a doctor although she loves working with computers. Like Abena, she appears to have adopted her
parents’ expectations as her own and concurs with them that being a doctor will “bring food to the table.”

I like computers. I like messing around with computers. That was my dream, but it was like, “Be a doctor! That’s what’s going to bring food to the table!” and I was like, “But I like computers. That’s what I like.” But I like kids so I was like, okay never mind. So I’ll just be a doctor (FG, 2/26/08)

Ekene’s response to what her parents expect of her is, “…get good grades. That’s my dad’s thing—get good grades.” She also seems to want to do well in school, not just to please her family, but herself as well. Ekene states that the reason she challenges herself to do well is so that, not only would she have “a clean record,” but she could get scholarship money for college.

Oh, my dad believes it’s straight As and all that… I like getting good grades—I’ll do it for myself ‘cause I need to get in a good college and even if I don’t go college, my record will be clean. I get good grades and any college would want to accept me, give me scholarship. (PI, 2/11/08).

The parents’ expectations for academic success positively affect the girls’ school performance in that their school performance has earned them the respect of their peers. Their school performance also impacts their ethnic identity because their peers link the girls’ academic performance to their African identity, which, in turn, reinforces the participants’ efforts at holding themselves to very high standards. Amanda shared how she and her peers disagree on which grades are acceptable.

Well, my peers’ expectations, like not expectations, but when they see my grade and I see that I have a B, they’ll go like, “Oh, that’s good.” I’ll be like, “No, it’s not. I should have an A.” (PI, 2/11/08).
During the group interview, Ekene and Abena, just like Amanda, described, in greater detail, their peers’ perceptions of them as smart African girls.

Ekene described an encounter that took place at the end of eighth grade between her and another student who she regularly helped with his work. He had written her a note:

And he was like, “I know you’re gonna—have a good summer and I know you’re gonna get good grades than I am, better grades than I am. So keep it up. I wish you the best.”…I was so happy, because I was known as the kid that was always getting good grades, straight A’s, and stuff.

Her reputation as “the kid that was always getting good grades” and “the kid [who] is always smart” made Ekene “happy” and could be said to have helped her self-esteem. From her earlier descriptions of the challenges she faced as a new immigrant in school, it appeared that Ekene needed the affirmation that she received for being smart.

The below exchange between Ekene and Abena further explains how the girls feel about their reputation as smart students and the role that they play in assisting their peers with schoolwork. Although they sound frustrated about their peers’ expectations for homework assistance, there seems to be an underlying satisfaction in their role as teachers:

**Ekene:** Because we always do our homework and it’s hard for us to get in trouble. And we always do the right thing. And it’s a good thing, but sometimes, it’s annoying…Like in middle school…Goodness, you should have seen them. They were like, “Ekene’s here. Oh, yeah, she’s so smart. Did you do your homework, Ekene?” I was like, “Yes.” “Can I see?” I was like, “Sure.” Another one will come with one problem and they’ll be like, “Ekene, can you help with this?” I’ll solve it for them, then the next person, then the next and I was like, “I’m done! I’m tired. Leave me
alone.” It’s kind of hard, because I always try to help you, but it gets tiring (FG, 2/26/08).

**Abena:** They take advantage of [us]…If you teach them once, everyday they’ll come to you. “Did you do this? Did you do this?”… They don’t wanna learn it themselves (FG, 2/26/08).

 Madeline and I did not discuss whether she had similar expectations from her peers to be smart because of her African heritage. Since she confirmed that her peers are aware of her African heritage, by extrapolation, the same expectations could apply to her.

 I wanted to probe further into the reputation that the girls had for being “smart” and how it was that their peers came to believe that they are smart just because they are of African ascent. In addition to parental standards for academic success, Ekene’s explained that their parents’ expectations that they respect their teachers and stay out of trouble also contribute to their academic success. It seems that their parents’ expectations that they adhere to socio-cultural practices like respect for adult authority result in the girls “doing the right thing” by “not getting in trouble” in school. If they are doing the right things and staying out of trouble, then they are likely to succeed academically.

 The above explanations for the girls’ school success highlight the similarities and differences between them and their U.S.-born peers with regards to expectations for school success. The girls are similar to their U.S.-born peers in the dreams they likely share about future careers. They may be also similar in parental expectations for academic success because these expectations are not
exclusive to African immigrant parents. I believe that what sets the girls apart from their U.S.-born peers apart are community expectations for academic success. African immigrant children who are raised in communities where great value is placed on education may not want to disappoint their families with poor school performance. Each girl may see herself as one among many other African immigrant peers in her community who are achieving in school and may not want to lose such a priced position in the community or bring shame to her family. It is also possible that by excelling in school, the participants want to maintain this aspect of their African identity that is nationally recognized in terms of educational attainment.

I wanted to understand whether the girls’ teachers were aware of their parents’ academic expectations and if they, too, had similar expectations. Ekene and Abena shared how their parents collaborate with school officials to ensure their academic success. Their teachers expect them to excel in school when their parents successfully communicate their expectations to the teachers. The assistant principal, Dr. Williams, having met with and learned of Ekene’s father’s expectations, took the liberty to enroll her in academic programs that he believed would benefit her. At the time of this study he had enrolled her in a school-community program which would award her full in-state tuition upon successful completion of the program and high school graduation. Her family was not initially aware of this program, but since they had communicated their desire for
her academic success to Dr. Williams, he enrolled her when the opportunity came up.

Abena’s mother also collaborates with the teachers by visiting them and expressing her academic expectations of Abena to them, and the teachers respond by ensuring that Abena participates in class. She admits that her teachers do not necessarily have higher expectations of her than they do her peers until they meet her parents:

Unless they meet my parents, no. If they meet my mom and [she says], “Oh, work hard on her. Try your best.” [The teachers say]“Oh, Abena, we expect a lot from you because your mom already came here.” But if they don’t meet her, then everything’s okay. When I first came to this school. [She said] “I want you guys to give her a lot of homework. Make her work hard.” Oh my gosh, in Humanities, anytime, even if I’m dozing off, [the teacher says] “Abena, wake up.”

(FG, 2/28/08)

Ekene concurred:

It happened to me with this school. I remember my Dad met Dr. Williams. All the programs and college that are good, he set me up. I didn’t sign up for the Space program, but he signed me up. …So[he] talked to my dad and from then on, anything that is good, he forwards it to me. (FG, 2/26/08).

Madeline and Amanda did not describe any instances when their parents came to school to inform school officials of the academic expectations they have for their children. Nevertheless, their parents’ expectations for academic success were sufficient motivation for school success.
Summary: the impact of family ethnic practices and socio-cultural expectations on the girls’ ethnic identity

Close analysis of the data suggests that the participants’ identities as children of Nigerian and Ghanaian immigrants are influenced by the ethnic practices and socio-cultural standards and expectations of their parents. Even within the tension that arises as they struggle to define who they are, we cannot ignore the influence that the families have on the girls’ ethnic identities. The participants seem to acknowledge that their parents’ socio-cultural expectations are for their own benefit, even while they strive for personal agency in the identity they choose to adopt. The participants’ parents’ influence can be seen in the socio-cultural practices that they expect the girls to adopt – respect for adults, gender roles in the home, delay in dating, their choice of peers and high academic expectations. And these expectations, in turn, cause the girls to choose which ethnic practices they value and hope to adopt. At times, the line between the parent’s expectations and what the girls believe are their personal choices appeared to be blurred.

The findings on the impact of parental expectations on socio-cultural practices, choice of peers and academic achievement reveal that, although not all the girls’ choose their family ethnic identity, they all embrace different aspects of their African identity. They feel sufficient connection to Africa to want to live and work there someday. Most of them also indicate a desire to carry on the families’ ethnic practices. This may appear contradictory to their insistence that they will
consider marrying outside their ethnic group, but the girls do not feel that marrying a same-ethnic mate is critical to the preservation of their African identity. The girls are mostly similar in their views on dating and the value their families place on respect for adults and authority. They are confident enough in their decisions to embrace certain ethnic and cultural values associated with their African identity that they do not mind being different from their peers on social concepts like dating. They like being identified as respectful African girls in contrast to their American peers who they claim are less respectful. They also embrace an identity of being smart African students who always do their homework, hardly get in trouble and always do the right thing. Their parents’ expectations for academic success resulted in the girls’ school success and subsequent reputation as smart African girls.

Could the parents be said to be successful in their function as transmitters of ethnic identity for their children? To what extent have they influence the participants’ choice of ethnic identities? To a large extent, the study reveals that the girls are very culturally aware and connected to their African identity, even if they do not fit into specific, predetermined ethnic molds. Parental efforts at immersing them in ethnic and socio-cultural practices as a means of transmitting an African identity appears successful, although the girls seem to want to define their “Africanness” differently from their parents. I believe that their cultural awareness and successful negotiation of which aspects of their African identity to retain have led to the participants’ construction of a hybrid ethnic identity. They
have chosen to retain what they deem expedient or practical aspects of their African identity while they find alternative ethnic selves in a society whose values may be at variance with their ethnic values.

Since the participants and their families repeatedly contrasted their identity, values and behaviors as African immigrants with those of their American-American peers, I was curious to know what relationships they had with other African immigrant children at Montclair Preparatory. Did they find themselves drawn to peers from similar ethnic backgrounds? Were these peers a source of support in the school context as they were in their ethnic communities? The answers to these questions are discussed under the next theme.

Theme 4: The importance the girls place on immigrant peers in the school context and the impact on their ethnic identity

“I usually hang with the African group, because I’m most close to them. ...people be like, “Why she always hang around with those Africans?”” - Madeline

Although I have discussed the role that parents played in the participants’ choice of peers in the home context, the discussion here will focus on the girls’ peer relationships in the school context. The importance that the girls place on immigrant peers relationships in the school context and the impact on the participants’ ethnic identity emerged during the analysis of data about the girls’ school experiences and calls for closer examination of whether the participants developed friendships with peers of the same ethnic group, or whether their
friendships cut across racial and ethnic lines and the impact that this may have had on their ethnic identities. This study looked specifically at school peer relationship as one of the factors that might shape the girls’ ethnic identities. Kao & Joyner (2006), in their study of Hispanic and Asian adolescents, discovered an overwhelming preference for same-ethnic peers among their study participants. Similar to their findings which suggest that ethnic boundaries are still salient among Latino and Asian-American youth in their choice of peers, the findings of this study also suggest that ethnicity is salient for some of the girls. Although all the study participants referred to having some form of peer friendships in school, for Abena, Madeline and Ekene, these friendships consisted of same-ethnic peers. Amanda was the only one whose school friends came from diverse ethnic groups.

Whereas Abena and Madeline found a lot of support in school friendships with their immigrant peers, Ekene’s experience with school friendships was not always positive. Abena and Madeline were similar in the relationships they formed with “the African group” made up of girls from other West African countries. Abena, who had attended Montclair a year before her cousin, Madeline, introduced her to “the African group.” Amanda, on the other hand, said she was not aware of this group and had friends from different ethnic groups. Although Ekene knew about “the African group” she did not feel that as a freshman she could be a part of the group whose members were sophomores. Instead she made friends with other African girls, although it did not appear that this group offered
the same kind of support as the “official” African group did for Abena and Madeline.

I will begin with the immigrant peer relationships as described by Amanda, Abena and Madeline. I will describe Ekene’s peer relationships last because as a 1.5 generation Nigerian immigrant, her experiences were different. Abena described the strong relationships that she had in school with her immigrant peers from other parts of West Africa, including Liberia and Sierra Leone. She and her cousin, Madeline, are the only Ghanaians in the group. I was curious to understand how this group of girls from the same background, and labeled “the African group” by their schoolmates, came to be friends. I also wanted to know if there were other “African groups” in the school, to which Abena responded, “Not that I know of.” She explained:

I heard one of my—my first friend, she’s a Liberian, and I heard her talk and I heard the accent and I was like, “Oh, you must be an African.” And yeah, we just—they call us the African group. [Laugh] Like, some of the peers, the students. They’re like, “Oh, that’s the African group. When they have an accent, you can’t understand it.” So when she talks, they think I understand what she’s saying, so they’re all confused- (Abena, PI, 2/11/08)

It is important to note here that it was the accent that first drew the girls to each other. It was also the accent that their peers referred to when describing them as “the African group.” The role of accented speech in drawing same-ethnic peers to each other points to the fact that adolescents will be drawn to peers with whom they share a commonality and this same uniqueness which draws them to each other can also set them apart from the rest of their peers. Abena revealed her
schoolmates’ assumptions that the members of “the African group” are unilingual and can understand each other because they are Africans (and speak English with an accent), yet Abena and Madeline are the only members of “the African group” who speak the same language (Twi). When I asked Abena to compare her home and school experiences, she stated that having relatives [including Madeline] in school with whom she could speak the same language helped:

As I told you, my cousins, so I mostly—I spend more time with them, so I speak my language with them (PI, 2/11/08).

In addition to having a peer group with whom she can speak the same language, Abena explained that having a group of African friends offered a form of support that she did not get from her non-African peers. Speaking of the benefits of having same ethnic group friends, Abena said, “We all have the same expectations.” This suggests that friendships with peers from similar ethnic backgrounds could offer much needed support at this critical time in adolescent development because of shared values and experiences. Peers who share the same values are more likely to support each other at this stage of development when adolescents face pressures to conform to peer expectations.

In comparison to her African friends, Abena described the relationship with her non-African friends as formal. The extent of her conversations with them is, “Hi. Bye” and “Did you do your homework?” She continued, “Yeah, we’re not really close the way I am with my [African]…friends.” The extent of her relationship with other peers is to “socialize” and help them out with schoolwork.
The friendship is platonic and does not offer the same kind of support as her friendship with her African immigrant peers.

When I asked Madeline about her peer relationships in school, she referenced “the African group” without my mentioning it. This led me to believe that it was a term commonly used by the group, as well as those outside the group. Since Madeline was a part of “the African group,” I wanted to know what that experience meant to her. She had spent her freshman year at another school, so having a cousin, Abena, who was already at Montclair before she got there, was critical to her school adjustment. It was through Abena that she acquired this ready made group of friends. But, Madeline did not limit her friendship to this group alone. She made friends with “a different variety of people”:

Right now, the most people I hang out with is the Liberians, Sierra Leone, and my cousin Abena, she’s Ghanaian. I usually hang with the African group, because I’m most close to them, but then on the other side, when I’m not talking to them, I have another side. ‘Cause I don’t care who I hang around with, but right now I just really hang around with—[the African group] (PI, 2/11/08)

Madeline admitted that “hanging around” with the African group led to some tension between her and her African-American friends.

People be like, “Why she always hang around with those Africans?” And they be like, “Why don’t you hang around with us? Those African are…” Then they go around talking about—‘cause they always look at me as the non-African, because the way I act, but [they say of the African group] they’re loud, talking in their accent, and they be like, “Madeline, hang around with us. Stop hanging around with those Africans.” I be like, “Everybody’s the same.” I just hang around with different variety of people.
It is obvious from the statement above that Madeline’s friends openly speak about the stereotypes they have about Africans. They probably view her as “non-African” because she identifies as African-American when she is with them and are comfortable referring to the African students as “loud” or as “those Africans when they are with her.” The above exchange reveals some tension and Madeline seems to be torn between her African-American and African friends. They urge her to “stop hanging around with those Africans.” I wanted to understand how she feels about the pressure to choose allegiances, especially from peers who assume she is African American and should be hanging around with other African-Americans: “Yeah. It doesn’t matter. I just hang around with who I feel comfortable with.” Madeline’s comment that her non-African peers “always look at [her] as the non-African, because [of] the way [she] act[s]” indicates that she believes that she “acts” African-American. It appears that she has internalized the stereotypes that there is an African and an African-American way of “acting.” Earlier on Madeline had also commented that she did not “look” African. I treated this in detail in the section that discussed the mutual stereotyping between Africans and African-Americans. Her comments in the quote above could also help explain her switching of identities from Ghanaian to African-American depending on the context. Madeline has not only bought into the stereotype of an African way of being and an African look, but she seems to pride herself for not fitting into these stereotypes. It is possible that she uses this to her “advantage” when she needs to feel accepted by her African-American friends.
During the group interviews, Madeline explained that at Montclair was the first time she had school friends who were not African-American. The fact that her friends at her previous school had all been African-Americans could explain the context in which some of her identity switching began. It would have been difficult for her to identify as the only African in her group of friends, hence her choice to identify as African-American in such contexts. Coming to a new school where her cousin, Abena, already attended, she naturally got co-opted into “the African group.” She described the benefits of being a member of this group:

So hanging around with them shows how I really am. My best friend that came to my other school, she said, “Are all of them African?” and I said, “Yeah, these are the people I feel most close to and talk to about anything instead of everybody gossiping about each other” (PI, 2/11/08).

