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4

# THE WEB OF IDENTITY:

# A STUDY OF ADOLESCENT IMMIGRANT GIRLS IN NEW YORK CITY

by

**SUZANNE MICHAEL**

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.**

**1998**

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

April 2, 1994
Date

William Kornblum
Chair of Examining Committee

4/24/94
Date

R M Alderson
Executive Officer

William Kornblum - Sociology

Catherine B. Silver
Catherine Silver - Sociology

Ida Susser
Ida Susser - Anthropology

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In 1939 my mother left Hamburg and Nazi Germany and came to America. She was 17 years old and came alone. Her parents followed two years later. My father, born in Leipzig, was also a refugee from Nazism. He arrived in America alone at 21 having first lived in Czechoslovakia and Finland. Growing up in an immigrant household in a non-immigrant community, I was at times acutely aware of the difference it made having immigrant parents. My parents spoke with an accent. Family life was an amalgam of European and American cultures. The stories told to me were very "American" and also very European. They were about places I had never seen, and about my parents' journeys from immigrant to citizen. Immigration and its on-going reverberations were thus the backdrop of my childhood.

Years later as a family therapist at Kings County Hospital - Down State Medical Center, I found myself again listening to the stories of immigrants, but this time the children, adolescents and parents came from Haiti and the English Caribbean. I became increasingly fascinated by their experiences coming to America and making a life here. This study has therefore been figuratively and literally years in the making. It has developed out of my personal history as a second generation child of German immigrant parents, and from my professional experiences working with immigrants as a therapist, advocate, public policy and program developer and, most recently, as a teacher of immigrant college students.

There are many people whose love, support, encouragement and wisdom have enabled me to complete this study. I now want to recognize and publically thank them.

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# I

# INTRODUCTION

They laughed with pleasure and they had tears in their eyes. They sat tall and they sat with downcast eyes. They wore jeans, tee shirts, and mini skirts. They were all teenagers but their voices had the lilt of many different tongues. They told stories of places far away yet so close inside of them. They wanted to be younger and to return to the way life was before they came. They wanted to be older so to better enjoy the "promise" that was America; or to return to the "home" they had left behind. They spoke the words "my country" with sadness and with pride. Some felt safer here - no more demands for identity papers, no soldiers barring their school door. For others, Brooklyn streets with the sound of bullets in the night, were more terrifying than their native Haiti where "soldiers" with guns wandered the streets. Some students spoke of college and others spoke of jobs. Some wondered about their "papers" and how a future without "papers" barred access to college and a job with a decent wage. Yet others excitedly marked the date when they would be sworn in as US citizens. The students were all sizes and all hues of the rainbow - born afar but brought to a new world by the forces of politics, economics, family and dreams. There were differences amongst them and yet there was much they shared in common. Their stories were moving and terrifying. The stories revealed resiliency and flexibility, fragility and sadness. They were surprised that I was interested in their lives. They said, it felt good to talk about their lives. But they also acknowledged that it was difficult. Some said they had never really thought about the questions I asked them. Some

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said they didn't think about the past because it brought too many tears. Others said that their tears had dried. And, yet others said they never shed a tear as they began a new life here.

## STATING THE PROBLEM

The following is an exploration of the experiences of a group of immigrant adolescent girls living in New York City in the 1990's. It is a study which seeks to better understand their lives and how they construct meaning and identity as they face the triple challenges of immigration, adolescence, and the development of gender identity. Focused on the continuities and discontinuities between childhood and adulthood, social-cultural experiences pre- and post- migration, and traditional and emergent gender roles and aspirations, the study hopes to contribute to an increased appreciation of life stage - childhood, adolescence, adulthood, or old age - on the post-arrival adjustment of immigrants. In brief, what are the added challenges that adolescence places on post-immigration adjustment and what are the added challenges immigration places on adolescent development? The definition and significance of gender identity in both the immigration experience and adolescent developmental processes prompts the decision to focus this study only on female adolescent immigrants. The particular historical moment in which the new wave immigrants are arriving, the socio-economic-political atmosphere and opportunities of New York City in the 1990s, and the current dialogues about gender and ethnic identity, provide a dynamic context for the study.

The study has been conceptualized to respond to four major questions. The issues these four questions raise will be briefly discussed later in this chapter, and will act as

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underlying themes throughout the study.

1. How has the immigrant experience provided structure and/or meaning for the immigrant adolescent girl and her sense of self?
2. How have the inter-related factors of race, ethnicity, gender, age, role and immigration status affected the experience of the immigrant adolescent girl?
3. How does the immigrant adolescent girl self-define? What is the impact of external identifiers and classifiers on the development of her self-identity?
4. How does the immigrant adolescent girl's past and present shape and contribute to the realization of her expectations and dreams?

## SETTING THE CONTEXT: IMMIGRATION TO NEW YORK IN THE 1990'S

New York City has traditionally been the portal to the United States for millions of foreign-born. Current immigration echoes this past. Each year approximately 100,000 documented immigrants arrive and settle in New York City (New York City Office of City Planning 1992). In addition, many undocumented individuals arrive and settle. While generally invisible on the official population tables, these individuals are visible from their contribution to the City's diverse ethnic-immigrant communities and to the City's economic growth.

Today's immigrants, both documented and undocumented, have come for reasons similar to those which "pushed and pulled" the great immigration waves of the late 19th and early 20th centuries: 1) to escape war, persecution and famine, 2) to seek out economic opportunities and realize the "American Dream" and 3) to be re-united with

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their families and relatives. The ethnic-racial composition of the newest immigration, however, is radically different. Whereas the primary waves of immigration pre-1965 were dominated by Europeans, the post-1965 migration has increasingly been composed of individuals and families from the Caribbean, Central and South America and Asia. During the most recent period for which data are available (1990 to 1994), the top ten major sending countries in descending order were: the Dominican Republic, the former Soviet Union, China, Jamaica, Guyana, Poland, Philippines, Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti and India (New York City Office of City Planning, 1996).[1]

As the ethnic-racial composition of the new immigration differs from the past, so does the pattern of migration by gender and age or life stage. The historical image of the immigrant to America was the young man who sets out to make his fortune in a new land; and/or the young man who migrates to be later followed by his wife and children. During the 19th and early 20th century, male immigrants did out-number women by a ratio of three to two. Among some groups, e.g. Chinese immigrants, the ratio was even higher. However, during other periods, e.g. the Great Irish potato famine and the pogroms of Czarist Russia, men and women came in equal numbers. By the 1920's the male-female ratio had reversed with greater numbers of women than men migrating from the West Indies, Bohemia and Russia. This trend continued and expanded following the second World War (Seller 1981:5-6). In the last three decades as a consequence of late 20th century transformations in the international division of labor and the increasing socio-political independence of women, many migration streams to the United States and other "core" nations are dominated by women (Houston 1984; Mortimer and Bryce-Laporte

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1981; Morokvasic 1984; New York Department of City Planning 1992; Pedraza 1991).

Historically, immigrants tend to migrate either as young adults in their physical and reproductive prime, or as the young children of young parents beginning a new life abroad. The principal exception have been refugees. Changing world politics, transformations in the labor market, and revisions in immigration policy such as family re-unification, however, have contributed to a changing age pyramid for some immigrant groups. Older immigrants are now arriving in increased numbers, e.g. 32.4% of immigrants/refugees from the former USSR were over 55, as were 16% of Filipino and 12.8% of Chinese immigrants during the 1982-88 Immigration Naturalization Service reporting period (New York City Department of City Planning 1989). The growing phenomena of "mother-first" migration has within the past two decades, also contributed to increasing the proportion of New York City children and adolescents who are foreign-born. For the period 1982 to 1988 New York City Department of City Planning (1989) reported that 27.6% of the documented immigrants arriving and settling in NYC were under 18 years old, with 20.6% of new arrivals between the ages of 5 and 19. In the early 1990s 23% of the city's population was under 18. However, during the same period 28% of immigrants to New York were under 18 (op. cit 1996:17). As a result of this influx of immigrant children and adolescents the proportion of foreign-born students in the New York City public schools has increased over the past decade from 20% of total enrollment to over 30% (Batiz-Rivera 1996).[2]

This study was thus stimulated by my recognition of the changing demography of the City's children and schools, by my curiosity about the nature of this growing

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proportion of New York's population, and by my interest in the potential of this population to impact New York City life today, and tomorrow in the 21st century.