Madeline’s comment that she hangs with the African group because she can be herself when she is with them- not an African-American, but a second-generation African immigrant who enjoys the company of her immigrant peers with whom she shares common experiences, indicates her perception of the group as a safe space. Asked how she compared her relationship with her African and African-American friends, Madeline replied:

Yeah, most of the African-American friends, they usually gossip and I’m not a person that really associate myself with [gossip]…. So they be like, “Eww, look at her. She don’t have the new shoes, dah, dah, dah…” And I’m not like that. I be like, “Stop saying that.” But hanging around with them [her African friends], they’re just like cool. We can share each other’s point of view about stuff.

Madeline’s response indicates that she enjoys having friends from the same background because they can talk about shared experiences and “share each
other’s point of view about stuff.’” Her response also reveals her own stereotypes about her African-American peers and confirms that the mutual stereotyping between both groups is a recurring theme in this study. Madeline also contradicts herself by stating that she does not like associating with gossips, yet she continues to maintain a relationship with her African-American friends.

Apart from having a shared ethnic background, Madeline’s experiences with the African group have also taught her that there are certain ethnic experiences that only her immigrant peers will understand:

If I talk about it[ ethnic experiences] to my African-American friends, they’re like, “Oh, that’s interesting, but that sounds weird.” But with them [African group], I can just be like, “So in Africa dah, dah, dah, dah…” We just all are excited and stuff.

Madeline and Abena’s relationship with each other and with their immigrant peers appears to be mutually satisfying. About Madeline and other members of the African group, Abena stated, “I can still speak my language to her. Some of them understand what I’m saying. We all come from the same background.”

About the role that her cousin, Abena, played in her adjusting to a new school environment Madeline stated:

Yeah, she really helped me, because I’m usually a quiet girl when I’m at school and she really helped me express myself and just be free and not just stay in a really small shell, just be open to everybody. But she’s always there to just help me. Yeah, if it wasn’t for her, I’d just be lost.

Whereas Abena and Madeline showed a preference for friendship with their African immigrant peers, Amanda showed no such preference and chose to have friends from different ethnic backgrounds. Ethnicity was not salient for
Amanda when it came to peer relations. Unlike Abena and Madeline, Amanda had not heard of “the African group” or any other ethnic group of friends either. “I don’t think there’s a group of Africans or a group of Asians or a group of...Americans. I mean, we’re a diverse school… race, gender, so…everyone hangs out with anybody.” She did not think that ethnicity played a role in peer relationships at Montclair; therefore, I was not surprised that her peer relationships were not defined by the ethnicity of her friends but by their values and personalities. Her major concerns were that her friends be “honest,” “nice,” and not “talk about people all the time.” Like Madeline, she was particular about not having friends who talk about others behind their back, but unlike Madeline who had challenges with her friends not accepting her African background, Amanda wanted friends who accepted her as she was. Amanda maintained this stance during both the personal and group interviews.

I hang out with anyone who is honest and they have a good personality. So it doesn’t matter what race you are as long as you’re nice, and, as she [Madeline] mentioned, you don’t talk about people all the time. I’m the same at home and at school, because if you act two different ways, that doesn’t make you a real person. It makes you come off—I mean, I don’t know how to explain it, but if you act a certain way at home and you come to school and you act a different way, that’s not right. You shouldn’t do that. If your friends can’t accept you for who you really are, then they’re not your true friends (FG, 2/28/08)

Amanda also explained the diversity of her group of friends. To her, “it doesn’t matter where they’re from. It just matters who they are…” “Trust,” “loyalty,” and “honesty” matter more than ethnicity to Amanda in her choice of friends. Amanda was very comfortable in her relationships for the following
reason: “I feel that the friends I have right now, they care about me and I care about them at the same time.”

Ekene was the only participant who did not seem to have close friendships in school, as was the case with home and in the Nigerian community. She wished she had a group of friends with whom she shared the same language and lived experiences. She had a close Ghanaian friend outside of school and spoke of the close friends she still had in Nigeria. She also described the close relationship she had with her sister, who she wished attended Montclair so that she would have a close friend, in school, like the other participants. Although Ekene had been introduced by a mutual friend to “the African group,” she was not a part of the group because she is a freshman and the girls in that group are all sophomores. This may explain why Amanda had not heard of the group too, since she is a freshman as well. Ekene explained that she envied the group because it reminded her of her school relationships in Nigeria. Speaking of the African group, she said, “Cause they [are] just a group. They always hang out together, so I would like to have something close to what I had at home.” She acknowledged that although Amanda and some other students were Nigerian, they were not Igbo, so they could not communicate in the same ethnic language like Abena and Madeline did. This should not have been a hindrance since the African group was made up friends from different nationalities.

Even though Ekene mentioned having a few African friends in school, she described her relationship with them as platonic, “I just know them. They are not
like my best friends.” Yet, it was obvious that the relationships were somewhat meaningful because, according to Ekene, “at least we have some things in common… we are, like, six of us and we all sit at the same spot…we just have Africans, just us. We just sit together, eat and talk. At least we have some things in common.” I did not get the impression that Ekene’s group of African friends meant the same to her as the African group did to Abena and Madeline.

Summary: The impact of school immigrant peers on participants’ ethnic identity

All four participants found different levels of support from their school friendships. For Abena, Madeline and Ekene, the school friendships were mostly with fellow African immigrants. Although Amanda’s friends were ethnically diverse, she found her relationships with them to be satisfying. I believe that Ekene’s status as a 1.5 generation immigrant and the challenges she faced in school as a new immigrant may have limited her chances of forming close connections with her immigrant and non-immigrant peers. Compared to the other participants who were second-generation immigrants, Ekene’s migration as an adolescent impacted her ability to form friendships the same way that the other participants did. As she had explained earlier, second-generation immigrants have the advantage of having done most of their schooling in the U.S. and have had opportunities to make friends. Other factors that could have impacted her peer friendships include the fact that when she first arrived, she was held back one year
because of her age; she was quiet; she was conscious of her accent; and she faced many stereotypes about her African heritage.

I believe that there was some connection between the ethnic identity that each girl chose and her choice of peers. I was not surprised that Amanda’s friendships cut across many ethnic groups. She was not concerned about the ethnic make-up of her friends and I see the connection to the way she chose to identify as partly American and partly Nigerian. She chose an identity that embraced all aspects of her heritage as a girl born in the U.S. to Nigerian immigrants. Likewise, she chose to embrace friendships primarily based on shared values rather than shared ethnicity. Abena showed the strongest ties to the African group. She enjoyed the benefits of having a group of friends with whom she shared either an ethnic language or similar experiences. She did not mention having friends from any other group at the time of this study. Instead, it appears that her major source of peer support in school was the African group. She was also one of two participants to clearly state that they were African [Ekene being the other]. She did not indicate switching ethnic identities like Madeline or having dual ethnic identities like Amanda. Madeline admitted that prior to coming to Montclair, she had only African-American friends. It is probable that this could also have been the case at Montclair if she had not been connected to the African group by Abena. She was the only participant who switched identities depending on the context. She claimed to be African-American when she was African-Americans and Ghanaian when she was with Ghanaians. I was not surprised that
she moved between two separate groups of friends at school, just as she moved between ethnic identities. As she claimed, when she was not with the African group, she was with her African-American friends. Ekene was the other participant who clearly chose both an African and a Nigerian identity. As a fairly recent immigrant, she did not feel she had a choice but to identify as a Nigerian. She was aware that her accent attracts attention to her African heritage. Ekene migrated as an adolescent when most children are typically dealing with peer issues. This was not helped by the fact that she was an African immigrant who spoke with a noticeable accent. The reactions that Madeline’s African-American peers had towards the African group, by asking her not to associate with them, is an example of the challenges Ekene faced with school relationships. Unlike the other participants who were second generation immigrants, these issues surrounding stereotypes and discrimination clearly impacted Ekene’s school experiences and adjustment and therefore likely her chances of forming close friendships.

In addition to immigrant peer relationships, another factor that impacted the girls’ school experiences and their ethnic identity was the efforts that the school made to include Africa in the curriculum. This will be discussed under the next theme, the girls’ experiences with culturally-responsive pedagogy regarding the treatment of Africa in the curriculum and the impact on their ethnic identity.
Theme 5: The girls’ experiences with culturally-responsive pedagogy regarding the treatment of Africa in the curriculum and impact on their ethnic identity

It makes me feel good that at least someone knows how Africa is, …my Humanities teachers, it seems like they know a lot about the advantages and disadvantages of Africa. They talk about the stereotypes made about Africa and it makes me proud to know that they don’t believe just one side, that they’ll sit down and take a look at both sides of the story –Amanda

In addition to immigrant peer relationships, how did other school experiences, like classroom curriculum, influence the participants’ ethnic identity? Models of culturally-responsive teaching that address the need for inclusive curriculum that meets the need of a diverse student population include Gay (2000) and Banks (1997). Gay’s (2000) principles of cultural responsiveness include making the invisible visible through accurate representation of history. Gay (2000) argues that “both immigrant and native-born students may… encounter prejudices, stereotyping, and racism that have negative impacts on their self-esteem, mental health and academic achievement (p. 18). Including their histories and experiences in the curriculum may improve the mental health and self-esteem of these students.

A review of the literature on ethnic identity and school adjustment reveals some studies that have examined the implications of identity and school experience (Gibson, 1991, 1995; Waters, 1991, 1994; Rong & Brown, 2001). Tatum (1997) argues that school experience influences the development of racial and ethnic identity and researchers like Banks (1993) support enhancing adolescents’ ethnic identity development for better academic achievement and general school experience. Researchers have argued for the need for culturally-
relevant teaching and curricula that uses the experiences and cultural knowledge that ethnic minority students bring with them to the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2001; Banks, 1995). Banks (1995) linked the inclusion of culture in the curriculum and the development of positive racial identities. In this study, the participants’ perception of the school curriculum was that it was culturally-responsive and that the balanced treatment of Africa impacted their ethnic identities and the way they felt about themselves.

School history has traditionally been the primary place in the school curriculum for students to gain a sense of national identity and heritage, but the enduring question is always whose history gets told, and how the experiences of various ethnic groups should be portrayed (Foster, 1999). At Montclair College Preparatory High School, History and Social Studies courses are taught as Humanities. This was the course that came up frequently when the participants answered questions related to whether Africa was covered in the school curriculum.

I wanted to know if the girls thought there was adequate treatment of Africa in their school texts and curriculum, and if so, how this affected their ethnic identity. I also wanted to know if they were ever expected to be experts on Ghana and Nigeria during lessons on Africa. All the participants’ responses to the question about the inclusion and teaching of Africa in the curriculum were similar. They are also similar in the positive impact the inclusion of Africa had on
their ethnic identity. Madeline confirms that Ghana had been covered in her school’s curriculum.

There’s a lot in our textbooks. Like, Ghana has the most gold and they had they buy a lot of…all the really expensive stuff. And they [classmates] be like, “Wow, so your parents are rich?” I mean, we’re not that rich, but we have just enough money that we need (PI, 2/11/08).

Madeline acknowledged that she is sometimes expected to be an expert on Ghana. Her teachers are interested in knowing what part of Africa she is from and, “they’re really interested to know what kind of stuff I do with my family…” She described the way they look at her surreptitiously, out of the corner of their eyes, whenever they speak about Ghana, indirectly inviting her to say something.

when they’re talking about, like say Ghana or something, some of them look at me. They’ll be like, “Do you want to say anything?” (Imitates her teachers looking at her from the corner of their eyes) Like we’re talking about different parts of South Africa and then towards the Ghanaian area, so she’ll be looking at me like, “You wanna say something?” I just be like, “No. If you say anything bad, I might just like jump in and say something.” I’m just cool (FG, 2/28/08).

Madeline was pleased most of the time to be a spokesperson for Ghana because it provides her the opportunity to “let them know who I am inside and out.” The other time that Madeline expressed the desire to be known for who she is “inside and out” was during discussions about school peers. At that time, she indicated a preference for her African group of friends over her African-American group of friends because she could be herself when she was with them. This captures the challenges she encounters with, not only identifying as African-American and African in school, but also associating with two separate groups of friends. Madeline also mentioned an African project that is a part of the freshman
Humanities curriculum which allows the African students an opportunity to share their cultural knowledge with their classmates.

On the issue of being asked to speak as experts on Africa, Abena and Ekene describe an experience similar to Madeline’s:

Recently we [were] learning about Africa. Anytime the teacher said something about Ghana or Liberia, he would look at me! (She steals a glance to her left in imitation of the teacher’s way of looking surreptitiously at her)…I’m like, “Hello?” Cause I’m the only Ghanaian…so then [the teacher will say] “So Ghana’s the Gold coast.” And then he’ll turn around and look at me. Oh my God. I just wanted to sleep (Abena-FG, 2/28/08)

The only reason they looked at me for *Things Fall Apart*, was because I could speak the language [actual Igbo phrases and terminology are used in the book]. I told my teacher that… “This is my language.” I was so happy, but they started annoying me. In the hallway, they were like, “How do you spell …” It was kind of great, because they’re actually trying to perfect the language, but some people, they’ll just say like “Bia”[^35]. That’s disrespectful. (Ekene-FG, 2/28/08).

The girls expressed mixed feelings about being expected to be experts on Ghana or Nigeria. Although they were “happy” with the inclusion of Africa in the curriculum, they do not want the attention that it attracts. Ekene’s reaction to being asked to be an expert on Nigeria reveals this contradiction. Although she is “happy” that the text is based on her “tribe” and language, she has mixed feelings about being stopped in the hallway by her peers to teach them some of the language. She thinks “it [is] kind of great” to teach those who are “actually trying to perfect the language,” and at the same time thinks some of her peers are repeating some of the Igbo words in a “disrespectful” manner. Although the girls

[^35]: Bia is the Igbo word for “Come”
expressed mixed feelings about their teachers’ and classmates reactions to them whenever the subject was about Africa, it appears that they were generally pleased with their teacher’s efforts at using culturally-responsive pedagogy which acknowledged the cultural capital they brought to the classroom.

Amanda’s experience with the inclusion of Africa in the school curriculum centered on the African project being the first time her classmates learned of her Nigerian heritage. I asked Amanda if she saw aspects of her background as an African or a black girl in school textbooks and she explained that her school regularly covered some aspect of Africa in the curriculum, regardless of whether it was Black History month or not. It did not appear that Montclair set aside specific times of the year to cover Africa in the curriculum.

Yeah, especially now… we’re working on the African folktale. There’s a lot of people in the book displayed as an African girl or black girl just being raised in the white neighborhood or in the white school so, yeah, there’s a lot of people like that. At least every month or every month and a half, we get a new topic in Humanities and we just got done working on…ancient Egypt, so I think it’s a coincidence that we’re working on African folk tales in Black History month. I think if it was March or April, we’d still be working on African folk tales (PI, 2/11/08)

Amanda states that she had never been directly asked to speak for Africans, but she has experienced classmates wanting to be on the same team with her during the African project so that they can learn the customs and traditions from her.

I know last year when we worked on the African project, everyone wanted to work with me because they knew that my parents—when I told them my parents are from Nigeria, they wanted to work with me to get to learn the traditions and the customs and just to have the experience of working with a person that could relate to Nigeria (PI, 2/11/08).
I wanted to know how it made her feel that her heritage was being included in the curriculum. She was proud of the inclusion of Africa in the curriculum, but most especially that the teachers were not biased in their teachings about Africa. Her teachers “take a look at both sides of the story,” and rather than present an exotic picture of Africa, they also teach about the stereotypes. She recognizes that there were other people whose histories are not included in the curriculum.

It makes me feel good, because some religions or some tribes, [the teachers] don’t recognize what they’re doing or they don’t see what they’re going through, so it makes me feel good that at least someone knows how Africa is, what the advantages and disadvantages of Africa is. Makes me feel good. My Humanities teachers, it seems like they know a lot about the advantages and disadvantages of Africa. They talk about the stereotypes made about Africa and it makes me proud to know that they don’t believe just one side, that they’ll sit down and take a look at both sides of the story (PI, 2/11/08).

Amanda gave an example of a time when her teacher countered her classmates’ stereotype about Africa. It was during a lesson on Egypt when the teacher described certain Egyptian foods and the students were repulsed. The teacher cautioned them by reminding them that Egyptian children may also react accordingly to some American foods. This supports Amanda’s claim that her teachers offer a balanced view of Africa in the curriculum. Amanda’s use of statements like, “It made me feel good” and “It makes me proud” indicate the ways the inclusion of Africa in the curriculum made her feel about her African identity.
Ekene agrees that Montclair is making the effort to include Africa in the curriculum by teaching a lesson on African folktales and the African project in Humanities class. She claims that Nigeria is taught about more than other African countries in the African unit because:

… our country has over…300 languages in our country and most of them are all over Africa and it surprises people, because they really don’t know squat\textsuperscript{36} [sic]. I will tell them that we have too many languages in my country so we won’t speak all but one central one. We just speak English. I keep telling them that, but they don’t understand…but the [text]book tells them and they should understand (PI, 2/11/08).

I could conclude from her tone and facial expressions that she was proud of the role she played in educating her classmates about the wealth of languages spoken in Nigeria. At the same time, I could hear the frustration in her allusion to her classmates’ limited knowledge of Africa. During the group interview, Ekene made a very insightful observation about the treatment of Africa in the curriculum. Although other old civilizations are included in the curriculum, she mentioned the prominence that Africa has in the curriculum. She referred to Africa as the cradle of civilization:

cause almost everybody [in the world] has a little bit of speck of—everybody here [in the world] is black! Even the white people. Because scientifically, that’s where civilization came (PI, 2/11/08).

Ekene agrees that “it’s really good how they [the teachers] do it,” how they teach about the world from a global perspective.

…as freshmen we’re learning about Mesopotamia, all those regions like Iran, Iraq, all those places. We learn about India, their cultures. Africa, because Africa’s a big one ‘cause almost everybody has a little bit of

\textsuperscript{36} See notes on\textsuperscript{17}
speck of—everybody here is black! Even the white people. Because scientifically, that’s where civilization came…we’re learning about Greece, Roman emperors, and Egypt. We just finished Egypt….We’re doing India right now. So we just finished Egypt and Africa. So they’re showing us around all the kingdoms and emperors. Even if it’s a lot of stuff… it’s really good how they do it (FG, 2/28/08)

Both Ekene and Abena agree that Africa is portrayed respectfully by the teachers, and Ekene commends her school for using texts like Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart in the Humanities class. She claims that the inclusion of such texts is one of her reasons she chose to attend Montclair College Preparatory School. In addition, she is glad that the text used in her school because:

It’s talking about my [her] tribe….I am happy. It’s not everyday that everybody’s book will be [used in school] 37 Like we are doing an African project… folktales .and stuff like that… I appreciate those things…(PI, 2/11/08).

Although Ekene acknowledges that she is “happy” that her teachers set aside the time to teach about Africa, and even include texts written by an African author about Africa, she is still frustrated when some of the topics taught reinforce existing stereotypes:

…sometimes some of the things they are talking about, it just gets annoying ‘cause they are so ancient and [the teachers] need to address it so they[students] won’t think that my country is like this right now (PI, 2/11/08).

She wants the teacher to distinguish between current representations of Africa and what Ekene labels “ancient” information about Africa that is no longer applicable

37 Achebe’s Things Fall Apart is set in Umuofia, a fictional Igbo village. Ekene is “happy” because she is Igbo, too.
today. She believes that failure to do this may continue to feed the stereotypes the students already have about Africa.

So every time they say it [reinforce a stereotype] I say, “I beg[38] please say the word, ‘ancient’ cause some people still have the impression that Africa is just dark people and stuff.” There’s a lot of White people in Africa. Like my pastor, he was born in Africa but you say he is white because of his skin color but he is an African American. He was born in Africa and he is a citizen here now (PI, 2/11/08).

Unlike Amanda and Madeline who believed that their teachers provided a balanced representation of Africa in the classroom, Ekene was the only participant who showed some concern that one of her teachers was not giving an accurate representation of Africa. She shared during the member check meeting about her frustrations with her teacher’s incorrect interpretation of a certain text from *Things Fall Apart*. Ekene admitted to not confronting the teacher and when I inquired as to the reason for her silence, she recalled a previous attempt she had made at correcting the teacher. Ekene said that the teacher’s response, at that time was, “I am going by the book.” Ekene interpreted her teacher’s response to mean, “She thinks she knows everything,” and admitted that she felt that her lived experience as a Nigerian immigrant was not taken into consideration in this context. While Abena and Madeline did not mention that their teachers had negatively represented Africa, they were typically on the alert in case the teachers misrepresented Africa. They were ready to interrupt the lesson and provide the correct information, if needed.

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[38] This is a pidgin or “broken” English phrase that means “please” Pidgin English is an informal form of English widely spoken in Nigeria and other parts of West Africa regardless of ethnic group.
Summary: impact of culturally-responsive pedagogy on participant’s ethnic identity

All the participants expressed feeling “good,” “happy,” “proud,” and “respected” concerning the inclusion of Africa in their school curriculum and the mostly unbiased manner in which the continent was treated. Although there were moments of conflict when they felt that certain issues were being misrepresented by the teachers, or that their peers were disrespecting some aspect of the culture or language, they were all generally pleased at the attempts that the school made to include African history, dances, folklore and projects in the curriculum. The pride they felt at the inclusion of Africa in the curriculum seemed to reinforce the pride that they all said they felt about their African heritage. This suggests that the inclusion of African textbooks and history in the curriculum, the teachers’ attempts to offer a balanced picture of Africa in the classroom, and the girls’ being asked for their perspective as African immigrant children, may have worked together to reinforce positive feelings about their African identity even in the face of the negative stereotypes they encountered at the hands of their peers.

Culturally-responsive pedagogy can be used as a tool for deconstructing stereotypes and myths about Africa, and when the students are regularly exposed to positive images about Africa, their attitudes towards their African peers are likely to change.
CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the experiences of West African immigrant adolescent girls as they negotiate ethnic identities while growing up in the U.S. The study examined how home and school experiences shape the ethnic identities of young immigrant girls specifically from Nigeria and Ghana. The analysis of the data generated through interview transcripts, field notes, participant and researcher journals revealed five themes that characterized the participants’ experiences. The two themes that consistently appeared throughout the data analysis were: (1) the girls’ experiences with African-American stereotypes of Africans versus the girls’ stereotypes of African-Americans and the impact on participants’ ethnic identity and (2) the personal agency that the girls exercised in their ethnic identity construction. Other themes that were discussed in this chapter were (3) the importance of family standards and expectations in relation to socio-cultural practices, choice of peers and academic achievement (4) the importance of immigrant peers for participants’ ethnic identity, and (5) the girls’ experiences with culturally-responsive pedagogy regarding the treatment of Africa in the curriculum and impact on their ethnic identity.

Analysis of the study data suggests five major findings: First, the data revealed that the participants and their African-American peers engaged in mutual stereotyping of each other’s ethnic group. The negative stereotypes that their African-American peers had about them appeared to have impacted the West African immigrant girls in their ethnic identity construction in that their responses
to these stereotypes may have influenced the ethnic identities the girls chose. Their African-American peers revealed their stereotypes of Africans as poor, hungry, diseased and dark-skinned. They expressed surprise upon learning of the participants’ ethnic backgrounds because the girls did not fit any of their peers’ initial perceptions of Africans. The girls, on their own part, had negative perceptions of their African-American peers as being ignorant of their African heritage. They also used labels such as “racist” and “prejudiced” to describe their African-American peers. Exposure to the negative stereotypes about Africa and Africans seemed to lead to some of the participants choosing an African identity as a form of resistance. At times, they identified as Africans in opposition to their perception of negative stereotypes of African-Americans or as African-Americans as a result of their internalization of the negative stereotypes about Africans.

The second major finding was that three of the participants, Amanda, Ekene and Madeline exercised agency in their negotiation of socio-cultural and ethnic identities. They used phrases like, “I choose to…,” “I am never pressured…” and “You can’t force me…” to indicate that they were able to negotiate parents’ socio-cultural expectations and their own ethnic identities while maintaining an attitude of respect towards their parents. Only one participant, Abena, showed little resistance to family expectations as seen in comments such as, “I just do whatever she [her mother] asks me to do.” By exercising some agency in their ethnic identity construction, the participants showed they were
capable of negotiating what ethnic and cultural values to adopt and which ethnic practices to discard.

The third finding indicated that the girls’ families set certain standards and expectations for their daughters in the efforts to transmit an African identity to them. These family standards and expectations were manifested through family ethnic practices in relation to adult authority; gender expectations, dating and marriage; choice of peers; and academic achievement. The primary reason for the families’ maintenance of socio-cultural practices seemed to be to ensure that their children maintain ties to their ethnic heritage. The data suggests that the value the families placed on respect for adult authority guided the relationship between the girls and their parents. It was the reason the girls maintained a high level of respect for their parents even when tensions arose as a result of their parents’ expectations. The tensions were due to negotiations and re-negotiations between the girls and their parents’ standards and expectations in relation to gender roles, choice of peers and the issue of dating and marriage within the ethnic group.

The impact of family socio-cultural expectations on the girls’ identities is evident in the girls’ construction of hybrid ethnic identities. They seemed to pick and choose certain aspects of their African identity to retain. They adopted the family and cultural values for respect for authority and academic success. They also chose to go against the dominant cultural norm of dating. Yet, they wanted to be able to participate in popular social practices like sleepovers and choose future marriage partners based on romantic love rather than ethnicity. The girls
redefined their “Africanness” to reflect their positioning between ethnic and dominant values that sometimes appear to clash.

The fourth finding pertained to the relationship between the girls’ experiences with their immigrant peers and the participants’ ethnic identity. The participants found different levels of support from their school friendships, mostly with immigrant peers as was the case with Abena, Madeline and Ekene. Although Amanda’s friends were ethnically diverse, she found her relationship with them to be satisfying. There appeared to be a close connection between the ethnic identity that each girl chose and ethnic makeup of her friends. Amanda identified as both African and African-American and her friendships spanned many ethnic groups. Just as she chose an identity that embraced all aspects of her heritage as a girl born in the U.S. to Nigerian immigrants, she chose to embrace friendships based on shared values rather than shared ethnicity. Abena identified as Ghanaian even though she was born in the U.S., and she showed the strongest ties to the African group. She enjoyed the benefits of having a group of friends with whom she shared either an ethnic language or similar experiences. Madeline was the only participant who switched identities depending on the context she found herself. She claimed to be African-American when she was with African-Americans and Ghanaian when she was with Ghanaians. It came as no surprise that she had two separate groups of friends at school. When she was not with the African group, she was with her African-American friends. Ekene, a fairly recent immigrant, identified as African and Nigerian. She appeared to be affected most by the
negative stereotypes she encountered and seemed to have chosen her ethnic identity as a form of resistance. Because she was a recent immigrant, Ekene had a difficult time breaking into already-established peer groups. Her friendship with other African immigrants in school did not suggest the same level of support that Abena and Madeline enjoyed with their African group. Consequently, she was the only participant who seemed to face challenges with school relationships.

The last finding concerned the treatment of Africa in the curriculum and showed that all the participants expressed feeling “good,” “happy,” “proud,” and “respected” concerning the mostly unbiased treatment of Africa in their school curriculum. There were moments of conflict when the girls felt that certain issues were being misrepresented by the teachers, but it seemed that the pride they felt at the inclusion of Africa in the curriculum reinforced the pride that they all said they felt about their African heritage. This suggests that the inclusion and balanced presentation of Africa in the classroom strengthened their ethnic identities, considering the stereotypes they encountered about Africa. A culturally-responsive approach to teaching may possibly serve to dismantle negative perceptions of Africa.

In Chapter Five, I will discuss and position the study findings in relation to existing literature on immigrant ethnic identity; family cultural norms and their role in the identity construction of immigrant children; and how school context (peer relations, inclusive curriculum and stereotypes) plays a role in the identity development of immigrant children.
I will also discuss implications of the study for parents and leaders in the Nigerian and Ghanaian communities, teachers and policy makers. Finally, I will make recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand the factors that shape the ethnic identity construction of West African immigrant adolescent girls and how they negotiate identities between home and school contexts. Individual and group interviews, and participant and researcher journals provided the data for understanding the participants’ home and school experiences and the role that these play in their ethnic identity construction.

In the first chapter of this study, I introduced the background of this study, stated the problem under investigation and outlined the research questions which guided this study.

In the second chapter, I reviewed the literature: 1) the history of immigration, with particular emphasis on the history of African immigration, 2) the history of Americanization through schooling, 3) historical approaches to educating immigrants in the 21st century, 4) situating the education of African immigrants, and 5) ethnic identity development, with a close examination of immigrant ethnic identity development.
The third chapter focused on the theoretical frameworks that guided this study, the methodology and research methods that directed the data collection process and issues of ethical consideration.

The fourth chapter focused on the findings which emerged from the study. This chapter identified and explained five themes that characterize the role of home and school experiences of the participants in their ethnic identity formation.

The goals of Chapter 5 will be to conceptualize and theorize about the study findings by showing how they answer the research questions and support and add to existing literature on immigrant education, immigrant and ethnic identity, and the role of family socialization, peer group and school context in immigrant ethnic identity construction. In this chapter, I will also include the implications of the study for immigrant families and communities, school practice, and policy makers. Finally, I will make recommendations for future research.

*Theoretical scaffolds that framed the construction of the study*

Building on Collins (1991) Black feminist epistemology, I framed this study in terms of the participants’ lived experiences and their interpretations of how home and school contexts shape their lives and ethnic identities. Black feminist research “is research that gives space to oppressed women to tell their life stories, to share their ‘theories’ that have not been utilized in mainstream educational research (Dillard, 2006).
There were times during the interview when the girls themselves began to theorize about their experiences. They began to make meaning of their experiences in the home and school contexts. For example, during the discussions about family socio-cultural expectations, Ekene, the only participant born abroad, theorized that parental expectations for maintenance of culture and ethnicity may be higher for second generation adolescents than for 1.5 generation adolescents like her. Her explanation was that, unlike the other participants, she was already grounded in the culture and ethnic traditions prior to migration, so her parents appeared to be more liberal in their expectations of her.

Since this study investigated the girls’ experiences with and responses to school curriculum and the ways school curriculum might contribute to shaping the girls’ ethnic identities, I worked with Gay’s (2000) principles of culturally responsive pedagogy which include making the invisible visible through accurate representation of history in the curriculum. Today’s classrooms reflect the diversity of the U.S. population and this requires that teachers learn how to teach children from various cultures and languages (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002).

Narrative research is a methodology that is used by researchers who have “liberatory” hopes for their research (Bloom, 2002), so I also worked from the perspective of Freire’s (1970) critical theory of emancipation, empowerment and liberation through education. His theories of liberation through education and the “transforming power” of education focus on the role that educators play in the empowerment/disempowerment of their students. The study revealed the positive
impact that a culturally-responsive pedagogy had on the girls’ ethnic identity. The participants felt empowered in their roles as “experts” when they provided the teachers with information about Africa.

Using Phinney’s (1990) stage model of ethnic identity development as a theoretical framework, I attempted to position these adolescent girls and their ethnic identity choices along the continuum of three stages of ethnic identity development: an unexamined ethnic identity, exploration and commitment. Since identity is a fluid and sometimes messy concept, it is difficult to categorize each girl’s position on the continuum as being permanent.

**Research questions**

The research questions that guided this study were as follows: (1) What ethnic identities do adolescent girls who are growing up in West African immigrant families in the U.S. use when they describe themselves and what factors influence their ethnic identity construction? (2) What role do home experiences play in the ethnic identity construction of West African adolescent girls? (3) What role do school experiences play in the girls’ ethnic identity construction? (4) How are the girls negotiating identities between home, school and society and what challenges accompany this negotiation?

I will attempt to conceptualize and theorize about the study findings by showing how they answer the research questions and support and add to existing literature on immigrant education, immigrant and ethnic identity, and the role of
family socialization, peer group and school context in immigrant ethnic identity construction.

**Summary of findings**

First, the data revealed that the participants and their African-American peers engaged in mutual stereotyping of each other’s ethnic group. The negative stereotypes that their African-American peers had about them, and the girls’ own stereotypes about their African-American peers appeared to impact the West African immigrant girls’ ethnic identities. The girls seemed to adopt African identities either as a form of resistance to the negative stereotypes they encountered or in opposition to their own stereotypes of African-Americans. In some cases, it seemed that they identified as American or African-American as a result of their internalization of the negative stereotypes of Africans. In other words, they associated an African identity with the shame that their peers’ negative stereotypes elicited.