## CONCEPTUALIZING THE STUDY

### The Experience of Emigration and Immigration and Their Consequences

In the past three decades theories of migration have shifted from neoclassical, largely labor driven explanations which emphasized push and pull factors to more structural interpretations which explained migration flows in terms of global economic and political systems and policies. In these more recent interpretations, migration takes place within the context of interdependence and reciprocity between the "core" and periphery with family-based migration gaining ascendancy (Boyd 1989). The literature of migration has similarly moved from the perspective of the "over-socialized migrant" (micro-analysis of the push-pull), to the "under-socialized" migrant (macro analysis of structural factors), to a more recent attempt to balance micro and macro aspects of migration. The concept of transnationalism has provided a theoretical framework in which both micro and macro aspects of migration can be studied (Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992). And social networks have become a means to explore the dynamics of migration in terms of individual migrants, migration flows and the consequences of migration in both the sending and receiving nations.

The field of immigration studies has evolved such that migration is no longer viewed as a single life transforming experience (Vidal 1980) in which there are fault-lines established between past and present. Rather migration is increasingly viewed in terms of continuities and discontinuities which involve, and are molded by, a multiplicity of factors

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including psychological, social, economic, and political. Immigrants are perceived " less "objects or victims ...following capital" and more as individuals "consciously participating in the construction, deconstruction and manipulation of their identities and roles" (Rios 1992:226).

In his 1917 book, An American in the Making, Marcus Ravage described the immigrant experience as being one in which individuals are "cut adrift suddenly from their ancient moorings... floundering in a sort of moral void" (Ravage cited by Steinberg 1981:51). The sense of being uprooted (see Handlin 1973) or experiencing "cultural vertigo" (Steinberg 1981:31) were major motifs in much of pre-1965 literature on migration. In 1928 Robert Park described the immigrant as a marginal man, a "hybrid living in two worlds but not part of either" (1928). Despite recognition that migration potentially freed the individual from the restraints of his/her past, much of immigration literature focused on the sense of estrangement and alienation experienced by immigrants, and on the immigrant's susceptibility to depression and mental illness (Portes and Rumbaut 1990).

The immigrant's ability to assimilate was a critical focus in much of the pre-1965 immigration literature. It was thought that the post-arrival challenge of immigration was the immigrant's movement along a continuum - contact, accommodation, assimilation and ultimately amalgamation (Steinberg 1989). Upward mobility was contingent on the immigrant's and his childrens' success moving along this continuum. While there is now some debate as to what the melting pot theorists meant in terms of the process and the degree to which immigrants gave up the old to embrace the new culture (see Steinberg

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1989), the melting pot theorists did assume a certain inevitability to the process and assumed it was to the mainstream or dominant Anglo-European culture that immigrants assimilated. Over the past decade this "straight-line" concept of assimilation has been "turned on its head" (Portes and Zhou 1992). Instead of a singular "cultural blueprint for advancement," acculturation and assimilation are now viewed in the context of ethnic pluralism in which there are any number of social and cultural reference points towards which immigrants orient themselves. The result is the incorporation of immigrants into different spheres of social and institutional life along gradients that vary in terms of the immigrant's and her community's position in society. The migration history of an immigrant population, its reception by the larger society, its residential location and its neighbors are now understood to shape the nature of the immigrant group's acculturation and assimilation. Mainstream American culture is no longer viewed as the only frame of reference for acculturation and assimilation. Instead, there is recognition that immigrant populations in their interface with specific subgroups or classes within society may adapt and adopt the characteristics of these groups. The resultant "segmented assimilation" creates and reproduces distinctive groups within society and/or behaviors and values that are articulated within specific social, economic and political contexts. Specifically, Caribbean, Latin America and Asian immigrants, living in poor and working class communities, tend to interface far more with African-Americans and other minorities than with the majority population of European descent. Faced with similar obstacles such as racism and the uneven distribution of resources and opportunities, many of the children of these immigrants are adapting and adopting the characteristics and strategies of other

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minority and underclass groups (Gibson 1988; Gibson and Ogbu 1991; Portes and Zhou 1993; Rumbaut 1995). The consequence for these immigrant populations and their children is often downward rather than upward mobility (see Jensen 1990; Portes and Zhou 1993). Inverting prior trends in assimilation, it now seems that the immigrants who maintain many of their pre-migration values and behaviors are the ones who achieve upward mobility.

The literature on segmented assimilation predominantly focuses on the experiences of the 1.5 generation, i.e. children who emigrated at very young ages,[3] and/or on second generation immigrants, i.e. the children of immigrant parents. Scholars such as Portes, Gibson, Ogbu, Rumbaut, Waters and Zhou have studied various aspects of acculturation and assimilation, e.g. language and social identity amongst these children. And they have explored the nature of the social-cultural interface between the 1.5 and second generation youth, their parents, and their peers. Few recent studies, however, have focused on how first generation adolescents experience the interface between their native cultures and the culture, or cultures, they find here. There is thus a gap in our understanding about the process of acculturation and assimilation, and how new immigrant adolescents especially those considered "of color," choose their cultural and social references. To what extent do they confirm the patterns of segmented assimilation observed in regard to the new 1.5 and second generations, and to what extent do they differ? By focusing on immigrant adolescents this study hopes to contribute to our understanding of current post-migration experiences and the processes and choices which move these new immigrants towards and away from the dominant culture and subcultures that comprise America.

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**Family and Individual Life Cycles in the Context of Immigration**

The age of an arriving immigrant and the stage of her/his family in the life cycle pose a unique set of issues for the individual immigrant, the immigrant family or household, and the larger community (Rogler, Cooney and Ortiz 1980). As developmental tasks vary over the life cycle of the individual, so do family tasks vary over the life cycle of the family. The intersection of these tasks during a family's and/or an individual's migration and post-migration adjustment magnifies individual and family values, roles and processes of decision making. What is the family's or household's structure prior to, during and post migration? These are especially important issues when there is chain migration. What structures, patterns and processes are maintained and which are altered as a result of migration? To what extent are family and household rules and roles changed? How does migration affect intra-familial relations, especially between spouses and cross-generations? Do traditional beliefs and behaviors conform or conflict with those found here, e.g. child rearing and discipline (Thrasher and Anderson 1988)? What is the effect of migration on the family's allocation of roles and functions - earning a living, rearing and educating children, caring for the elderly? For example, the absence of an elder who "chose" to remain behind, may stimulate the family to re-assign decision making roles. Can previous patterns be successfully transplanted or replicated here (Sluzki 1979), or does the family find it requires supplemental community resources, such as day care or nursing homes? Changes in opportunities for employment by age and gender may result in changes in the family's previous allocation of roles and functions, e.g. traditions in which the male was the producer, the female the keeper of the home and reproducer (Pessar 1982). The

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challenges and conflicts that emigration and migration stimulate may result in positive, negative or neutral consequences for the family as a system, and for the individual. Thus, post-migration, a family's maintenance of traditional values and roles may shield the family, providing a sense of identity, security and/or stability, or may cause splits within the fabric of the family along generational and/or gender lines.

The developmental stage at which an individual migrates may similarly create special opportunities, or stimulate challenges and conflicts post-arrival. It appears that very young children who migrate with their families are initially least affected by re-location, their immediate world maintained by the stability of both affective and instrumental spheres of experience. However, as these children tend to adopt the culture of the new country, inter-generational conflicts may develop at a later point when their Americanized ways conflict with the more traditional ways of their parents.

Immigrant children are frequently recruited to interpret for their parents. As the mediator between their family and the outside world these children may experience a special pride in the knowledge that they are helping their family, and may be pushed into roles that belie their chronological age. At the same time, the knowledge and power inherent to the children's function as interpreters can reverse roles between the generations, causing parental loss of authority and creating role confusion (Gany and Michael 1993, New York Times 1991). The consequences of children interpreting for their parents and the resultant accelerated maturity thus may have both positive and negative consequences for the child and her family.

The nature of the migration process itself may result in significant consequences

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for both, individual development and family relations. Children, left behind with relatives or friends when their mothers migrate to pursue work, have been observed post-migration and parental reunification to experience some special difficulties. In these situations the child's age at the time of her mother's departure, the nature of the care-taking in the absence of the mother, and the extent of on-going contact with the mother become critical variables. The child's experience of loss and her conflicts of loyalty - the care-giver versus the parent, may affect her capacity to trust and develop intimacy as an adult (Adams 1986). As women who are mothers increasingly become the first or primary migrants of family chain migration, the impact of a mother's departure on individual psycho-social development and family life emerges as an important area for both sociological and psychological research. While this study does not focus exclusively on mother-first migration, the inclusion of girls who have experienced mother first migration will, hopefully, contribute to a better understanding of some of the potential consequences of this pattern of chain migration.

As the adolescent immigrant will be discussed in a later section, this brief discussion about life cycle implications of immigration jumps forward to a discussion of adult immigrants.

The majority of immigrants come during their adulthood, most migrating between the ages of 18-44 (New York Department of City Planning 1996:17). In New York the mean age of immigrants over the past decade has hovered around 26 although for some groups the mean is higher, e.g. immigrants from the former Soviet Union, or younger, e.g. immigrants from the Dominican Republic (New York Department of City Planning 1996).

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The tasks of adulthood include the completion of education, the definition of career or employment, and/or the establishment of a marriage and a family. In general, adult immigrants, especially younger adults, come with hopes and dreams to create a new and more wonderful life for themselves and their current or future families. Youthful energy and high levels of optimism are common characteristics of these immigrants. They are frequently ready for hard work, even sacrifices. They believe that they have the capacity to overcome tremendous challenges including the learning of a new language, and will succeed in achieving their version of the "American Dream."

Those who come to complete their education, however, may find that the United States' educational systems is significantly different from the one back home. The learning of English may be harder than anticipated. English Language classes are often over-subscribed and immigrants often find that they lack the time to study.

The adult immigrant may discover that work experience in his/her native country is not transferrable here. Lack of English proficiency may close many doors. Immigrants holding professional credentials may find that these credentials are not recognized here and/or that they must take additional courses and/or pass credentialing exams, e.g. medical doctors. Some immigrants may take interim positions in related fields and then prepare for the exams. Other immigrants will find that daily life takes over and they end up accepting other jobs and/or pursuing careers which do not require a license. Many adult immigrants will discover that while they may earn more here, the jobs they can get are of lower status than the ones they held back home. And many immigrants discover that while their wages are higher here, they are not sufficient to pay their expenses and to send

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money back home. Some immigrants accept the downward social mobility as a transitional adjustment, but others find that they can never regain the employment and social status they had prior to emigration. At times the frustrations of unfulfilled employment expectations leads to disillusionment, depression and family tensions (see below).

Adult migrants may come as single individuals or as married or affianced. Single immigrants may find companionship with others from their country. Some find spouses amongst their compatriots, others may meet and marry someone who shares their language but not nationality, religion but not ethnicity; and others may cross all boundaries and enter into an entirely new social world. Yet other immigrants may return home to find a spouse. For immigrants here on their own, the absence of family may be freeing, for others it may cause profound loneliness. For immigrants with family or relatives here, family members may provide an important social support and a sense of continuity; or family members may make demands based on the traditions of home from which the adult immigrant had hoped to escape. Different degrees of acculturation may result in conflicts between the adult immigrant, his/her family and/or community.

For immigrants who come with or establish families here, family obligations may take over their dreams. For others, children become the instruments of their dreams.

Finally, there is the set of issues faced by the older immigrant who migrates past his/her adult years. Smaller apartments may inhibit re-establishment of the traditional extended family household decreasing or eliminating the older immigrant's function as a care-giver or decision maker. Decreased mobility may also contribute to isolation.

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Neighborhood conditions may restrict movement. Public transportation may be too difficult to negotiate. Learning a new language may prove to be too awesome, increasing isolation. Economic options may be limited because of language, lack of appropriate American credentials or licenses to practice. The number of contemporaries who share the older immigrants life experiences may be small, reducing the possibility of support, new friendships or the satisfactions of collective reminiscing. The older immigrant's position within the family hierarchy may be altered. Lines of authority may be shifted from the grandparent who back-home had the final say, to the father whose participation in social and economic life here may provide needed information and insight. The older immigrant may also be challenged by the adolescent who is rapidly "Americanizing." For example, in the Chinese community, Confucian thought instructs reverence for the elderly, and directs one to never question or argue with one's parents. This tradition may be challenged by younger members of the family who believe that grandparents just don't understand "the new culture in which they live."(Jeng 1989:15). An elderly immigrant's experiences of diminished status and reduced role functions may parallel those of American-born senior citizens but are frequently intensified by the discontinuities between his/her social worlds. On the other hand, the stature of the elderly immigrant in the immigrant family or community may remain constant and provide a sense of coherence in the present and continuity with the past. In these cases, the elderly immigrant may experience an enhanced social and symbolic status simultaneous to helping maintain the family's or community's ethnic identity.

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**The Adolescent Immigrant**

As stated above, there is an increasing number of immigrants who are arriving in New York City during the adolescent period. What is the experience of these adolescents as they grapple with the tasks of adolescence within the context of their immigrant families, their peer networks, their schools, their immediate communities, and the world beyond which intersects with their lives, e.g. the media? The primary tasks of adolescence are the establishment of personal goals, values and beliefs, the adoption of a set of social roles (Waterman 1985), and the start of a separation process which will end in the establishment of an adult life, and possibly a new family. The adolescent experiences a heightened consciousness of self (Adelsohn and Doehrman 1980:109) as she works towards a definition of self, i.e. who she is and who she is not (Hoare, 1991:47). The definition which emerges out of this "identification process" will be the individual's unique integration of psycho-social-physical experiences and capacities which will enable her to meet the tasks of adulthood as defined by her cultural world (Eisenstardt in Elder 1980:10). But what if her culture is changing? What if her developing values, beliefs and roles prior to immigration are now at variance with those to which she is exposed post-migration? What if her experiences here cause her to identify more with new values and behaviors which vary from those of her parents' or traditional community's? The life cycle challenges faced by immigrant adolescents reflect many commonalities with non-immigrant individuals during the adolescent period. Increasingly, rapid change in a society's culture and/or in social and economic opportunities create problems of understanding between generations (Elder 1980, Mead 1968). For immigrants the rapidness of change is

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exacerbated by the immigration process and the adjustment and adaptation to the new country. For the immigrant adolescent, simultaneous to their own efforts, their families are also working to: "reconcile the traditions of the Old World with the freedom of the new, the ghosts of the past with the possibilities of the future" (Kakutani 1989). This simultaneous need to make sense of cultural roles and values may complicate and/or intensify the adolescent's own efforts to develop a sense of self, her own cultural identity. Are the "orientation and attitude of children who migrate during adolescence... unpredictable" (Piore 1979:66), or are there factors which influence the direction of their orientation? This study will present and discuss some of the factors which may help predict the directions of adolescent immigrants' acculturation.