The second finding revealed that the girls’ families played a significant role in their ethnic identity development by setting standards for their daughters which were manifested through family ethnic practices in relation to respect for adult authority, gender expectations, dating and marriage, choice of peers, and academic achievement. The primary reason behind the families’ desire to maintain socio-cultural practices seemed to be to ensure that their children maintain ties to their parents’ country of origin and family ethnic identity. As girls
who are being raised in immigrant homes, but who attend school and socialize with peers outside of their ethnic communities, it was apparent that the participants adopted a “pick and choose” approach towards what aspects of their ethnic heritage they wanted to retain. The family influence on the girls’ ethnic identity can be captured by the phrase “ethnic hybridism.” This term could be used to describe the process of the girls’ construction of ethnic identities by borrowing from family ethnic culture and the dominant culture in which they are being raised.

The third major finding was the personal agency that the girls exercised in their negotiation of parents’ socio-cultural expectations. The girls chose to be active agents in their ethnic identification process by constructing hybrid identities. For example, although the girls embraced the reputation they had as smart African girls and wanted to retain this aspect of their identity, most of them did not agree with their parents’ expectations that they marry African men in order to maintain ties to their parents’ countries of origin. The data indicated that they were able to negotiate socio-cultural and ethnic identities, while maintaining a respectful attitude towards their parents.

The fourth finding pertained to the importance that the participants placed on immigrant peer relationships and the impact of this on the participants’ ethnic identity. In the home context, the girls’ families were strategic in ensuring that the girls form same ethnic friendships in their ethnic communities. The girls saw their friendships with recent immigrants as a connection to the African continent.
through the mutual learning opportunity that the relationships offered. While their parents had some influence over the girls’ choice of peers in the home context, the participants exercised some agency in their choice of peers in the school context. Most of them deliberately sought out same ethnic peers who, not only validated their ethnic and cultural experiences, but also provided a space where the girls felt at home in the school context. The data also suggests a close connection between the ethnic identity that each girl adopted and the ethnic makeup of her friends. The ethnicity construct of each girl seemed to determine the spectrum of choice of peers.

Lastly, this study found that there was a connection between the girls’ experiences with the treatment of Africa in the curriculum and their ethnic identity. The efforts that the school and their teachers made to include Africa in the curriculum positively impacted the girls’ ethnic identities as children of African immigrants. They were all pleased with their teachers’ efforts to provide what they called “a balanced view of Africa,” a view that neither exoticized Africa nor reinforced already existing stereotypes. The inclusion of Africa in the curriculum strengthened the pride that they had in their African heritage.

These findings will be discussed in the next section and situated within the literature on Black and other ethnic group immigrant experiences.
Negative stereotypes and ethnic identity

The study found some tension between the participants and their African-American peers. This tension was due to the fact that most of the participants and their African-American peers engaged in mutual stereotyping of each other’s ethnic group. Although they may have experienced some stereotypes from students from other ethnic groups, the participants mostly referred to their African-American peers in the context of stereotypical reactions to their ethnic heritage. One recurring stereotype in this study was the “African look.” It seemed that this was contrasted with an African-American look, and as long as the participants did not fit the images that their peers have of Africans, they were perceived to be African-American. The stereotypes occurred either when the girls self-identified as being of African ascent or when their “foreigner” status was apparent, either through accented speech or through having names of foreign origin.

Accented speech and stereotypes

Sometimes the girls encountered discrimination as a result of their foreign names and accented speech. Although these, by themselves, are not stereotypes, the study found that when the participants’ foreign names and accents attracted attention to their African heritage, then the negative stereotypes attached to that heritage were likely to follow. Traore (2006, p. 30) supports this finding that “an obvious accent” may cause African immigrant students not to be accepted by their
American peers. Waters (1994) also maintains that an accent “is usually a clear and unambiguous signal to other Americans that [the immigrant] is foreign born” (p.798). In a study that was designed to investigate the relationship between level of accentedness and the characteristics attributed to the speaker, Ryan, Carranza & Moffie (1977) discovered that accented speech is negatively stereotyped and that the more accented the speech, the stronger the stereotype. In another study that they conducted with Spanish speakers, Ryan & Carranza (1975) also found that Spanish accent features in Spoken English were negatively stereotyped and the greater the prominence of the accent, the stronger the stereotyping.

Concerning their accented speech, only Abena and Ekene indicated any reactions from their peers or teachers. Unlike Abena who did not report any adverse reactions to her accent, the study found that Ekene’s response to the perceived reaction of her peers and teachers to her accented speech was to adopt an attitude of silence that limited her classroom participation. Although Ekene did not make any direct attribution of her silence to any particular stereotypes she had experienced with her peers, it is likely that there had been covert reactions to her accented speech that made her think it was something to be ashamed of. It seemed that her peers’ and teacher’s speech was the norm against which she measured her own speech and concluded that hers was not standard.
Foreign names and stereotypes

The study found that all the girls also regularly experienced the difficulty that their peers had with pronouncing their foreign names and reacted in varying degrees to the unwanted attention that their foreign-sounding names attracted. This finding is supported by studies that have found a link between foreign-sounding names or non-Caucasian names and negative stereotypes. These include Anderson, Green, & Haley (2008) who found a relationship between ethnic names and teacher expectations for achievement. They found that there were significantly lower achievement scores given by raters whose descriptions used an African-American sounding name rather than a Caucasian-sounding name. Other studies that have investigated how names influence attributions like intelligence, competence, ethnicity, physical attractiveness and other positive and negative attributes include Daniel & Daniel, 1998; Hassebrauck, 1988). These researchers support the study findings that suggest that the reactions elicited by these names are a precursor to negative or positive stereotypes.

Victims or perpetrators?

The incidences with negative stereotypes were not one-sided. This investigation found that while the girls’ were trying to portray themselves as victims of negative stereotyping, they similarly engaged in negative stereotyping of their African-American peers. This is demonstrated by the participants’ negative perceptions of their African-American peers as being ignorant of their
African heritage. The participants believed that their African American peers do not have a culture and a language and cannot claim to be from “somewhere” like their African peers. There was a recurring perception of African-Americans as having no roots. The participants’ stereotypical comments might have been reactionary to the negative comments about Africa that they encountered and were used by them to draw distinctions between themselves and their African-American peers.

_Mutual stereotypes and resulting ethnic identities_

So what impact did the mutual stereotypes have on the participants’ ethnic identities? This study found that the mutually negative stereotypes that both groups held about each other impacted the West African immigrant girls in their ethnic identity construction because these stereotypes determined what ethnic identities they chose. There were variations in the ethnic identities chosen by the participants with some of them choosing African identities as a form of resistance to the stereotypes they encountered or in opposition to their own perceptions of African-Americans. Others seemed to choose American or African-American identities, perhaps, in response to having internalized the negative stereotypes about Africa. Regardless of their ethnic identities of choice, the participants seemed to have a perception of the significance of race and ethnicity for “minority” groups “since these terms… interact with concepts of power and privilege” in the U.S, (Wakefield & Hudley, 2007).
At certain points in the study, the girls’ made statements that seemed to contradict their choice of ethnic identities. For example, Madeline sometimes adopted an African-American identity even though she made stereotypical comments about her African-American peers. Also, although the girls said they were proud of their African heritage, they were embarrassed by public displays of their African identity, like when their parents spoke too loudly in public in their ethnic language. Banks (2008) has referred to such inconsistencies as “the complicated, contextual, and overlapping identities of immigrant students” (p.134) while scholars who study immigrant high school students have demonstrated “their complex and contradictory transnational identifications” (p.134). The participants were simultaneously proud of their heritage and embarrassed at public displays like speaking of the ethnic language too loudly in public.

As a fairly recent immigrant, Ekene described experiencing more negative stereotypes than the other participants and she responded by choosing what Waters (1994) called “a reactive ethnicity.” Ekene adopted an African and Nigerian identity that seemed to be in resistance to the stereotypes she had encountered about Africans. Foner (1987) and Kasinitz (1992) confirm the study findings that first-generation black immigrants tend to distance themselves from American blacks by stressing their national origins and ethnic identities such as Nigerian, as Ekene did in this study. First-generation black immigrants may
believe that accepting an immigrant nationality identity will serve as a buffer against negative stereotypes about African-Americans (Rong & Preissle, 1998).

Ekene did not feel that as an immigrant-identified Nigerian, that she had any other choice but to identify as Nigerian. Similarly, Waters (1994) found that an immigrant-identified Jamaican student in her study could not conceive of herself as having a choice but to identify as Jamaican unlike her ethnic-identified counterparts who could identify as Jamaican-American. Waters (1994) contends that adolescents like Ekene can maintain a Nigerian identity because her accent and, perhaps behavior, signal to others that she is foreign-born. This explains why identifying as Nigerian was natural for Ekene because, according to her, “I lived most of my life, my childhood…in that part.”

Madeline described switching between an African-American and Ghanaian identity, by claiming to be Ghanaian in mostly Ghanaian contexts and African-American when she was among her African-American peers. Her decision to not disclose her Ghanaian identity in certain contexts could be attributed to an internalization of the negative stereotypes she encountered from her African-American peers. It could also be that she had bought into an unspoken hierarchy among minority ethnic groups in the U.S. that places African immigrants at the bottom of the ethnic totem pole (Waters, 1994; Rong & Brown, 2002). Wakefield & Hudley (2007) argue that “members of minority groups in a hierarchical multiethnic society like the U.S. must consider the extent to which they will sustain a unique group identity, identify with characteristics that afford
success in the dominant society, and negotiate their relationships with others similarly situated as minorities in relation to the powerful dominant group” (p.148). Similar to Madeline, several girls in Waters (1994) study chose to “pass” as black Americans when they recognized the higher status black Americans enjoyed in comparison to foreign-born and second-generation Haitian immigrants.

Amanda was the only girl to identify as both American and Nigerian. She was specific about her adoption of an American, rather than an African-American identity throughout the study. Amanda explained that her reason for claiming both identities was to acknowledge her Nigerian background and her U.S. citizenship. Her adoption of a national identity and a U.S. citizenship is similar to immigrant youths studied by El-Haj (2007) and Nguyen (2008) who distinguished between their national identity and citizenship. Like these students who viewed themselves as Palestinian or Vietnamese while acknowledging their U.S. citizenship, Amanda believed that she could claim a Nigerian identity as well as acknowledge her U.S. citizenship. The difference between Amanda and the students in Nguyen’s (2008) study is that while she viewed herself as American in terms of identity and citizenship, they differentiated between U.S. citizenship and an American identity. For Nguyen’s students, a U.S. citizenship did not translate into an American identity. Regardless of the distinction that immigrants make between U.S. citizenship and an American identity, Fuligni et al. (2005) argue that “rather than being in opposition, adolescents’ ethnic and American identities
can coexist and be combined into a new and different identity that is relevant for adolescents’ lives” (p. 807).

Abena identified as Ghanaian, although she was born in the U.S. Although she described instances where she had experienced negative stereotypical behavior, she did not demonstrate that this affected her enough to cause her to disassociate herself from Africa. Abena did not claim either an American or African-American identity. Instead, like Ekene and Amanda, she seemed to choose an African identity that was in opposition to African-Americans because, unlike them, she could claim to be “from somewhere.”

My findings on the connection between stereotypes and ethnic identity are similar to Waters’ (1994) findings in a study which described and contrasted the types of racial and ethnic identities adopted by adolescent first- and second-generation West Indian and Haitian Americans in New York City. Waters (1994) found three types of identities among her participants- a black American identity, an ethnic or hyphenated national origin identity, and an immigrant identity. She discovered that the different identities they adopted were “related to different perceptions and understandings of race relations… in the United States” (p.795). Waters (1994) and Kasinitz (1992) have linked the types of racial/ethnic identity that youngsters develop to their reaction to racial discrimination and the understandings of race they develop with peer groups. The study’s findings regarding participants’ adoption of ethnic identities that are reactionary to the mutual stereotyping that occurred between them and their African-America peers,
are supported by studies like Waters (1994), Wakefield & Hudley (2007), and Kasinitz (1992). However, this study speaks specifically to the experiences of West African immigrant girls which are missing in the literature on Black immigrant ethnic identity.

The study findings are also similar to the results of a study of eight African American and nine African students conducted by Traore (2006) at an inner-city high school in a large metropolitan city in the U.S. Traore (2006) found that there was a prevalence of negative images of Africa and Africans among the African-American student population. She found that the hostile relationship between both groups of students led to each group’s struggles to maintain positive ethnic identities. Following the intervention work she carried out to educate both groups of students about their shared heritage, Traore (2006) recommended that educators “support [students] in developing their identities free from negative stereotypes” (p.34). She demonstrated the connection between the way adolescents are made to feel about their identity and the self-respect that follows. Traore (2006) pointed to the importance of self-respect as “a key ingredient to identity development in adolescence” (p. 252). Like Traore (2006) I found a correlation between the way the students were made to feel about their heritage and the ethnic identities they adopted. The mixed feelings of shame and pride which resulted from the negative stereotypes seemed to be key to the ways the girls identified. Traore’s (2006) work is one of the few in the literature on immigrant education to focus on the experiences of African immigrants in U.S.
schools. Therefore, this current study will be a much needed addition to the literature, especially with its focus on not only West Africa, but on adolescent girls. This study’s inclusion of the students’ home experiences with ethnic identity development also differentiates it from existing literature.

Being cognizant of the incident of mutual stereotypes and the possible effect on immigrant ethnic identity is important for school officials who work in schools with an African and African-American student population. An awareness of the tension that exists between both groups calls for school intervention which could include the use of culturally-responsive pedagogy in the classroom or programs which educate both groups of students to their shared history.

_The media’s role in perpetuating stereotypes_

It repeatedly came up during my discussions with the girls that a major source of the stereotypes both groups held about each other was the media. The participants’ peers’ claim that their negative perceptions of Africans were from the media representations of Africa seemed to be true for the girls’ negative perceptions of African-Americans as well. In addition to the media, another source of stereotypes for the participants was their families. When Madeline’s parents explained that their reason for not wanting her to sleep over was for her safety, they referred to the media as the source of their fears, not only of African-Americans, but Americans in general. They made comments like “they may take you somewhere…Are you really sure you want to go sleepover? I don’t want
nothing bad to happen to you.” Likewise, when they expressed their reservations about her marrying an African-American, they resorted to media depictions of African-American men as abusive spouses to explain their fears. Traore (2003) also attributed the “debilitating stereotypes” of Africa that her African-American participants had to the media who perpetuate images of wild animals, Tarzan and Africa as a “Dark Continent.” Likewise, she claimed that her African participants also learned from the media that African-Americans are violent, rude, and on welfare. She contended that the media made Africa less inviting to African-American students by denying them “access to positive images or information about Africa and Africans” (p.247).

It is important to address the role that the media plays in perpetuating the negative stereotypes described above. Most immigrants will get their initial perceptions about African-Americans and Americans in general from the media either pre- or post-migration. Likewise, Americans who have not traveled extensively in Africa also depend on media depictions of Africa to inform their perceptions about Africa and Africans. Understanding the critical role that the media indirectly plays in immigrant adolescents’ ethnic identity construction, and creatively using this tool to debunk myths and stereotypes could assist immigrant families and school officials in confronting negative stereotypes.

Next I will examine the role of family in socialization for ethnic identity. This study revealed that the participants’ families were the primary influence on the girls’ ethnic identity development (Rosenthal & Feldman, 1992). Yet, the
study also found that the families were not able to replicate in their children all the ethnic characteristics of Ghanaian and Nigerian children being raised in their home country. That means that even when the girls chose to identify as Ghanaian or Nigerian, these identities did not have the same connotation as a Ghanaian or Nigerian identity would on the African continent. Instead, the girls constructed ethnic identities that were a hybrid of their family ethnic identity and the socio-cultural norms of the U.S. society.

**Impact of parental socialization on ethnic identity**

Phinney, Romero, Nava & Huang (2001) contend that the family is uniquely positioned to play a role in children’s ethnic identity formation through its values, attitudes and practices. Data from this study revealed that the girls’ families played a major role in influencing their ethnic identities, even among other factors that combined to affect how the girls chose to identify.