Much of the literature on immigrant adolescents is focused on determining the level of the adolescent's adaptation to their changed environment. The measures most frequently employed are behavioral or social indicators having to do with school performance, peer relations, parent-child relations. If the adolescent fits into the social expectations of these environments, she is perceived as being adjusted. But Sung suggests that our yardsticks may need to be questioned. "Eruptions or disruptions" may indicate deviance and/or conformity and/or social change (Sung 1987:199). The institution, its norms, and its sanctioning mechanisms must be identified and the position of each must be clarified in terms of relative power and in terms of context. The immigrant adolescent may encounter an array of normative systems which may result in identity and inter-generational conflicts. What is the adolescent's greatest motivator - family traditions, parental anger, bad grades or the ostracism of a desired peer group? And what are the

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consequences? Working in England with immigrant children from the West Indies, Rutter (1974, 1975) found that the children being referred to a clinic had few or no behavioral problems reported at home but presented behavioral problems within the school setting. My own work at Kings County Child Psychiatry Clinic in the late 1970s and early 1980s found a similar school-home discrepancy. Rutter's work suggests that it is the different expectations - the normative values and structures, of both the teacher and the child - which resulted in deviant behavior, rather than any of the children's inherent neurosis or psychosis.

The message from the immigrant parent is often:

> Become a success in the United States, but find ways to do it without becoming an American; be grateful for your freedom here, but don't embrace it as a way of life." (Nguyen and Williams 1989:513).

But one study of Vietnamese male adolescents found that those boys who formed friendships with American peers were at less risk for emotional distress than those that didn't. Yet, "success in school-based relationships places (sic) the Vietnamese adolescent at risk for conflict with parents "(Charon and Ness 1981:13). The calculus for decision making may be dependent on the intensity of the repercussions meted by the normative system (family, peers, school, community). If the immigrant adolescent chooses to subscribe to non-familial norms, the result may be family conflicts. If the immigrant chooses her family's or community's traditions and norms, the schisms might be between her and the American culture she finds here. This study will attempt to explore 1) how immigrant adolescent girls understand their choices, 2) the decisions they make given these choices, and 3) some of the actual and potential consequences of their choices.

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Two of the most dominant statuses in America are gender and race (Epstein 1972) . Both ascribed statuses, the cultural system's interpretation of them, creates or enhances (Epstein 1972) or limits value and/or action. The interaction between these two statuses affects much of individual experience (Davenport and Yorich 1991). To understand the post-arrival experiences of immigrant adolescent girls it is critical to explore both.

**Gender and the Immigrant Experience**

The experiences of immigrant men and women may vary considerably. Men may find additional freedoms here that they did not have back home when their family and/or community demanded their attention. Some men may seek out and/or create situations in which they can fraternize with other men from their former village or nation. Formal and informal activities may recreate for these immigrant men the social solidarity they once had. Drinking, playing cards, or engaging in a national sport, may provide the immigrant man with a means to escape some of the hardships and loneliness of post-migration adjustment. And often through these social activities men may learn about employment and housing opportunities.

While most immigrant men successfully overcome the challenges and frustrations of the the post-arrival period, some men may become disillusioned and depressed when they find themselves unable to "make-it," or to achieve their pre-migration dreams. In response to loneliness and/or diminished self-esteem, men more frequently than women seek consolation through sexual encounters and alcohol. Some immigrant men, often those who are single or have come on their own, may therefore be at special risk for substance abuse and sexually transmitted diseases (Michael 1996:11).

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Immigrant men who have their families with them may experience frustration when their wives and daughters are more successful in finding work. They may feel their manhood is in question. At times, domestic violence will result.

In contrast to the experiences of immigrant men, immigration for single women may open up opportunities, both socially and economically, previously unavailable in their countries of origin. Some studies suggest that single adult women migrants have a greater sense of satisfaction with their lives than women who arrived as mothers and spouses. (Friedenburg, Imperiale and Skouton 1988). For married immigrant women with or without children, the initial decision to migrate frequently may have been made by their husbands, fathers or brothers: "I did not come because I chose to" (Ibid., 220). Post-arrival, women may experience increased isolation and dependency as the demands of home and children in a strange environment inhibit their ability to develop new supportive networks (Kosack 1976). Limited social access beyond traditional cultural and religious activities may reify traditional roles, but without the effective supports available in their country of origin. For other married women, access to employment may be better for them than their spouses, opening up new social, economic and intellectual opportunities. However, as women who might have never worked outside the family become the breadwinner, or supplement the family budget, traditional definitions of masculine and feminine may be challenged. For example, the decision what to wear to work, a sari, a skirt or pants, may emerge as a significant familial struggle throwing into relief definitions of modesty, honor and lines of authority between men and women, husbands and wives (private communication with Janet Poppendieck ). The meaning perceived in a changed

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role or status may result in severe consequences for individuals within the family. The "Network on the Rights of Immigrant Women" reports increases in domestic violence and spouse abuse during the post-migration period. This has been found to be associated with gender-related discrepancies in the spouses' abilities to earn money or find employment of equal "prestige." In these cases the man may feel he has lost face, his role and status within the family hierarchy having been diminished. Domestic violence has also been found to be a consequence of the woman's growing sense of independence, wherein she begins to question the right of her husband to dominate, and he on the other hand, believes he must re-assert his authority (Kosack 1976). Yet, it is important to bear in mind the resiliency of individuals and families to adapt and change in new circumstance. For many families, the change of an individual's status may be encouraged rather than discouraged. New opportunities may bring about new arrangements of roles, previously unimagined. The family may feel enhanced pride and honor as the first family member, a female, graduates high school or college, or receives a professional degree.

Simone de Beauvoir called women the "second sex." Worldwide this may aptly describe the familial and societal position of women. Women who migrate, especially those migrating from industrializing nations, frequently discover the extent of their prescribed and restricted lives when they experience new opportunities for self-determination in the United States. Adolescent immigrant girls at the critical juncture between childhood and adulthood, may be specially challenged in deciding which path they will follow, satisfying traditional role expectations such as early marriage, or trying to explore the other options they may have discovered here. "Americanizing" or attempting

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to develop an individual identity, beyond traditionally prescribed roles for women, may create friction at home and potential loss of face for the family. Similarly, the adolescent may experience internal doubts as to her life options - loyalty to the family may inhibit her ability to fully protect her newly identified individuality and sense of freedom. For example, a 1991 episode of Rose O'Neal (11/22/91) portrayed the conflicts of a young Hmong immigrant girl. The TV show focused on the price of transplanted traditions, in this instance a tradition (unclear as to the extent of TV taking creative liberties) in which a Hmong man laid claim to a woman by raping her, the female engaging in ritualized resistance to give the man a greater sense of his power. The story line involved the consequences for the girl whose real protests went unheeded by the man, and she ends up killing him. Knowing that rape is illegal here, but believing that her "traditions were all she had left," the Hmong adolescent was faced with the dilemma of going against her community and "pleading self-defense" or bowing to her tradition and standing trial for unprovoked murder.

There is some disagreement in the literature, if immigrant adolescent girls or boys have greater difficulty adjusting. Some research indicates no difference based on gender (Williams and Westmeyer 1983), other literature suggests that girls have a harder time because of the greater discrepancies between traditional roles and what is deemed acceptable behavior in the U.S. (Nyguen 1989; Rosenthal 1984). Rosenthal's (1984) work with immigrant families in Australia raises several issues to be considered in an investigation of gender and post-migration adjustment of adolescents. 1) What are our definitions and measures for adjustment, i.e. are they adequate, given the range of

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culturally defined gender norms? 2) What are the dynamics of the social milieu of the community in which the immigrant resides? 3) What are the meanings of the conflicts for each participant? Male immigrant adolescents in Australia reported more conflict with their parents than did their female counterparts. However, the parents reported more conflict with their daughters than their sons. Rosenthal suggests that these results might be explained by the expectation that boys are more rebellious and openly challenge authority, while "girls are expected to be more passive and tolerant of controls" (Ibid., 72).