The participants’ families set certain standards and expectations which were manifested through ethnic practices like maintenance of the ethnic language, membership in ethnic organizations, and socio-cultural values in relation to gender roles, choice of peers, marriage, and academic success. Similar to Waters (1994) work with Caribbean immigrant youth, the study revealed that the girls faced a choice about whether they will maintain an ethnic identity similar to their parents’ national origins or construct their own ethnic identities, while acknowledging parental influences in the process. Critical to the standards and
expectations that the families set for their girls was the family value for respect of adult authority.

The study found that the parents were successful in conveying their value for respect for adult authority because the participants described how this impacted their interactions, not only with their parents, but with school officials. Most of the participants contrasted their value for respect with their peers’ who they described as “rude” and disrespectful to their parents. They appeared to make a positive distinction between themselves, as respectful African girls, and their rude, disrespectful American peers. This is one example of an instance when the girls seemed to define their ethnic identities in opposition to their perceptions of their non-African peers.

*Maintenance of ethnic language*

One of the areas the families hoped to influence the girls’ ethnic identities was in the maintenance of family ethnic language. The maintenance of ethnic language has been linked to identification with one’s culture-of-origin (Laroche, Kim, Hui & Tomiuk, 1998). This study discovered the role that the participants’ families played in ensuring that the girls’ speak or at least understand their native language as a means of identification with their culture. Similar to Phinney et al. (2001) who found that ethnic language proficiency had a positive impact on ethnic identity among the adolescents they studied, the participants’ ability to speak and/or understand the ethnic language led to positive feelings about their
ethnic identity in that they valued having another language with which they and their families could communicate. The girls also valued the use of their ethnic language for internal or ingroup communication, to the exclusion of non-group members (Giles et al. 1977). They explained that the reasons their families gave for expecting them to learn the language was so that they and their families could communicate publicly without others knowing what they are saying. In addition to serving as a tool for exclusion, this study found that similar to Phinney et al. (2001), the girls’ ability to communicate in an ethnic language served as a link to their parents’ culture and ethnic identity. This confirms the significant role that the families played in impacting their adolescent children’s sense of ethnicity through the maintenance of their ethnic language.

*Socialization through involvement in ethnic organizations*

The study confirmed that the participants’ families sought to connect them to their ethnic heritage by maintaining membership in ethnic organizations and being active in the Ghanaian and Nigerian communities. They hoped, by doing this, to expose their children to socio-cultural practices and friendships with other immigrant children who share the same cultural values. The girls confirmed that these relationships have turned out to be an enriching experience due to the firsthand accounts they get about Africa from recent immigrants and their own role in introducing the recent immigrants to American culture. Apart from the sense of empowerment that the role of teacher provides, the participants viewed
their immigrant friends as a connection to the African continent. In other words, these friendships that have been somewhat orchestrated by their parents, appear to have achieved their intended purpose, which is to support the girls in their ethnic identity construction.

“You trying to be like them? That’s not good”: Parents’ influence on choice of peers

According to the study findings, the families recognized the impact that peer groups could have on peer identity construction (Erikson, 1968) and sought to influence the girls’ choice of peers by limiting their interactions with non-African peers. It seemed that the families believed that their girls would benefit from same ethnic relationships with peers with whom they share the same cultural values. Dion & Dion (2001) found that if important values and behaviors in the parents’ country of origin differ significantly from those they perceive to be prevalent in the receiving country, the parents are likely to regulate their children’s contact with any aspects of the host country that may threaten family and cultural values. It was not clear from the study if the parents were more protective because the participants were girls. Though research has found that immigrant families have greater socialization expectations for their daughters which embody traditional gender roles compared to their sons, this may pertain more to second-generation females (Das Gupta, 1997).
“Girls clean the house and boys, they just sit around:” Gender roles and marriage aspirations

The study findings revealed greater socialization expectations for the three second-generation participants. Dion & Dion (2001) argue that this difference in gender expectations has potential implications for the development of ethnocultural identity among adolescents. This means that female children may face more pressure than their male counterparts to be carriers and transmitters of family ethnic and socio-cultural values and practices. One way that the families hoped the girls would maintain a connection to their ethnic heritage was through gender role expectations. This was evident in family expectations that the girls practice traditional gender roles like cooking and keeping house.

Along with practicing gender roles was the expectation that the girls marry someone from their parents’ ethnic group. The parents hoped that this would ensure preservation of ethnic practices and long-lasting ties to the parents’ countries of origin. Marriage in many African cultures is viewed as a joining of two families and the union transcends just the two people involved. In some cases, the union between the two people has been known to bring multiple families and communities together. Since marriage is not regarded as a personal decision to be made by just the young couples involved, many African parents expect to play an influential role in the decision-making process. Therefore, it was not unusual that the participants’ families expected to be involved in this aspect of their children’s lives in the U.S. The parents’ preference for same ethnic partners probably stemmed from their knowledge of the traditional purpose of many
African marriages- a bringing together of two families who mostly share the same culture and values.

The issue of marital aspirations has received some attention from researchers who have recently begun to study the processes through which adolescents make decisions about their future mates (Blair & Blair, 2005; Bronzaft, 1991; Ganong, Coleman, Thompson, & Goodwin-Watkins, 1996). Even then, these studies are specific to African-American and White American young adults. There is a noticeable gap in the research on marriage aspirations of African immigrants for their children. This study’s findings on parental expectations that their daughters marry same ethnic spouses as a way to maintain ethnic ties, and the tension that these expectations produced, will be a much needed addition to the literature. This particular finding is important because it sheds new light on home experiences and parental expectations with regards to dating and marriage that may impact the social adjustment of African immigrant girls. An awareness of parental expectations concerning dating and marriage may be helpful to educators and policymakers who work with African immigrant girls and who might assume a universal teenage experience with dating and marriage aspirations.

Marriage outside of one’s ethnic group has been found to lead to a gradual weakening of ties to one’s ethnic group (Gordon, 1964; Lee & Bean, 2004). It is also likely that children of such unions may view themselves as having multiple ethnicities which may eventually lead to a gradual disconnect
with the foreign-born parent’s ethnic heritage (Kalmijn, 1998; Pagnini & Morgan, 1990). This “gradual disconnect” with the family ethnic heritage seemed to drive the participants’ parents’ expectations that their daughters marry same ethnic spouses.

Would the parents’ expectations be different if these girls were male children? Worts & Boyd (2006) suggest that among those with one foreign-born parent, the strength of ties to the homeland’s ethnic and cultural traditions may depend on the gender of the foreign-born parent. If the mother is the foreign-born parent, her heritage may carry more weight if she is viewed as the main agent of socialization in the home. Ekene and Abena’s responses to their parent’s expectations concerning marriage indicate that level of ethnic identification with parents’ country of origin may not necessarily be a strong indicator of whether immigrant girls will marry same ethnic group spouses. Although they both identified with their parents’ countries of origin, Abena felt that she should marry whoever she chooses regardless of their ethnicity. Although Ekene preferred to marry a Nigerian, she maintained that romantic love was a more important factor than ethnicity. This finding disproves Ganong et al.’s (1996) theoretical explanation for the development of marital aspirations among adolescents. One perspective, the socialization model, proposes that when adolescents are exposed to messages about future partners from childhood, they are likely to internalize family expectations for their future mate and act upon this internalization. In other
words, they are likely to choose a future partner who embodies the expectations they have been bombarded with through the years.

Blair & Blair (2005) studied the influence of family and ethnicity on marriage aspirations of young adult Asians and also agreed that the socialization model is a plausible explanation for future mate selection. This study’s findings on the influence of participants’ family on their future marriage aspirations disproves the socialization model because the participants did not indicate that their choice of future mate was contingent on ethnicity as their parents wanted. Instead, this study found that the girls’ sense of personal agency, rather than parents’ emphasis on the ethnicity of the future spouse, was more likely to influence their choice of future mate. The girls wanted to be active agents in making such a critical life decision. Olsen (1997) also found in a study of high school immigrants that adolescents she worked with believed that romantic love should transcend language, cultural and racial barriers. Although the girls in this study and Olsen’s study respected their parents’ authority, Olsen’s students considered their parents’ disapproval to be enough deterrent not to date or marry outside their ethnic and racial groups. Considering the role that respect played in the other socio-cultural choices that my participants made, I suspected that, with time, they might yield to parental expectations to marry same ethnic spouses.
“And they think because I’m African, I’m smart”: Ethnic identity and academic success

The last finding on parental standards and expectations revealed the impact of family expectations on the participants’ academic success. Education has been identified as one of the major reasons African immigrants come to the U.S. (Arthur, 2000). Like some of the parents of the study participants, many African immigrants come to the U.S. to further their education. By the time they arrive, they have already established “a rich tradition of commitment to education” (p. 102). Immigrants who come to the U.S. for better opportunities are likely to view education as a means to getting ahead and they also tend to translate this to the academic expectations they have of their children (Ogbu, 1993). It was apparent from this study that all the participants’ families had high standards for their academic success and the participants’ responded by, not only performing well in school, but holding themselves to equally high standards. This explains the perception held by their peers that Africans are generally smart and maintain high academic standards.

This investigation showed that most of the participants’ parents collaborated with school officials to ensure the academic success of the girls. They communicated their expectations for academic success to the teachers which influenced the teachers’ expectations of the girls. The girls fulfilled both parent and teacher expectations by working hard to achieve in school. The benefits of parent-teacher collaborations for the student have been promoted by scholars in the field of child development and home-school relations who argue that joint
expectations from both teachers and parents enhances student learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Epstein, 2001). The hard work which earned the participants the reputation of being smart African girls created many opportunities for them to provide their peers with class work and homework assistance. Although they spoke of their parents’ involvement in their school success and their peers’ expectations for academic assistance with some frustration, it was evident that the girls enjoyed the status that their academic success accorded them. They liked being labeled as “smart African girls.”

In addition to their parental expectations for academic success, I found that the girls’ ethnic community expectations were additional motivation for their school performance. Rong & Preissle (1998) argue that the success of black immigrant children in schools may be attributed to the strength of their immigrant families and communities who work together “to instill and embody unique human, cultural, and social capital in youth” (p.139). In various ethnic communities, most African immigrants demand high standards of academic success from their children. It then becomes almost imperative for the children to succeed. Failure to do so may lead to parental disappointment and bring shame to the family. Abena’s playful exchange with her mother captures the gravity of these expectations:

They want me to be a doctor. What if [I] don’t want to be a doctor?...I like doing hair, right? So one day I was just playing around. I wasn’t serious. “Oh Mom, I want to be a hairdresser.” “No!” [Her mother responded vehemently] “We have enough of those. I want a doctor! I want a doctor!”

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Her mother’s use of the pronoun “we” in “we have enough of those” probably referred to the Ghanaian community and captures the way the community views the academic and professional achievements of its members. Abena captured this well when she said her family wants her to be a doctor, “like every African parent.” The exchange above illustrates Abena’s understanding of the connection between her identity as the child of African immigrants, her school success and the success of her ethnic community. This suggests that the participants’ African identity had implications for their school success. That is, they appeared to have internalized the value that their families and communities place on academic success and used this as motivation to succeed. This is supported by Hogg’s (2003) argument that identification with a social group leads to the internalization of the values of that group.

Using Hogg’s (2003) argument, Fuligni, Witkow, & Garcia (2005) propose that ethnic identity has potential implications for adolescents’ academic achievement. They argue that “the strength of adolescents’ ethnic identification, rather than the specific ethnic labels they choose is more closely associated with academic attitudes” (p. 808). This study found a greater connection between the girls’ identification with the value that their African communities place on education and their academic success than it did between their specific ethnic labels and academic success. For example, Amanda identified partly as an American, while Madeline identified in some contexts as an African-American, but it was the value for academic success attached to their African identity that
strongly influenced their academic performance. This puts this study at variance with Ogbu’s (1991) and Waters’ (1991) argument that Black immigrant children who assume more Americanized ethnic identity labels tend to acquire oppositional identities like their African-American counterparts and perform less well in school.

The relationship between school achievement and ethnic identity is usually viewed through two distinct perspectives (Wakefield & Hudley, 2007). The first perspective is that a strong ethnic identity may promote academic success. This may appear to be true with Abena and Ekene who identified strongly with their Ghanaian and Nigerian backgrounds, but could be disproved by the fact that even Madeline and Amanda who chose African-American and American identities in addition to their African identities, also performed well in school. Therefore, a strong ethnic identity, by itself, may not be a sufficient explanation for the girls’ academic success. A second perspective proposes that a strong ethnic identity may hinder academic success. Ogbu’s cultural ecological theory (1978) is an example of the latter perspective which claims that African-American youth who view the dominant culture as a tool of oppression may resist markers of school achievement like studying hard because these practices are attributed to “acting White” as opposed to “acting Black” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

The findings of this study cause me to propose a third perspective which states there is a stronger link between the value that families and communities
place on education and academic achievement, than there is between a strong ethnic identity and academic achievement. Children who are raised in homes and ethnic communities that place a high value on academic success, even if they choose ethnic identities in opposition to their parents’ expectations, are likely to adopt the same high value for academic success.

Another possible explanation for the participants’ academic success, in addition to their adoption of their family and community value for academic success, is peer expectations. As the data revealed, the girls were perceived by their peers to be smart African girls. This was a prevalent stereotype of Africans among their classmates. The girls fulfilled not only their family and community expectations for academic success, but their peers’ expectations as well. Kao (2000) found through focus groups and interviews of high school students that there are prevalent stereotypes that link ethnic group memberships to academic ability. Although her study focused on stereotypes of the academic abilities of Asian, Hispanic and what she termed black” youth, my study found a similar link between stereotypes of the academic abilities of African immigrants and their academic performance. Comparable to Kao (2000), this study found that the participants defined their academic goals primarily in terms of the academic stereotypes attached to their ethnic group.

This detailed discussion on parental socialization captures parents’ attempts to expose the participants to their heritage and instill pride in their ethnic heritage. The parents were successful to a large extent in influencing the girls’
ethnic identities. Yet, in spite of the efforts they made to connect their children to their ethnic heritage, the study revealed that their engagement in the community and immersion in ethnic practices did not yield similar results with the girls’ ethnic identities. This is evidenced by the fact that all the girls chose different ethnic identities even when their families shared similar ethnic practices. Although Abena and Madeline were from Ghanaian homes and were both immersed in the Ghanaian communities, Abena had a stronger identification with Ghana than Madeline. In the same way, Ekene and Amanda were both from Nigerian immigrant homes and were expected by their families to be involved in the community. Although Ekene was a recent immigrant and identified as Nigerian, she balked at some of her family’s attempts to connect her to the community. She attributed her resistance to the difficulty she experienced as a recent immigrant with breaking into already existing peer groups. On the other hand, Amanda attended a Nigerian church and formed relationships with other Nigerian immigrant children. Yet, she chose to identify as both Nigerian and American.

The girls’ families may have been successful in connecting their children to ethnic practices and the ethnic community and thereby influencing their ethnic identities, but their effort at ethnic immersion did not appear to be the sole determinant of the ethnic identities chosen by the girls. Contrary to other studies like (Lu, 2001; Bankston & Zhou, 1997), that have established a link between higher levels of family membership and active involvement in ethnic
organizations, with higher levels of children’s ethnic identity, this study did not reveal a connection between level of immersion and level of ethnic identification. Although their families were active in their communities, surrounded the girls with ethnic artifacts and immersed them in ethnic practices, the girls did not all choose their family ethnic identity.

The girls mostly identified with the aspects of their African identity that valued respect for adults and academic success. They appreciated certain ethnic practices like ethnic language maintenance and associations with immigrant peers at social gatherings. Yet, despite efforts by the parents to socialize the girls to their ethnic heritage, I have used the phrase “ethnic hybridism” to describe the process by which the girls constructed their ethnic identities by borrowing from family ethnic culture and the dominant culture in which they are being raised. Their parents desired to raise the girls similarly to the way they would have raised them in their home country, but each girl constructed an ethnic identity unique to her.

In addition to examining the role that home experiences played in the ethnic identity construction of the participants, this study also looked at the possible impact of school experiences on the girls’ ethnic identities. Since the participants and their families repeatedly contrasted their identity, values and behaviors as African immigrants with those of their American-American peers, I was curious to know what relationships they had with their peers at Montclair Preparatory. Did they find themselves drawn to immigrant peers from similar
ethnic backgrounds? Were these peers a source of support in the school context as they were in their ethnic communities? The answers to these questions are discussed next.