The work of Chodorow, Gilligan, and Miller, among others, suggests that there may be important differences in the developmental processes which result in male and female identities. They observe that a girl, in claiming her own female identity, can maintain a bond with her primary caretaker, identifying with her as a women, while boys must separate from the mother in order to establish their male identity (Davenport and Yorich 1991:65). Girls will thus define their identity through relationships and connections rather than through separation, i.e. the female attempts to preserve affiliations to maintain a sense of continuity. Exploring the adolescent immigrant's experience through this reading of female psychological and social development, the question arises if the female adolescent may experience greater difficulties in responding to contrasting cultural norms, particularly those presented by family and peers, and especially during the adolescent stage of individuation and separation. Do her identifications with her mother and her family, and the traditional roles and statuses they represent, intensify and complicate the experience of identification with "American" peers or values, or, alternatively, provide a sense of continuity for her in her new milieu? Naditsch (1976), suggests that as "female

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socialization often results in increased sensitivity to interpersonal relationships", the emergent cultural and role conflicts may have less of an impact on feelings of contentment and well-being than the girl's experience of ambiguity as to how others are evaluating her behavior (Naditsch 1976:117). The girl's primary reference orientation thus may be very significant in how she identifies and the values and behaviors she embraces post-migration.

There is also the issue of changing cultural standards. The immigrant family may be involved in its own sorting process as to what roles and expectations to maintain, alter or replace. But so is society, especially in regard to role expectations for women. American culture is not static, there is continued ambivalence about female sexual behavior, the status of motherhood, the pursuit of careers, the ability to be both mother and worker. The womens' lives captured so movingly by Ruth Sidel in On Her Own (1990) speak to the discrepancies between expectations and reality, external and internal evaluations of success as women grow up in America of the 1990s. What standards, what role models are presented to the immigrant adolescent and how realistically can she achieve any of them? What are the choices and the consequences of those choices as she tries to find her own identity? Horowitz' (1985) discussion of sexual mores within the Chicano community reflects quite eloquently the interplay of symbolic meanings - the virgin, the mother figure of the Madonna and the whore, behavioral reality for young women, and the dynamic consequences within a changing normative system. The values associated with different roles prompt different choices, as do the anticipated repercussions of the selected choices. How then do adolescent immigrant girls respond to the challenges presented by the changing dynamics of gender within and without their immigrant families? This study will

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explore both the contexts in which adolescent immigrant girls must make their choices and the patterns of their responses.

**Ethnicity, Race and the Immigrant Experience**

"I never realized I was Albanian until my brother came from America" (Park and Miller 1921/1969:146). "Only in America, as strangers, had they (the immigrants) learned from the inevitable contrasts with others to be aware of their own distinctive character" (Handlin 1951:173). The experience of seeing oneself as different can be surprising and acute for immigrants. Cultural characteristics, if so desired, can be discarded over time, the indelible stain of pigmentation" (Fishman 1961:331) can not. In 1903 W. E. Dubois wrote:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (cited in Sidel 1990:69).

In Marshall's Brown Girl, Brownstones (1981), Selina realizes "the full meaning of her black skin," when she sees her reflection in a white women's pale eyes and knew that the woman saw one thing above all else" (1981:289). In the racial politics of the United States, that meaning often overshadows ethnic identifications, and has negative connotations with serious implications for the development of individual and group identity, often affecting access to and enjoyment of life opportunities. Facing the "invisibility" of their national origins and the ambivalence of association with American-born African-Americans, some Caribbean black immigrants may work to solidify their cultural community, "becoming more West Indian than those back home." Their action has been seen as an attempt to avoid the stigmatization of their "caste" position as blacks

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(Reid 1969; Bryce-Laporte 1972; Gibson and Ogbu 1991; Sutton and Makeiesky 1975; Waters 1996). How do immigrant adolescents from the Caribbean and other immigrant teens of African ancestry respond to the challenges of imposed racial identifiers, identifiers which often are imbued with negative stereotypes? How do they self-identify and with what outcome? Waters' studies of Caribbean immigrants in Brooklyn (1993, 1996, 1997) and Gibson's (1988) and Ogbu's (1991) work on immigrant minorities have begun to address these questions. This study hopes to contribute some additional observations.

Asians, frequently termed the "model minority," have had to respond to a different set of identifiers and assumptions, than those who are of Latino background or who are of African ancestry. In classrooms, the result may the playing out of the Thomas theorem, the self-fulfilling prophecy between teacher expectations and student performance. What happens when the messages outside their families clash with those from within their families, when traditional filial and gender roles must be weighed against new opportunities for higher education and non-traditional career paths? How does their categorization as a model minority affect their self-esteem when they do not attain high grades, and how does their categorization affect their relationship with their peers, especially those from different racial and ethnic groups? This study also hopes to tease out some possible answers to these questions and issues.

The experiences of adolescent immigrants must also be examined within the context of the changing meanings given to ethnicity and race in the United States. Is the objective to acculturate, to lose or discard one's ethnicity to be replaced by another cultural frame in order to blend in? As previously stated, during earlier periods of

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immigration many believed that the ideal was the melting pot, wherein cultural differences would be homogenized into a single American culture. Today, the melting pot has been replaced by the salad bowl, the gorgeous mosaic. Within the context of cultural and ethnic pluralism which developed out of the social movements of the 1960s, acculturation and assimilation have become somewhat suspect. In its place is the actual and/or symbolic maintenance of ethnic identifications and affiliations and rhetoric about the value of diversity. At the same time, the immigrant adolescent witnesses and experiences the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities based on classifications of race, ethnicity and gender. Thus, while diversity may be perceived to be positive, there is recognition there are still hierarchies which "impact on those who would be defined as inferior by the dominant way of perceiving" (Meyers 1991:55) In a society in which there still exist a "pervasive number of existing societal 'isms' (racism, sexism and ageism)," the immigrant adolescent may discover that it is not easy to choose her identifications and/or to develop a positive self-identity (Ibid., 55). Within a context of structural pluralism where there are unequal resources and opportunities, how does the immigrant adolescent girl understand her choices? How does she select which cultural traditions to keep and which to alter and/or discard? Does she elect to position herself as a foreigner, does she dream of returning to her native country where she better understood social expectation and where identifications seemed less problematic? If she is of non-European descent does she choose to ground her identity within her nationality and/or ethnicity, or does she choose to identify with others who share her racial classification? Does she try to move beyond racial identifications, or to make race a critical element of her socio-political self?

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Will the discontinuities between her past and the present, the old and the new, result in the integration or alienation of self, and/or stimulate the development of a new "cultural hybrid" particularly suited for life in a complex and diverse society? The formation of patterns in individual and group responses to these identity choices may effect social, economic and political consequences, not only for the immigrant groups and their U.S. born children, but also in terms of their interaction with others in American society. This study will both, examine the choices some immigrant adolescent girls are making and suggest how their choices will impact their futures and the futures of communities from which they come.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

At the age of 30, Mary Antin wrote her autobiography The Promised Land (1912), describing her childhood in Russia, and her experiences migrating to the United States and becoming an American. The Promised Land is infused with excitement, optimism and confidence in the unfolding of a life. A decade later, another Jewish immigrant woman from the Pale of Russia, Anzia Yerzierska, wrote a poignant novel about the experiences of immigrant women and their families in New York City's Lower Eastside. In the Bread Givers (1925) Yerzieska describes impoverished circumstances and the struggles of immigrant women and their daughters to make a life in this "promised land." More recently, there has been a stream of books about the experiences of immigrants who have come to the United States after the watershed immigrant legislation of 1965. Novels and short stories by immigrants and the children of immigrants from the Caribbean, Latin America and Asia mirror the complex and often contradictory images found within the

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books of earlier authors. Novels such as Breath Eyes Memory (Danticat 1994), How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent (Alvarez 1991), Lucy (Kincaid 1991) and Jasmine (Mukherjee 1989) focus on characters who are trying to make sense of themselves and the strange new worlds they have found post-migration. These newer novels give us a wonderful view of the subjective experience of immigrants at the end of the 20th century and as such are instructive both historically and culturally. But novels no matter how vivid are still creations. Autobiographies by individuals who immigrated as adolescents can be powerful in their articulation of experience and provide a wealth of insights, but they are always through the prism of adulthood, e.g. Lost In Translation (Hoffman 1989).

There is a wealth of statistical studies on immigrants measuring their adjustment as defined by economic, social and health indicators, e.g. labor market participation, school performance, crime rates, pregnancy rates and outcomes. These studies have been the basis of policy and programs. But, often stripped of the humanity of individual immigrant lives, these studies often have failed as the means to inform our political and social course of action. In the past few years there has been a burgeoning of literature which engages in sociological analysis while retaining some of the humanity of individual immigrants and groups of immigrants (Waters 1996; Gibson 1988; Zhou and Banston 1998). But much more is needed. This study was thus initiated as an attempt to add to our understanding by penetrating subjective experience and then identifying patterns and their implications.

This study moves beyond the ageless, often assumed to be male, immigrant. It responds to the National Research Council's observation that within the discussion about immigration policy, labor force participation and welfare there is little discussion about

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immigrant children, who have been "rendered largely invisible (Board on Children and Families 1995:73).

> The absence of reliable research on immigrant children and their families heightens the risk that policies and programs for newcomers children will be diminished rather than inclusive and effective "(Ibid., 83)

While the literature on immigrant children is now increasing, I believe there are several significant problems with the focus and definition of some of this research.

First, studies which position themselves as studies of immigrant children, often fail to define the term "immigrant children." More often than not, these studies include both, individuals who were born elsewhere and migrated as children **and** the children of immigrant parents (Board of Family and Children 1995:73). For an excellent example of the failure for a common operational definition see the articles in the Winter 1994 edition, Volume 28 of the International Migration Review. The inclusion of both groups of individuals, I believe, confounds our ability to understand some critical areas in respect to identifications. In my experience, even those individuals who migrated in their pre-school age identify as being of their native country in a very different sense than individuals who were born here, even those who have strong attachments to the culture and nationality of their parents. There are also issues related to immigration status and citizenship which, over time, are played out differently for immigrants and for children of immigrants, including those participating in transnational households. A good deal of the social science and public health literature on immigrant communities, particularly of Latin American origin, do not truly discriminate between foreign-born and U.S. born individuals. The result is a lack of clarity about the patterns of values, beliefs and behaviors for immigrant,

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first and second generation Latinos, e.g. Horowitz 1985. Studies of minority youth can and do inform our understanding of some of the issues of cultural and structural assimilation, but the significance of being born and raised in one culture and re-located to another is lost in most of these studies. This study thus was designed to focus only on those girls who were born in another country and migrated to the United States during their adolescence, no earlier than 12 years old and not after their 19th year.

Second, much of the literature on foreign-born adolescents tends to focus on refugee youth. The dramatic stories of these adolescents' pre-migration lives and the challenges of their post-migration adjustment, while of real concern, focus our attention on a minority of immigrating adolescents, i.e. only 10% of all immigrants who come to this country each year are defined as refugees. Our understanding of the majority of immigrant adolescents thus gets overshadowed by our attention to a fraction of their peers. Further, the literature on refugee adolescents disproportionately focuses on Southeast Asian refugees, and gives far less attention to those refugee youth migrating from the former Soviet Union and/or Latin American. This study includes both refugee and immigrant youth from over 30 different nations. The study's diversity of subjects will facilitate comparisons, and hopefully will help set the stage for other more comprehensive studies of the experiences of immigrant youth from around the world.

Third, while there are some very interesting oral histories that have been collected about the experiences of immigrant youth (see Bode 1989), it seems that most of the researchers and the editors of these histories do not engage in sociological analysis which could surface important patterns. We get the story but do move beyond the individual life.

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The design of this study is therefore to use the girls' voices to surface their unique and common experiences and then to actively examine their collective experiences and surface trends and patterns.

Fourth, many of the studies that have focused on immigrant children emerge from what I call the perspective of pathology. These studies seem to start with a problem oriented frame of reference focused on some difficulty or maladjustment during the settlement of immigrant and refugee children and youth. These studies explore such issues as depression, poor school performance, criminal behavior, substance abuse and teen pregnancies. While a number of researchers suggest that immigrant children and youth do not evidence greater pathology than non-immigrant youth (Aronowitz 1983), much of this literature suggests, by implication, that immigrant youths are at greater risk for adjustment and identity problems, and that migration and social change are bad for one's well-being and health (Nann 1982:8). Studies which are problem focused tend not to look at the creative and positive outcomes of immigration and/or to highlight the strength, resiliency and flexibility which enable immigrants to move forward with their lives without chronic problematic or pathological consequences. In addition, most of these studies impose their research focus on their immigrant subject, thus precluding the surfacing of the issues important to their subjects. The voices of immigrants thus are responsive and not spontaneous. While this study is structured around the events of migration and immigration, there is no pre-existent problem orientation or focus on problems of adjustment. Rather it has been designed to have the girls surface the areas of meaning and those issues they believe important for our attention. If there is any underlying perspective

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for this study, it is one that is focused on the flexibility and resiliency of human beings to negotiate challenges.

Fifth, many studies of immigrant children and youth, in fact about immigrants in general, tend to focus on one or another immigrant population. The depth and richness of these studies are critical to our understanding of that population's unique experience given social, cultural and historical factors particular to them. While some of these studies broaden their focus to identify similarities and commonalities with other immigrant populations, there is a tendency to emphasize the specific population's experience. While many statistical studies do engage in comparisons between groups, and some general studies speak to the larger issue of immigration and also ethnic identifications, there need to be more studies which engage in surfacing patterns of similarity and dissimilarity amongst current immigrant populations. More active recognition of the commonalities of different immigrant groups in terms of role transformations, generational transitions, inter-generational relationships and survival strategies will help to diminish the stigmatization of specific groups, and enable the establishment of more comprehensive and humanistic polices which can contribute to more successful inter-group relations and the incorporation of all immigrant groups. While this study is very small in scale and can make only a small contribution, it is hoped that the study's inclusion of immigrant girls from many different nationalities will enable the discovery of the commonalities of the experience of immigrating as an adolescent rather than continue the focus on cultural and other differences of immigrating youth.

Sixth, with the emergence of feminist scholarship, there has been a growing

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literature which examines how women experienced and continue to experience immigration. This literature has been enhanced with the growth of ethnic studies which have widened the frame from European immigrant women to the inclusion of immigrant women from all parts of the world (Mortimer and Bryce-Laporte 1981). The insights from this literature shift the women immigrant from object to subject (Lerner cited in Seller 1981:9) and looks at gender as an organizing principle rather than as one variable amongst many (Pedraza 1991:322). While this study examines a web of identities, the decision to focus on the experiences of immigrant girls and not on immigrant adolescents in general, was prompted by recognition of the saliency of gender in organizing experience, and the need to explore how gender affects and is affected by the immigrant experience.