**Immigrant peers and ethnic identity**

This study examined school peer relationship as one of the factors that might shape the girls’ ethnic identities and found that while three of the participants found emotional and social support from same ethnic group relationships, one found support from peers from diverse ethnic groups. In other words, ethnicity of peer group members was more salient for three of the participants. Some scholars support the link between peer friendships and adolescent identity development and the emotional and social support that accompanies such relationships (Erikson, 1968; Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990). Peer friendships tend to arise from similarities, shared values and aspirations (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990; Epstein, 1980) as supported by the findings of this study.

The ethnicity of their peer group appeared to be more salient for Abena and Madeline who belonged to a group referred to as “the African group” by their African-American peers, and for Ekene who “hung out” with a different group of African immigrants. Abena explained that having a group of African friends offered a form of support that she did not get from her non-African peers because she and her African friends “all have the same expectations.” This suggests that
friendships with peers from similar ethnic backgrounds could be a source of support based on shared values and experiences. I conclude from the data that the benefits that same ethnic peer friendships offer include a safe space to share similar experiences, an opportunity to maintain the ethnic language through regular communication in the language, and a buffer from negative stereotypes about the ethnic group. Similarly, Traore (2006) found that although the students in her study were from eight different African countries, they identified with Africa because of the strength in numbers that comes from identifying with the continent rather than each country.

Although Madeline described the African group as the primary source of her school friendships, she also had African-American friends. Madeline contrasted her friendship with both groups and commented that, unlike her friendship with her African-American peers, her friends in the African group provided a safe place where she could be herself. As the only participant to switch between a Ghanaian and African-American identity, perhaps Madeline needed a space where she felt accepted and where she did not have to pretend to be someone else. The implication is that she may have had to suppress her “Africanness” in the midst of her African-American friends. Ethnicity was not salient for Amanda when it came to her choice of peers because her relationships were not defined by the ethnicity of her friends but by their personalities. In spite of the ethnic diversity of her peer group, Amanda found support from her peers because they accepted her for who she is. I would like to note here that these were
the same friends who Amanda claimed would support her decision not to date until the right time. So even though ethnicity was not salient in Amanda’s choice of her friends, it is possible that Amanda purposefully sought friends whose values mirrored the ones she and other children in her community have been raised with.

**Salience of ethnic identity in friendship choices**

I found a close connection between the ethnic identity that each girl chose and the ethnic make up of her friends. This finding suggests that immigrant children are likely to form friendships with peer groups whose ethnic makeup reflects the children’s ethnic identity. This finding supports Vaquera & Kao (2006) claim that self-identification is important in determining to which ethnic group an adolescent feels closest. For example, they argue that an adolescent who sees herself or himself as Hispanic White is more likely than another adolescent who identifies as Black Hispanic to choose a non-Hispanic White friend.

Amanda’s friendships cut across many ethnic groups because she was not concerned about the ethnic make-up of her friends. In the same way that Amanda chose an American and Nigerian identity that embraced all aspects of her heritage, her school friendships were based on shared values rather than shared ethnicity. Abena, Madeline and Ekene showed the strongest ties to the African group. They enjoyed the benefits of having a group of friends with whom they shared either an ethnic language or similar experiences. Madeline was the only
participant who switched identities depending on the context, therefore I was not surprised that she had two separate groups of friends at school.

Vaquera & Kao (2006) hypothesized that the ethnicity of one’s friends signal an ethnic identification that is more meaningful than an official label checked on a survey. They also argued that the ethnic composition of one’s friends can influence current and future attitudes about one’s racial and ethnic group. Overall, the study found that the girls’ relationships with immigrant peers led to positive feelings about their ethnic identities because these friendships were based on commonality of experiences and cultural understandings.

**Culturally-responsive pedagogy and impact on ethnic identity**

Another finding that linked school experiences with participants’ ethnic identity concerned the treatment of Africa in the curriculum. I have included details about Montclair Preparatory Academy and the school’s efforts at an inclusive and culturally responsive curriculum in Chapter three.

Much of the literature on culturally-responsive pedagogy focuses on teacher perspectives on how students respond to such pedagogy. In contrast, this study drew on the participants’ experiences with a culturally-responsive curriculum to understand the link between the curriculum and their ethnic identities. Chan (2007) confirms the limited research on curricular experiences of ethnic-minority students as told from their perspective. The data revealed that the
girls’ believed that their teachers made the effort to practice culturally-responsive teaching by including Africa in the curriculum.

Culturally-responsive pedagogy utilizes students’ culture and language in instruction which ultimately respects the students’ personal and community identities (Richards, Brown & Forde, 2007). This study examined the instructional dimension of culturally-responsive pedagogy as the girls perceive it is practiced at Montclair. The instructional dimension includes instructional materials and activities that identify and utilize the strengths and cultural knowledge that students bring to school. Using Banks & Banks (2004); Gay (2000); Ladson-Billings (1994) and Nieto (1999) as resources, Richards et al. (2007) compiled specific activities that could serve as a guide for culturally-responsive instruction. I used some of these activities to position teachers’ efforts at culturally-responsive practices at Montclair. Did the girls feel that their teachers validated their cultural identity in classroom practices and instruction? The participants described specific examples of teacher efforts to include their literature, history and culture in the curriculum. These efforts included an African project, inclusion of literary texts by African writers, African folklores, and the history of African civilization. Some of the participants also described instances when their teachers tried to include them in classroom discussions about their parents’ countries of origin or the African continent as a whole. The girls also assumed the role of teacher during co-curricular projects like African folktales or African dance projects and described how their peers looked to them for guidance.
because of their cultural knowledge. The sense of empowerment that resulted from their role in educating their peers about Africa contributed to positive feelings about their African heritage.

Did the girls feel that the teachers promoted equity and mutual respect in their classroom practices? Amanda appreciated that her teachers presented a balanced picture of Africa by neither exoticizing nor stereotyping the continent. According to her, the teachers were not biased in their teachings about Africa, but “take a look at both sides of the story.” There were moments, though, when Ekene felt that certain topics were being misrepresented by her teachers, especially when it appeared that teachers were presenting images of Africa that only fed negative stereotypes about the continent. She labeled these facts as being “so ancient,” but did not confront the teacher because an initial attempt to correct a teacher had been met with some resistance. Nevertheless, the pride the girls felt at the inclusion of Africa in the curriculum seemed to reinforce the pride that they all said they felt about their African heritage. This finding suggests that the inclusion and mostly balanced presentation of Africa in the classroom, and the invitation to serve as experts on Africa, strengthened the girls’ ethnic identities and the ethnic pride they described having in their African heritage.

The connection between culturally-responsive pedagogy and a positive ethnic identity is acknowledged by Traore (2006) who suggests that multicultural educators need to support African immigrant students in the development of identities that are free from negative stereotypes. According to Traore (2006), this
can be achieved through culturally-sensitive classroom practices that include such students as full participants in the classroom and through inclusion of their life experiences (Traore, 2006). In her study of recently arrived students from eight different African countries and the tensions that erupted between them and their African-American peers, Traore (2006) found a possible solution in culturally-sensitive pedagogy that included the history and culture of the immigrant students. She believed that the results of such an approach would be a healthy identity development of the students which would lead to increased self-confidence in sharing their history and culture with their peers.

Using Friere’s (1970) perspective on the critical theory of emancipation, empowerment and liberation through education to examine the relationship between culturally-responsive pedagogy and the girls’ sense of empowerment, the data supports the conclusion that the girls felt empowered in their roles as experts both inside and outside the classroom. The data shows that being asked questions about Ghana or Nigeria by their teachers, or knowing that their classmates were vying to be in the same project group as the participants because of their cultural knowledge, empowered the girls. It is evident from the data that the inclusion of Africa in the curriculum and the sense of empowerment from being viewed as sources of cultural knowledge led to positive feelings about their ethnic identity.
Personal agency and ethnic identity

I chose to discuss the importance of personal agency in the girls’ ethnic identity construction last because I believe that it ultimately accounted for their successful navigation of the home and school contexts which worked to impact the girls’ ethnic identity and their (re)negotiation of ethnic identities between home and school. Successful navigation could be measured by the fact that they became agents in their ethnic identity construction in both home and school contexts. The study findings reveal that the girls were not just passive individuals at the mercy of external factors which sought to define who they are. The girls’ active roles in their ethnic identity construction suggest that the girls maintained a sense of personal investment in their individual ethnic identity choices.

Scholars borrow from the work of Stuart Hall when looking at the relationship between agency and identity. Central to Hall’s (1996) position on identity formation is a key idea that supports the findings of this study. He believes that identities are formed only when an individual invests in some or all of the possible identities available to him or her. Like Hall, I have used the term “investment” to suggest that the participants’ ethnic identities required some action or agency on their part.

As I previously mentioned, the girls’ perceptions of their parents was that their parents were trying to raise them with the socio-cultural expectations that they will turn out to be like their peers who are being raised in Ghana and Nigeria. The girls respected their parents’ efforts at socializing them to adopt the family
ethnic identity, but they were also aware that they were being raised in a different cultural context than what exists in Ghana and Nigeria. Instead of responding passively to the parents’ socialization efforts, each girl constructed her own ethnic identity. That is, they were all “engaged in similar identity-making processes” (Holland et al., 1998, p.3) by using cultural resources around them to construct their identities. For example, the girls adopted cultural values like respect for authority, value for hard work and academic success, and the value placed on being well-behaved and well-raised children. They understood what aspects of their African identities to purposefully adopt to work in their favor in the school. Holland et al. (1998) describe personal or individual agency as the power that people possess to act purposely and reflectively in situations where they or others may consider alternative courses of action. The agency that the girls displayed was a purposeful response to an alternative course of action which was yielding completely to their parents’ expectations of the kind of girls they were supposed to be. The agency they exercised reveals a conscious and deliberate decision to choose who they want to be in the socio-cultural contexts in which they have found themselves.

Feminist research uses narratives as a methodology of liberation and I hoped that my participants would be empowered as they construct their ethnic selves through the act of narrating self stories (Bloom, 2002). Understanding the value that Black feminist research places on the empowerment of women, I was pleased to recognize that the participants understood the voice they had in their
identity-making process. Bakhtin (1981) asserts that finding one’s voice is necessary for agency, and to varying degrees, the girls were similar in maintaining authorship in their identity of choice. Therefore, no two of the participants had the exact same ethnic identity, even when their immigrant backgrounds appeared to be similar. Amanda summed up, in a journal entry, how empowering this study experience was for her. She said, “…though you learn something from us girls, us girls can also say we learned something about ourselves” (Journal entry, 3/10/08).

Based on this understanding of each girls’ unique experience with ethnic identity construction, I attempted to position the girls along the continuum of Phinney’s (1990) stages of ethnic identity development with the understanding that identity is always fluid and the way the girls have chosen to identify may change with time and context.

**Is Phinney’s stage model of ethnic identity development appropriate for identifying the participants’ positions on the continuum?**

Using Phinney’s (1990) stage model of ethnic identity development as a theoretical framework, I attempted to position these adolescent girls and their ethnic identity construction along the continuum of three stages of ethnic identity development: an unexamined ethnic identity, exploration and commitment. Cross (1991) reminds us that ethnic identity is a complex construct that varies even among members of the same group. It is a fluid concept which can possibly change over time and in different contexts. Tajfel (1981) contends that ethnic identity development is an age-related progression in the ability to perceive,
process, and integrate or interpret racial or ethnic stimuli that lead to the establishment of ethnic identity. Therefore, the attempt to place the girls along the ethnic identity development continuum does not speak to a permanence of these positions; instead, it is possible that any one of these participants could adopt different identities in different contexts and at other development stages.

Ekene identified as a Nigerian mostly as a form of resistance to the negative stereotypes she encountered about Africans. Out of all the participants, Ekene showed the greatest identification with her parents’ country of origin because she viewed it as her country of origin as well, having migrated as an adolescent. She had plans to return to Nigeria and settle there. Ekene seemed to be at the third stage of ethnic identity development— an achieved ethnic identity. At this stage adolescents “have a working knowledge of their ethnic heritage, a clear idea of the meaning of their ethnic group membership, and a commitment to their ethnicity and the role it plays in their lives” (Wakefield & Hudley, p.149).

Madeline switched identities from Ghanaian and African to African-American possibly because she had internalized the negative stereotypes that her peers had about Africans. Madeline admitted to switching identities depending on the context in which she found herself. She identified as African-American when she was in a predominantly African-American context, and as a Ghanaian in majority Ghanaian contexts. Since she was born in the U.S. and speaks English without any noticeable accent, she learned that she could pass as an African-American if her last name does not give away her Ghanaian identity. Based on
Phinney’s (1989) model, Madeline could be said to be at the second stage of ethnic identity development—ethnic identity search. Adolescents at this stage are exploring without making any commitment. Madeline did not indicate that she had committed to any one of these identities. Instead she said, “I’m trying [emphasis is mine] to learn to confront to people that I’m really Ghanaian instead of being an African-American.” She may continue to feel this way or she may get to the third stage— an achieved ethnic identity. After exploring what it means to be a member of an ethnic group, the individual at the achieved identity stage chooses to commit to that group. At this stage, the individual is able to assert a clear, positive sense of their ethnic identity (Phinney, 1993).

Amanda had also encountered stereotypes among her peers, but did not indicate whether this played any role in her decision to identify as both Nigerian and American. Instead she claimed that being born in the U.S. to Nigerian immigrants made her want to identify with both aspects of her heritage. Like Ekene, Amanda could be said to have an achieved ethnic identity. During the interviews she seemed to assert a clear, positive sense of her ethnic identity (Phinney, 1993). She repeatedly claimed both identities and insisted that it was her parents, and not she, who were from Nigeria. At no time during this study did Amanda indicate that she switched identities.

Abena was the only second-generation participant to choose an African identity as her only ethnic identity. Although she, too, had been confronted by negative stereotypes of Africa, it did not appear that these impacted her choice of
a Ghanaian identity. Like Ekene, she adopted one ethnic identity throughout the study and appeared to have an achieved ethnic identity. The feelings accompanying this third stage of ethnic identity development are ethnic pride, belonging and confidence. Although I concluded that Abena was at the third stage of ethnic identity development where she could be said to have committed to an ethnic identity, she made the following journal entry at the end of the study, “[The study] has made me begin to ask myself, ‘Who am I?’ A[n] African-American or Ghanaian?” Perhaps the study allowed her to begin to question how she came to choose a Ghanaian identity; that is whether it was really her choice or whether she had made a commitment based on her parents’ ethnic attitudes. Abena’s dilemma supports the challenges that might arise by positioning adolescents at any of the three stages of development as if ethnic identity development is a permanent rather than a dynamic process. A possible challenge to positioning the girls at a specific stage of ethnic identity development is the role that the girls’ ethnicity and minority status in the U.S. played in their ethnic identity development. Their experiences with negative stereotypes, which appear to be an ongoing issue, and their adolescent status, suggest the possibility of the girls changing their ethnic identities in different contexts and at different ages of development.

CONCLUSION

I began this study with two main questions: How do home and school contexts impact the ethnic identity construction of West African adolescent
immigrant girls in the U.S.? And how do they negotiate ethnic identities between the home and school contexts? These questions are pertinent because of the significant numbers of African immigrants and their school-age children in the U.S. models developed in the last few decades to explain the immigrant experience have been largely based on the European experience (Suarez-Orozco, 1999). While researchers have made significant contributions to our understanding of Black Caribbean youth and their ethnic identity development (Waters, 1994; 1996; 1999 and Rong & Brown, 2002), West African immigrant youth seem to have escaped close scrutiny as to their processes of ethnic identity development.

A recurring theme throughout this current study was the mutual stereotyping that occurred between the participants and their African-American peers and how this appeared to impact the girls’ ethnic identities. Rong & Brown (2002) have done significant work on the socialization, culture and identities of Black immigrant children and they argue that having African ancestry or features places Black immigrants at “the lowest level of the racial hierarchy” (p. 253). Similar to the participants in this study, they report that Black immigrants respond to their positioning on the racial hierarchy by either emphasizing their ethnicity or nationality to “de-emphasize their race as defined by American stereotypes” (p.253) or emphasizing their ethnicity or nationality in order to distance themselves from African-Americans and the stereotypes that identifying to this group connotes. Rong & Brown (2002) understand that an awareness of the
process of socialization for Black immigrants is beneficial for educators who work with Black immigrant students. The limitation to their work, which they acknowledge, is the dearth of research on African immigrants which led to their focus on using the Caribbean Black immigrant experience as a way of understanding and explaining all Black immigrant experiences. This present study has added the experiences of West African immigrant adolescents with negative stereotypes to the literature.