In conclusion, this study seeks to examine the multiple dimensions of experience, to move away from the competing paradigms of much of the literature on migration - assimilation and ethnic pluralism (Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton 1992:226); and to observe how the memory of the past - personal, shared, inherited and reconstructed, helps to shape the present (Goldstein 1988:6), such that the experiences of adolescent immigrant girls and their identifications reflect additive processes and continuities. This study's explorations will hopefully provide further insight as to the relative importance and effectiveness of various values and strategies, personal, familial and institutional, which may ease post-arrival transitions and challenges faced by immigrant adolescents. Finally, through my listening to and recording the girls' experiences and observations, I hope to provide validation of their experiences, and to provide others with an enhanced understanding of the experiences of immigrant adolescent girls and the potential

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contribution of these newcomers to New York City's and America's cultural, social, economic and political future life.

## GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

**Chapter II: METHODS**

This chapter identifies the study's parameters and then discusses the logistics of recruiting girls to participate in the study. The interviews and survey instruments are described. Methodological issues are raised and analyzed, including ambiguities and strains in my role as the interviewer.

**Chapter III: A DEMOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT**

Who are the girls who are the subjects and focus of this study? This chapter presents demographic information about the girls including their nationalities, their ages at migration, and the length of time they have lived in the United States. To set the stage for later analysis, I then survey the girls' parents' level of education, their parents' pre and post-migration employment histories and their pre and post-migration social economic statuses.

**Chapter IV: EMIGRATION AND IMMIGRATION**

This chapter sets the context for the remainder of the study. It begins with an analysis of the girls' families' reasons for emigration. The actual processes of the girls' immigration are explored, surfacing a variety of types and subtypes of migration, including nuclear family, chain migration, and "mother-first" migration. These patterns are then examined in relation to the girls' immigration status. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the girls' pre-migration images and expectations of the "America," and the

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realities they discovered upon arriving in the United States.

**Chapter V: FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD**

What are the connections between migration process, family or household composition and current household dynamics? This chapter focuses on the girls' experiences in their post-migration households. The continuities and discontinuities of family and gender roles are explored and the effects and implications of shifts and adaptions are analyzed in terms of individual and family adjustment and inter-generational relations. The girls' desire and ability to uphold or conform to family and cultural traditions are discussed, surfacing areas of agreement, accommodation and conflict. By the end of the chapter, the family emerges for most of the girls as an anchor in a sea of change, and for a few, as a frustrating context for their post-migration lives.

**Chapter VI: PASSING THROUGH THE SCHOOL HOUSE DOOR**

The pursuit of educational opportunities motivated some of the girls' families to come to America. This chapter examines the ironies and some of the paradoxes of the girls' experiences within New York City's public high schools. Beginning with a brief examination of the place schools had in the socialization process of earlier generations of immigrants, I then consider how school climate, student diversity and the presence of alternative norms affect the girls' educational experience and the nature of their acculturation. Reviewing the girls' academic achievements I then explore a range of factors which contributed to the girls' successes and failures. As part of this exploration, I look at the potential impact of participation in either English as a Second Language or bilingual classes. The chapter concludes with the girls' plans and prospects for college and

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graduate study.

**Chapter VII: THE WEB OF IDENTITY**

As adolescents, the girls in this study are in the process of developing and confirming identities. This process has been amplified and in some cases complicated by the experience of immigration. In this chapter I try to understand how the girls self-identify, and how they make sense of a complex web of identities - those with which they came and those now superimposed on them. Using material from the "This is Me Survey "and from the interviews, I examine the girls's choices of identities, and how they project these identities. The social environments in which identities are fostered and responded to and the girls' experiences with race and racism are explored. The chapter also pays special attention to the girls' identity and their identification as an immigrants.

**Chapter VIII: IDENTITY AND GENDER**

In the context of rapidly changing ideas about gender roles, values, and expectations this chapter focuses on the saliency of gender in shaping the girls' pre and post-migration experiences. The girls' families' attitudes and, at times, prohibitions are juxtaposed with the girls' own interpretations. I identify specific areas of agreement and contention and present the girls' strategies of response. The chapter also looks at the evolution of the girls' gendered identities in terms of their ideas and experiences about dating, sex and marriage.

**Chapter IX: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE AND THE AMERICAN DREAM**

In this concluding chapter I weave together a number of themes and insights which have emerged during the study, and explicitly respond to the questions raised in the

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introduction - the effects of immigration on adolescence and adolescence on immigration. In the process I consider how the girls' lives and their expectations about their futures have been altered through their migration to the United States. I then examine the girls' current plans and dreams in light of their interpretations of the "American Dream" and in light of the realities of their daily lives: their educational achievements, their family's expectations, their immigration status, and available social and economic resources. I conclude by asserting that unlike many earlier generations of immigrants, for this generation of immigrants, the pathway to the achievement of their dreams is the retention of many of the cultural values and identities with which they arrived. By not breaking with their pasts, these young women have the best chance of finding their futures.

## Chapter X: SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Reflecting on the material gathered in this study and the issues and questions which have surfaced yet remained partially or fully unanswered, this short chapter posits some areas for further research and investigation.

## ENDNOTES

1. For the preceding period, 1982-1989, during which some of the girls in this study arrived, the top ten sending countries in descending order were: Dominican Republic, Jamaica, China, Guyana, Haiti, Columbia, Korea, India, Ecuador and the Philippines.

2. The numbers of immigrant children attending New York public Schools will be discussed in greater detail in chapter VI, "Passing Through the School House Door."

3. The definition of the 1.5 generation varies. Some scholars only include those children who emigrate to the United States prior to the commencement of school, while others include school age, even adolescent, immigrants.

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# CHAPTER II

# METHODS

> A life as told, a life history, is a narrative, influenced by the cultural conventions of telling, by the audience and by the social context. (Denizen 1989:30)

My ambition in this qualitative study was to learn about the experiences of adolescent immigrant girls. I wanted the study to move beyond "objective markers" of immigrant adjustment and focus instead on how the girls experienced and made sense of the migration process and their post-arrival lives. And, rather than focus on a single linguistic or cultural population, I wanted my study to be inclusive of the major immigrant populations in New York City and homogeneous and ethnically diverse communities. The chapter which follows will: 1) identify the parameters of the study sample; 2) describe the challenges of fieldwork; 3) describe the recruitment of girls and the establishment of a study cohort; 4) reflect on my role and experiences as an interviewer; 5) discuss the interview process and the utilization of two survey instruments; and 6) comment on content analysis and the organization of the study's findings.

## Defining the Parameters of My Study

My criteria for an individual's inclusion in my study were as follows:

1. Female
2. Foreign-born, and arriving in New York within the past one to four years. I wanted to exclude girls still in their first year, during which most immigrants are still sorting out first impressions and making major logistical adjustments.

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3. Nation of origin. I was interested in achieving a broad sample of girls representing the principal sending nations and regions. And, to avoid the limitations of working with single cases, I also wanted to have several girls from each of these nations/regions

4 Age. Girls who migrated after their 12th birthday but were still in adolescence. The target age span was therefore girls from 13 to 19 years old.

5. English language proficiency. To avoid the financial costs and logistical problems of using interpreters, I decided that the girls had to be sufficiently proficient in English to allow me to interview them without an interpreter. In comparison to adults, children and adolescents are known to have an enhanced capacity to learn second, even third, languages. The acquisition of English language skills facilitates post-arrival adjustment, and has considerable psychological and sociological meaning for individuals (Hoffman 1989; Marcos 1982). Adolescents, who, after two years, have not become English proficient, frequently have other significant issues of post-arrival adjustment, and or developmental difficulties. My decision not to include non-proficient English speakers reduced my access to this pool of girls. At a later time, it would be important to study this population and to compare and contrast their adjustment experience with those who become English-proficient within two years of arrival.