I agree with Rong & Brown (2002) that there is a diversity of the Black immigrant population and experience. But even within the same ethnic groups, there are diverse experiences as well. The girls in this study shared similar home and school experiences, yet the process by which each girl came to construct an ethnic identity appeared to differ. Like Rong & Brown (2002), I argue that it is critical to acknowledge the difference that immigrant generation status, gender and cultural traditions make in the Black immigrant experience. For example, this study revealed a difference in the ethnic identification process for the 1.5 generation participant and the second-generation participants. I posit that using the Black Caribbean experience to understand the experiences of all Black immigrants will deny Americans of the opportunity to learn that just as there is no one standard Black immigrant experience, there’s no one standard African immigrant experience. This study has shown that even within the scope of African immigrant adolescent ethnic identity development, there are some distinctions
with respect to the ethnic identity that each girl adopted in spite of what appeared to be similar home and school experiences.

Waters (1994; 1996; 1999) has also studied the Black Caribbean immigrant experience extensively. More specifically, she has studied the development of ethnic identity among first and second generation Caribbean Blacks, a work which she attributes to the choice that Black immigrants in the U.S. face as to whether they should identify as Black Americans or maintain an ethnic identity reflective of their parents’ countries of origin. My study found a similar dilemma among the participants whose parents’ desire for them was that they adopt an ethnic identity reflective of their parents’ countries of origin. This was the propelling force behind many of the steps that the parents took to immerse the girls in their ethnic traditions. Just as Waters’ (1994) study found three general types of ethnic classification, American, ethnic American (Jamaican-American), an immigrant identity (Caribbean), this study found that the participants adopted similar ethnic identities, American, African-American, a hybrid of these two identities and African (Ghanaian and Nigerian).

The similarity between this study and Waters’ (1994) ends where she argues that because second-generation Caribbean Blacks do not have accents or other clues which announce their ethnic status to others, they can choose to withhold their ethnic origins and thus pass as Black Americans. She further states that “in encounters with whites, the status of their black race is all that matters” (p.818). This study revealed that the second-generation participants’ African
heritage played a major role in the way they were perceived by their peers. Even when they did not have noticeable accents, their African names were likely to draw some attention to them and the ways they are perceived. So unlike their Caribbean Black counterparts, choosing to “lose” their ethnic status, even as second-generation immigrants, is not quite as easy. The nomenclature of the second generation African immigrants is a giveaway of their ethnic heritage and like this study found exposes them to negative stereotypes. Therefore, this study sheds additional light on the literature on Black immigrant ethnic identity development to the extent that it rejects the “one size fits all” that research on Caribbean Blacks tends to project on all Black immigrants.

The literature on immigrant ethnic identity development is rife with studies that have examined the critical role of families in the ethnic identity formation of immigrant adolescents. Umana-Taylor, Bhanot & Shin (2006) and Umana-Taylor & Fine, 2004) examined the relationship between ethnic socialization and ethnic identity for adolescents of Mexican, Asian-Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese and Salvadoran descent. Although these groups have diverse histories in the U.S., they share similar traditional cultural values that include the central role of family. Similar to this study’s findings on the family’s role in the participants’ ethnic identity development, their findings revealed that familial ethnic socialization played a significant role in the process of ethnic identity formation. Missing from these studies are the experiences of African immigrant youth with ethnic identity development. The current study
indicated that although the participants’ families played a major role in their ethnic identity development, their status as Black African immigrants was significant in its complication of the girls’ ethnic identity formation. The families’ attempts to socialize them as different from their African-American peers and some of the girls’ own construction of ethnic identities as different from their African-American peers makes this study a much needed addition to the literature on immigrant ethnic identity development.

This study also focused on African immigrant adolescent girls because up until 1986, studies by Boyd (1986) and Brettell & Simon (1986) indicated that immigrant females’ experiences were less studied than males. Females have also been shown to face higher expectations to maintain family culture and tradition. Even though the role of gender in the immigrant experience has been increasingly explored since the eighties (Dion & Dion, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, 1999), many of these studies have focused on East Asian (Das Gupta, 1997; Das Gupta, 1998); Chinese (Qin, 2006); Latin American (Suarez-Orozco, 1999; Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003) and Filipina women (Enrile & Agbayani, 2007), to name a few. This study found that the girls perceived that there were parental expectations of them to conform to traditional African gender roles as a way of maintaining their African identity. The role that gender played in the parental expectations for maintenance of ethnic identity is a distinct outcome of this investigation that places the girls’ experiences as adolescents of West African ascent front and center in discussions about gendered immigrant experiences.
Finally, the study findings on the impact of a culturally-responsive curriculum on West African immigrant ethnic identity add to current literature on the practice of culturally-responsive teaching. Studies that have examined the effect of culturally-responsive teaching on specific groups include Pewewardy (1993) and Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez (1992). The current study is significant in that it reveals how the inclusion of Africa in the curriculum in this specific school affirmed the participants’ historical and cultural experiences and strengthened their pride in their ethnic origins. This study will be beneficial for educators of African immigrant students who will learn that a curriculum that is responsive to the needs of students of color must include the African experience.

The findings on West African adolescent girls’ ethnic identity development has significance for the people who work most closely with the students in the two contexts in which they spend the most time- at home and at school. Since adolescent mental health has been linked to a strong, positive ethnic identity (Wakefield & Hudley, 2007), and since the study revealed that home and school experiences impacted the participants’ ethnic identity development, it means there are, therefore, study implications for both immigrant parents and school officials.

**Implications for teachers**

A proposed outcome of this study was to gain some understanding on the link between the participants’ ethnic identity negotiation and their schooling
experience. The girls’ matriculation in school as Nigerian and Ghanaian female immigrant adolescent students was mostly positively impacted according to the findings. Although their ethnic background elicited stereotypical responses from their peers, the girls successfully negotiated ethnic identities between the home and school contexts by adopting and applying aspects of their African identity to their school experiences. Parental high expectations for academic success, choice of peers and respect for adult authority seemed to impact the girls’ school experiences to the extent that they reported achieving academic success, forming strong friendships with other immigrant peers, treating school officials with respect and thereby staying out of trouble. The use of culturally-responsive pedagogy by the teachers also impacted the girls’ school experiences to the extent that they appreciated the coverage that Africa received in the curriculum and their role as experts on Ghana and Nigeria which reinforced the pride they felt about their ethnic backgrounds.

The data indicated that the impact of the negative stereotypes on the girls’ school experiences could be linked to their choice of immigrant peers as a support system in the school. In comparison to their relationships with immigrant friends in the home context, relationships which appeared to be orchestrated by their parents, three of the four girls studied claimed that their school friendships comprised of immigrant girls from several African countries. According to them, same ethnic group peers shared similar values and experiences.
I recommend that educators “support [students] in developing their identities free from negative stereotypes” (Traore, 2003, p.34). In addition to same ethnic group support groups discussed above, schools could create forums where African and African-American students come together to share openly about the stereotypes they hold about each other. Schools should be challenged to move beyond the foods and festival approach to understanding other cultural and ethnic groups and focus on teaching what it means to be African, African-American or any other ethnic group in the U.S.

This study also revealed an area of immigrant education that requires closer examination- the school adjustment of recent immigrant children. Ekene, the only participant born outside the U.S. had a difficult time with school adjustment as she recounted during the interviews. As I explained in Chapter three, it was difficult for me to follow the interview guide when we met because, as she later confirmed, she had been waiting for a long time to share her story. Ekene’s experiences with negative stereotypes caused her to adopt silence in school either as a form of resistance or as a defensive stance against her perceived mockery of her accented speech. The data indicated that Ekene’s school adjustment would have been smoother if school officials understood what she was experiencing as a recent immigrant. Instead she coped by not speaking much in class and staying back in class during recess. An awareness of such adjustment experiences will help educators ensure a smoother integration of 1.5 generation immigrants into the schools. School officials could create support systems,
perhaps in the form of same ethnic group peer mentors. This would serve as a support mechanism for immigrant students who are newcomers either to the school or to the U.S. If Ekene had found such a group, perhaps she would not have lugged her heavy textbooks home everyday when she did not know how to operate the school lockers. She would have also learned the correct way of doing the vocabulary assignments rather than struggle on her own.

In addition to the importance of same ethnic group friendships was the participants’ perception of the school curriculum which they described as inclusive in its treatment of Africa and other people groups. Considering the extent of mutual stereotyping that occurred at Montclair, the promotion of culturally-responsive teaching among teachers might be an effective approach to educating all students about difference.

Although Montclair Academy already included African literature, history, projects and folktales in the curriculum at the time of this study, the girls did not indicate whether the teachers knew of the positive impact that such a curriculum had on their ethnic identity. They did not mention, either, whether the teachers were aware of the mutual stereotypes that occurred between the African and African-American student population. Some knowledge of the impact of a culturally-responsive curriculum on the immigrant students’ ethnic identity could serve as encouragement for teachers who are already making the efforts at being culturally responsive, or as motivation for teachers who are not.
Implications for immigrant parents

As the primary socializing agents (Wakefield & Hudley, 2007), West African immigrant parents need to be aware of the other factors that might impact their children’s ethnic identity development. Some of the participants’ responses revealed the role that their parents played in perpetuating the stereotypes they had about their African-Americans peers. It was not clear whether the parents were aware of the effect that their stereotypical comments had on their children’s perceptions of African-Americans or the incidences of mutual stereotyping at school and how this might have influenced their children’s ethnic identities. Immigrant parents need to pay closer attention to their role in perpetuating negative stereotypes about other groups. As their children’s primary socializing agents, immigrant parents may make the earliest impressions on how their children view the world and the people around them. Rather than allow the media to inform their perceptions of African-Americans, African immigrant parents can seek out other sources of information that positively portray African Americans and use these as teaching tools in the home.

Implications for policymakers

This study found that the participants, their parents and their peers referenced the media as the source of their perceptions of each other. The media’s role in promoting stereotypes of different groups can be considered an environmental factor in adolescent ethnic identity development. Considering the
possible link between positive ethnic identity and adolescent mental health (Wakefield & Hudley, 2007), policymakers in the fields of education and the entertainment industry need to be aware of the insidiousness of the media in its promotion of stereotypes. With the globalization of the entertainment industry, the media’s influence is far reaching to the extent that many immigrants form impressions of Americans before migration. Furthermore, considering that there are Americans whose knowledge of Africa is limited to depictions of Africa and Africans on television, the media needs to examine their role as perpetrators of stereotypes. It could be that a more balanced presentation of Africa in the media will cause African-American children to realize, like Ekene stated, that Africans “are your ancestors, too.”

Bearing the media influence in mind, textbook publishers and producers of school curriculum should view school texts and the curriculum as tools for demystifying stereotypical beliefs. This means that school texts and school curriculum cannot be complicit in perpetuating stereotypes either through the omission of certain groups or cultures or through compensatory or token inclusion. These tools will aid educators in their practice of culturally-responsive pedagogy which has been linked to students’ positive feelings about their cultural background (Gay, 2000).
Recommendations for future research

Based on the data from this study, I intend to further investigate the following: First, I will investigate how teachers might use culturally-responsive pedagogy, especially in schools with a significant African and African-American population, in response to the cultural capital and history that both groups of students bring to the classroom. Such a study will explore teacher awareness of possible tensions between African and African-American students and what efforts, if any, the teachers are making to address this issue. More specifically, I intend to study teachers who are successfully using culturally-responsive pedagogy to address problems with tensions surrounding stereotypes between African and African-American students. This study will seek to celebrate “goodness” (Lightfoot, 1986) in schools that are successfully meeting the needs of African and African-American students through the use of culturally-responsive teaching rather than employ a deficit approach that highlights schools that may be less successful at meeting the needs of these populations. This will be particularly pertinent in school districts which have experienced an influx of African immigrants and refugees in the last few years. Possible questions for future study could be: (1) Since incidences of mutual stereotypes are likely to exist in schools with an African and African-American student population, what level of awareness exists among teachers and school officials of this problem? (2) Do existing programs recognize and address these problems? (3) To what extent have
schools utilized the cultural and historical capital of both groups of students in an effort to address the issue of stereotyping?

Secondly, since the study also revealed that mutual stereotypes appeared to influence school peer friendship choices, and that immigrant students are likely to form same ethnic group friendship groups, school officials might utilize this knowledge in the creation of peer mentor groups for newcomers. Because Abena was at Montclair the year before Madeline arrived, she was able to introduce Madeline to the “African group.” Therefore, Madeline had a ready group of friends upon arrival who reportedly shared the same experiences with her. A possible question for future study could be: What role do immigrant peers play in the school adjustment of African immigrant students?

Thirdly, another possible study would examine how 1.5 and second generation immigrant children construct their identities, bearing in mind the possible impact of time spent in home country on 1.5 generation immigrants’ experiences. I did not set out to purposely include a recent immigrant in this study. I was more concerned with having equal representation of participants from Ghanaian and Nigerian immigrant homes. As I progressed through the data analysis, it became apparent that Ekene’s experiences were significantly different from the other participants who were all second generation. The differences were particularly apparent in the strength of her connection to Nigeria. In contrast to the other girls, Ekene had formed strong social relationships in Nigeria. Ekene also differed from the other girls in the challenges she faced with school
adjustment, especially with regards to her accented speech and negative stereotypes. Immigrant children from English-speaking African nations may have needs peculiar to their families’ socio-cultural practices or their age at time of immigration. They may have accented speech which could hinder their classroom participation because of their perceived discrimination from teachers and peers. The resulting silence could be misconstrued by teachers and peers. Some questions that might drive the future research I intend to do in this area include: (1) How do 1.5 generation children identify themselves as similar to or different from their second generation counterparts? (2) What role does immigrant generational status play in the school adjustment of 1.5 and second generation immigrant children? (3) Are school officials aware of the social and educational needs of 1.5 generation immigrants like Ekene? (4) How can schools assist in the school adjustment of this population?

A fourth recommendation for future research concerns the role that gender might have played in the participants’ experiences. The study revealed what the girls believed were family attempts at maintaining traditional gender roles in the home context. The girls believed that the desire for the maintenance of ethnic and cultural practices were the motives behind their parents’ gendered expectations. Would the families have been more or less concerned about maintenance of ethnic identity if the participants were male? I intend to do undertake further study that will examine the role of gender in the relationship between parental expectations
and male children’s choice of ethnic identity. A question that might guide such research includes:

How do African parents’ expectations differ for their male with respect to household gender roles, dating, marriage and choice of peers?

A fifth recommendation for further study will be to investigate a possible relationship between ethnic identity and academic achievement, since the participants suggested that there was a relationship between their identities as African immigrant children and their academic success and school behavior. The current study did not review school records to confirm or disprove the participants’ claims of academic success. A future study will not only use school records as data, but will include teachers’ perceptions of African immigrant students’ academic performance.

A final recommendation for future research is the need to diversify the study group by including parent, peer and teacher perspectives on the roles they believe they play in the ethnic identity construction of immigrant children. Since I did not interview the parents of the participants or their teachers, I had to rely on the girls’ perceptions of their parents’ and teachers’ actions. The parents’ perspectives would make for richer data that will address some speculations that I had to make in this study. I would also like to know the perceptions that teachers of African immigrant girls have of them.
Final thoughts

I began this study with the awareness that my experiences as an African immigrant and an African immigrant parent would impact my researcher role. By beginning with my narrative tale of positionality and my experiences with raising teenage daughters in the U.S., I set the stage as both insider and outsider trying to understand the experiences of West African immigrant girls with their ethnic identity construction. I learned that in spite of parents’ noble efforts at maintaining some form of continuity with their ethnic heritage, West African immigrant girls may very well be the architects of their own identities. They take their home and school experiences and construct hybrid identities that Fuligni et al. (2005) succinctly describe as “a new and different identity that is relevant for adolescents’ lives” (p. 807).
APPENDIX A

SCRIPT FOR RECRUITMENT OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS FOR SCHOOL OFFICIALS, PARENTS, STUDY PARTICIPANTS AND SCHOL DISTRICT PERSONNEL
Thank you for taking the time to read and understand the reason why I am conducting this study.

Early adolescence is the time that adolescents begin to question their identity and their place in the world. For Black youth, asking ‘Who am I?’ includes thinking “Who am I ethnically and/or racially”? For West African immigrant adolescent girls, asking this question includes the fact that they may be trying to find their place in American society where it may be assumed that they are African-American and identify as such, without consideration being given to the role that their West African immigrant backgrounds play in the way they see themselves.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the experiences of West African immigrant adolescent girls (specifically from Ghana and Nigeria) and how they choose to identify themselves while being raised in West African immigrant households in the U.S. Ghana and Nigeria have been chosen as the focus of this study because, not only do they send the largest numbers of immigrants from West Africa, but they are former British colonies whose major language is English.

Some of the questions my study will address are: Who are these young girls and who do they choose to be? What factors influence their decisions on who they choose to be? To what extent does family background and culture influence how the girls choose to identify themselves?

Some of the benefits of the study include:

- School officials who work with adolescent girls from West African immigrant backgrounds may benefit from an understanding of the ways the girls’
identities are impacted by the ethnic and cultural traditions at home and their school experiences.

- West African immigrant parents may also benefit from an understanding of their daughters’ experiences as they negotiate ethnic identities between home and school environments.

- On the part of the participants in this study, I will try to raise their awareness that they are not just providers of information but potential agents of social change. While the study could lead to social change, it is not possible to ensure participants will bring about social change. The possibility of contributing to social change means that the participants will feel empowered, in telling their stories, by the knowledge that others’ lives may be affected and that they could give voice to a population that is currently missing in immigrant research.

**Researcher’s expectations of the participants**

This study will be conducted between December 2007- March 2008 with approximately 4-6 participants. I will begin this study with a one hour personal interview with each participant with the possibility of a follow-up 45-60 minute interview if necessary. I will follow with two group interviews, each one lasting about an hour, with one focusing on home experiences and the other on school experiences as they relate to ethnic identity formation. I will work closely with the school principal and superintendent of schools to ensure that the time spent in this research will not cause any conflicts with classes or school work.
APPENDIX B

ANNOUNCEMENTS READ BY SCHOOL OFFICIAL FOR THE RECRUITMENT OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT
Hello,
My name is Mrs. Chinwe Okpalaoka and I am doctoral student at The Ohio State University, in the School of Educational Policy and Leadership in the College of Education and Human Ecology. My research focus is on the school experiences of Nigerian and Ghanaian adolescent girls who are being raised in African immigrant households in the U.S. **By this, I am referring to Nigerian and Ghanaian girls who migrated to the U.S. with their families or girls born in the U.S. to Nigerian or Ghanaian immigrants.** I would like to understand the role that their ethnic, racial and immigrant backgrounds play in their school experiences and in who these girls choose to be. Ghana and Nigeria have been chosen as the focus of this study because, not only do they send the largest numbers of immigrants from West Africa, but they are former British colonies whose major language is English. The study will include group interviews and personal interviews to be held at your school.

If you would like to participate in this study, please pick up an information packet from the school office. In this packet, you will find permission forms that you and your parents have to sign in order for you to participate. You will also find a copy of this announcement and more information about the study. If you choose to participate in the study, you can return the signed permission forms to a locked box that will be provided in your school office. I will notify you by letter, through your school, if you have been selected for the study. This letter will detail the dates, times and school location for the group and personal interviews. I will be available to answer questions at 614-256-5500 or at okpalaoka.2@osu.edu. Thank you
APPENDIX C

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY PARENTAL PERMISSION FOR CHILD’S PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH
The Ohio State University Parental Permission
For Child’s Participation in Research

Study Title: Constructing reality, constructing identity: Narratives of West African immigrant girls in a Mid-West school

Researcher: Mrs. Chinwe Okpalaoka

Sponsor: N/A

This is a parental permission form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you permit your child to participate.

Your child’s participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to discuss the study with your friends and family and to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to permit your child to participate. If you permit your child to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the experiences of West African immigrant adolescent girls (specifically from Ghana and Nigeria) as they negotiate ethnic identities while being raised in African immigrant households in the U.S. My study will examine how these girls construct their identities along the lines of race, ethnicity and immigrant status and the relationship between their home and school experiences and their ethnic identity.

Procedures/Tasks:

Your child will be asked to participate in focus groups or group interviews along with other participants from her school. I will also interview each girl privately. In addition, I will ask each participant to keep a journal of her experiences throughout the research process. I will audio-tape the personal interviews and video-tape the focus group sessions. The focus groups will be video-taped because an audio-tape of the sessions may make it difficult to tell who is speaking at each point in time. Your child may choose to discontinue participation without any penalty or prejudice. You will be provided with samples of the questions the participants will be asked along with this permission form.
Duration:
This study will be conducted between December and March 2008. I will begin this study with a personal interview with each participant with the possibility of a follow-up 45-60 minute interview if necessary. I will follow with two focus groups/group interviews, each one lasting about an hour, with one focusing on ethnic and cultural traditions at home and the other on school experiences and how these impact your child’s ethnic identity. I will work closely with the school principal and assistant superintendent of Reynoldsburg schools to ensure that the time spent in this research will not cause any conflicts with classes or school work. I will be meeting no more than 3-4 times in a four month period with your child.

Your child may leave the study at any time. If you or your child decides to stop participation in the study, there will be no penalty and neither you nor your child will lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

Risks and Benefits:

While risks are likely minimal, there are risks which need to be recognized and minimized. There may be some awkwardness because your child and I are meeting for the first time, but this will disappear as your child and I get to know each other. On the other hand there are benefits to this study. School officials who work with adolescent girls of West African ascent will benefit from an understanding of their experiences as they navigate identities between the school and home cultures. West African immigrant parents will also benefit from an understanding of the experiences of their daughters as they negotiate ethnic identities between home and school environments. On the part of the participants in this study, I will try to raise their awareness that they are not just providers of information but potential agents of social change. While the study could lead to social change, it is not possible to “ensure” participants will bring about social change. The possibility of contributing to social change means that the participants will feel empowered, in telling their stories, by the knowledge that others’ lives may be affected and that they could give voice to a population that has otherwise been silenced in immigrant research.

Confidentiality:

Efforts will be made to keep your child’s study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your child’s participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your child’s records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):
Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
- The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

Incentives:

I plan to compensate the participants at the rate of $5 per visit, even if any one of them chooses to stop during a visit, to a maximum of $15 in gift certificates.

Participant Rights:

You or your child may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you or your child is a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you and your child choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights your child may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Contacts and Questions:

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact __Dr. Antoinette Errante at errante.1@osu.edu_________________.

For questions about your child’s rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

If your child is injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact _Dr. Antoinette Errante at errante.1@osu.edu_________________.

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**Signing the parental permission form**

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to provide permission for my child to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to permit my child to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

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**Investigator/Research Staff**

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

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APPENDIX D

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
The Ohio State University Assent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Constructing reality, constructing identity: Narratives of West African immigrant girls in a Mid-West school

Researcher: Mrs. Chinwe Okpalaoka

Sponsor: N/A

• You are being asked to be in a research study. Studies are done to find better ways to treat people or to understand things better.

• This form will tell you about the study to help you decide whether or not you want to participate.

• You should ask any questions you have before making up your mind. You can think about it and discuss it with your family or friends before you decide.

• It is okay to say “No” if you don’t want to be in the study. If you say “Yes” you can change your mind and quit being in the study at any time without getting in trouble.

• If you decide you want to be in the study, an adult (usually a parent) will also need to give permission for you to be in the study.

1. What is this study about?

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the experiences of West African immigrant adolescent girls (specifically from Ghana and Nigeria) as they explore who they are while being raised in African immigrant households in the U.S. My study will examine how you would identify yourself in terms of race, ethnicity and immigrant status and the relationship between your home and school experiences and your ethnic identity of choice.

2. What will I need to do if I am in this study?
I will begin the study by conducting a personal interview with each participant. In addition to interviewing you separately and in a group with other girls, I will ask you to keep a journal of your experiences throughout the research process. I will audio-tape the personal interviews and video-tape the group interview sessions. The group sessions will be video-taped because an audio-tape of the sessions may make it difficult for me to know who is speaking at each point in time. You may choose to discontinue participation in this study at any time without any penalty or prejudice.

3. **How long will I be in the study?**
This study will be conducted between December-March 2008. I will conduct a one hour personal interview with you with the possibility of a follow-up 45-60 minute interview if necessary. I will also conduct two group interviews, each one lasting about an hour, with one focusing on ethnic and cultural traditions in your home and the other on school experiences and how these impact your ethnic identity. I will work closely with the school principal and superintendent of schools to ensure that the time spent in this research will not conflict with classes or school work. I will be meeting with you no more than 3-4 times during a four month period.

4. **Can I stop being in the study?**
You may stop being in the study at any time.

5. **What bad things might happen to me if I am in the study?**
While risks are likely minimal, there are risks which need to be recognized and minimized. Since you and I will be meeting each other for the first time, there may be some awkwardness which is normal and which will disappear as we get to know each other.

6. **What good things might happen to me if I am in the study?**
I will try to increase your awareness that you are not just a provider of information but a potential agent of social change. While the study could lead to social change, it is not possible to “ensure” that you will bring about social change. The possibility of contributing to social change means that you will feel empowered, in telling your story, by the knowledge that others’ lives may be affected and that you could give voice to a population that has otherwise been silenced in immigrant research.

7. **Will I be given anything for being in this study?**
I plan to compensate you at the rate of $5 per visit, even if you choose to stop during a visit, to a maximum of $15 in gift certificates.

8. Who can I talk to about the study?

For questions about the study you may contact my advisor Dr. Antoinette Errante at errante.1@osu.edu.

To discuss other study-related questions with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.
Signing the assent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form. I have had a chance to ask questions before making up my mind. I want to be in this research study.

Signature or printed name of subject

Date and time

Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the participant before requesting the signature above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

Printed name of person obtaining assent

Signature of person obtaining assent

Date and time

This form must be accompanied by an IRB approved parental permission form signed by a parent/guardian.
APPENDIX E

PERSONAL INTERVIEW GUIDE
PERSONAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

The interview will begin with a brief introduction by the investigator:

“I am interested in understanding what your experience has been growing up in the U.S. as a child of Nigerian/Ghanaian/etc. immigrants. More specifically, I would like to know how your experiences at home and school help shape the way you identify yourself. I will be tape-recording our interview and everything you say will be kept strictly confidential. Your real name will not be used during the write up of this study and the tapes will be destroyed at the end of the three years following the conclusion of the study as required by the Ohio State University Institutional Review Board. Please feel free to answer or decline to answer any question. You can stop this interview at any time.”

Personal ethnic identity

1. Where were you born?

2. When did your family migrate to the U.S. and why?

3. As a first or second generation immigrant, if someone were to ask your nationality, what would you say?

PROBES:

Have you always described yourself this way?
Why do you describe yourself in this way?
When did you begin to identify yourself this way?
How does this differ from how your family expects you to identify?
Do you think that when people see you for the first time they categorize you as African or African-American?
How do you feel about other people’s perception of your ethnicity?
How do you think people of Ghanaian/Nigerian, etc. ascent are perceived by others?
How do you feel about your Ghanaian/Nigerian, etc. heritage?
When are you most conscious of your ethnic background?
Do you ever feel that you are different from other people because of your ethnic background? Can you describe how you feel?
How do you deal with any feelings of difference?
What role has the feeling of being different played on your ethnic identity development?
Family Ethnic identity/Home experiences

1. How does your family identify ethnically?

2. How can you compare this with how they expect you to identify yourself?

3. What ethnic and cultural practices are observed in your family or in what ways do your parents demonstrate their continued identification with Nigerian/Ghanaian culture? What attempts does your family make to maintain contact with members of your ethnic group?

PROBES:
What ethnic organizations or activities does your family participate in regularly?/Clothes, music, cable TV stations, African films, friends, church, parties, etc.
If you attend cultural events organized by the Nigerian/Ghanaian/etc. community, do you feel accepted by your Nigerian/Ghanaian, etc.-born peers?
What do you perceive to be the differences between first and second generation Nigerian/Ghanaian children?
Have you visited your family’s country of origin? If yes, how often do you visit?
Describe your experience with this visit
What plans, if any, does your family have about returning to their country of origin?
What languages are spoken in your home? In what languages are you fluent?

4. What are your family’s expectations when it comes to learning your ethnic traditions and cultural practices?

5. Have you experienced conflict between your ethnic culture and the American culture? If yes, what have they been and how have you typically resolved the conflict?

6. What gender roles are practiced in your family and are you expected to behave accordingly? In what ways?
7. Is it important to your parents that you marry someone from the same ethnic background as you?

School experiences

1. If someone were to ask you your nationality at school, what would you say?
2. Do you ever feel that you are treated differently (both positively and negatively) because of your heritage?

PROBES:
What are some experiences that have caused you to feel you were singled out because of your heritage?
Do some of your friends include members of your ethnic group? If yes, is the shared ethnic background the reason for your friendship?
Have you experienced cultural conflicts between your ethnic culture and that of your American peers?
Do you have a sense of belonging in your school relationships?
How accurate are your teachers and peers in the pronunciation of your name?
Does their pronunciation of your name cause you any distress? If so, how do you handle these situations when they occur?
What are your parents’ academic expectations of you?
What are your teachers’ academic expectations of you?
What are your peers’ academic expectations of you?
What aspects of your ethnic background are included in your school curriculum?
How are people from your ethnic background portrayed in school textbooks?
What contributions about your ethnic and cultural background are you asked to make in the classroom?
How knowledgeable are the teachers and other students about your ethnic and cultural background?
What specific efforts do teachers make to accommodate your ethnic background in classroom instruction?

3. How have you managed to negotiate ethnic identities between home and school?
4. How do your family and school support you in meeting the challenges of developing a positive ethnic identity?
FOCUS GROUP GUIDELINES*

1. Introduction of moderator and focus group participants: In order to begin to develop rapport with the group, I will introduce myself as facilitator and not the expert. The participants will say their names, grades, nationality of parents and one interesting thing about themselves that no one would guess just by meeting them for the first time. This will serve as an icebreaker.

2. Purpose of focus group: I will introduce the purpose of the focus group: To understand how home and school experiences shape how West African immigrant adolescent girls construct their ethnic identities.

3. Ground rules for the focus group: I will inform participants that they will be video and audio-tape recorded. I will also mention the importance of keeping to time and allowing full participation of all members of the group.

4. Data collection: The personal interviews conducted prior to the focus groups would have allowed me to gather some basic information about the participants.

5. Discussion: Using the material collected from the participants in the earlier personal interviews, the focus group discussion will allow for broader insight into experiences already narrated during the personal interviews.

APPENDIX G

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE
QUESTIONS FOR THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW-DAY ONE (2/26/08)

Family Ethnic Identity

1. In what ways do your parents practice their culture and traditions at home? (clothes, music, cable TV stations, African films, Nigerian/Ghanaian, etc. friends)

2. So would you say that your family actively practices their ethnic and cultural traditions?

3. What have your parents told you they expect of you as a girl from a Nigerian/Ghanaian background?

Student Ethnic Identity

1. In what ways do your parents expect you to practice your culture’s background and traditions? (clothes, music, cable TV stations, African Films, Nigerian/Ghanaian, etc. friends)

2. So would you say that your family expects you to actively practice their ethnic and cultural traditions?

3. How do your parent’s expectations of you as a Nigerian/Ghanaian girl differ from how you see yourself? Who do you want to be?

4. If you were born in Ghana/Nigeria, or anywhere else outside the U.S., how would you describe the process of adjustment in the U.S.?

5. If you were born in the U.S., how has having foreign-born parents affected your adjustment?

QUESTIONS FOR THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW DAY TWO (2/28/08)

Ethnic Identity & Others

1. If you were meeting someone for the first time, how would you describe yourself to them? (I will let them tell me whether or not they introduce their ethnicity)

2. How do other people treat you based on where they think you come from? (I will let them tell me how they think it affects them and whether others pick up on their “African-ness”)

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3. What are the challenges of having friends from other ethnic groups? (this is a great stand alone question -they will tell me if they have any, and also if they change identities with these friends and whether friends’ expectations conflict with personal or family expectations)

**School and Ethnic Identity**

1. How has your identity as a member of an immigrant Nigerian/Ghanaian, etc. family influenced the way your teachers interact with you in school? (This question will tell me if teachers know their identity and if the teacher’s use them as African resource persons or experts)

2. In what ways do you see your history, ethnicity and cultural background represented in your school textbooks or school activities? How does this representation affect your perception of your self? How does this representation affect others’ perception of you?

3. How would you describe your school environment in terms of being a welcoming place for students from all backgrounds and ethnic groups?
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