6. Socio-economic status. To maintain some degree of class standardization

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across nationalities, my initial plan was to include girls who came from lower middle class and working class families in their nations of origin. This parameter was based on an understanding that some form of American cultural capital permeates all world societies. It is believed that the similarity of cultural forms intensifies as class status increases, such that the elites of diverse societies are often more similar than the elite and the underclass of the same society. A focus on other than middle and upper class girls was hoped to increase clarity about the special challenges faced by adolescents re-located from more distinctive traditions in contrast to adolescents who arrive with greater knowledge of U.S. or Western cultural behaviors and mores. Given widely different sending societies and economic opportunities I decided to use parent or parents' level of education pre-migration as a surrogate for socio-economic status.

**Recruiting Immigrant Girls for the Study**

As I indicated in the introduction, unlike many other studies which focus on a specific immigrant population, this study was planned to include a sampling of girls from the principal immigrant groups which have migrated to New York City within the past five years. To identify these immigrant populations, I reviewed both the 1980 and 1990 census and also data available from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (New York City Planning 1992). My subsequent decisions about recruitment were based on my knowledge of the top twenty sending countries, as well as the principal world regions from which the majority of New York City's immigrants were coming.

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My first methodological decision was to determine how I was going to get access to a diverse group of immigrant girls living in neighborhoods throughout New York City. Given that all the girls were going to be in their teens I decided to use the public high school system as my access point. I understood use of public high schools would eliminate access to those immigrant girls who never entered high school, or who had dropped out. Further, by not including religious, especially Catholic schools or private schools and academies, I also would not have a chance to speak with girls who might represent very different pre- and post-arrival experiences. My study would thus not be representative of the cohort as a whole. However, given that the majority of New York City's adolescent school-age population attends public school I decided to limit this study to those girls who were attending public high schools. I also decided that I would eliminate as site options public high schools specifically created to serve newly arriving immigrant students, e.g. International High School and Liberty High School. While the experiences of students attending these schools would have been very interesting, they are not the mainstream experience of most arriving immigrant students.

**The Identification of High School Sites**

To identify school sites, I first reviewed 1990 census data and maps produced by the New York City Department of City Planning. These data sources helped to pinpoint immigrant enclaves and communities within the five boroughs. I then reviewed Board of Education high school profile data to identify high schools with significant (25% or more) immigrant populations. The Board of Education was unable, or unwilling, to provide me the specifics of students' national origins on a school by school basis (see chapter VI,

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"**Passing Through the School House Door**"). I therefore reviewed high school profile data to identify schools with either bilingual programs and the languages of these programs and/or ESL (English as a Second Language) classes. The presence of these programs were my best measure of the national/linguistic diversity of a school as well as a surrogate for the per cent presence of a given nationality.[1] I also identified those schools which had special programs for new immigrant students, such as Project Achieve Transition Services (PATS), which provides services to facilitate the school adjustment of immigrant students and seeks to prevent drop outs amongst this population.

My analysis of the above data resulted in an initial selection of 23 high schools[2] which seemed to fit my criteria: 1) greater than 25% non-US born student population; 2) schools with very diverse non-US born student populations; 3) schools with more homogenous foreign-born populations; and, 4) a distribution of schools which mirrored the location of principal immigrant enclaves within four New York City boroughs - Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx.

Utilizing relationships which I developed during my former employment as the Director of Interagency Affairs for the New York City Department of Health's School Health Program, I met or spoke with several senior administrators within the Division of High Schools. As a result of these discussions, five additional high schools were added to my list and 12 schools were classified as "best choices." In addition to helping identify appropriate field sites, these Board of Education colleagues graciously allowed me to use their names when I later wrote to principals of potential school sites to request an interview. I am positive that my use of the names of senior administrators helped to open

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faster and wider the doors of some principals' offices. Simultaneous to my activity in selecting high schools, I worked with the Board of Education's Office of Research and Evaluation and Assessment. This Office has a multi-step process through which external researchers must proceed before being permitted to enter a public school and engage in any kind of research. I had heard that the approval process could range from very rapid to very prolonged. I was very fortunate. It took less than a month from the date I submitted my proposal and ancillary documentation to the Office of Research and Evaluation to the receipt of my official approval (see Appendix). I was finally ready to begin my study.

**Entering the Field**

Perhaps for the sake of historical continuity, I decided for my first school field site to select a school in one of New York City's historical immigrant communities, a community which has seen immigrants from many different parts of the world settle, find roots and then move on to other parts of the city, the state and the nation. I wanted to physically locate myself within a neighborhood which mirrored from its tenements, its signs and the languages of the street, the confluence of many different waves of immigrants. I was right. The physicality of this particular neighborhood and its symbolism within US immigration history fueled my excitement about initiating my study, and further stimulated my desire to somehow contribute to the narrative of American immigrant history.

With my first school, and all the other schools, the pattern of access was the same. I wrote to the principal explaining my interest in using his/her school as a potential site for research. I stated that I had already received approval from the Board of Education's

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Office of Research, Evaluation and Assessment. I then briefly described my research objectives and explained that my study would involve interviewing students. A brief summary of my research proposal (see Appendix "Principals' Package") accompanied each letter. I followed my letter with a telephone call during which I scheduled an appointment to meet with the principal.

I was very fortunate with my first school's principal. He was not only welcoming but also excited about my study. He shared his own observations about his students, the changing demography of the school and some of the problems faced by undocumented immigrant students. During our meeting, staff from the school's two bilingual programs joined us and spoke with me about their students. I then met separately with each staff member to set up systems to identify appropriate students and schedule screening interviews with these students. The enthusiasm of these two staff members was evident as they began to tick off the names of students they thought I should meet.

My first meetings with principals at subsequent high schools varied in length, content and reception. In almost all cases, the nature of the interview foretold the ease or challenge of working within a particular school. In one school, the principal was very eager to help me and immediately introduced me to an assistant principal who became my liaison. In another school, the principal seemed very disinterested and hardly let me get a sentence out before he told me that so and so would work with me, signed the principal consent form and dismissed me. The briefness of this meeting angered me. It had taken me over a month to get on this principal's calendar. The considerable delay had cost me precious time, pushing back my time table for screening and follow up interviews. In yet

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another school, the principal seemed totally uninterested in hearing about my study but spent the time telling me about her own headaches doing research for her doctoral dissertation. The attitude of the designated liaisons also varied. At one school the assigned staff member initially indicated that she was too busy to be of any assistance. And, anyway, it was my dissertation, why should she do any of the work involved, i.e. getting the word out amongst staff and students. As I very much needed her help with such activity, I listened to this women's frustrations, and then with gentle persistence got her to help me recruit students. In another school I had just the opposite reception. The designated staff member, a guidance counselor, immediately became really invested in my research. He not only helped to identify students but introduced me to other members of the Pupil Personnel Support Team and to ESL teachers. This guidance counselor's introductions facilitated my interviewing in his school 23 girls from eleven different nations. In addition, during several lunches over the course of my ten plus visits to his school, this guidance counselor shared his observations about immigrant students and their families. The man's professional commitment and devotion to the school's diverse students were always in evidence in his comments and were reflected in how students related to him.

**Sampling and the Identification of Girls for the Study**

To assist school staff in identifying girls who would be appropriate for my study, I gave to each school's liaison a sheet with the parameters for identifying potential interviewees. I also provided a form for students to write down: their nation of birth, date of birth, year of arrival, and schedule information: lunch and/or study period, last period of

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the day and if they were free after school, and on which days. After my first school experience, to facilitate understanding about my study, I also developed a letter addressed to students which explained my study and invited their participation (see Appendix).

In each school the staff member assigned by the principal to be my contact or liaison distributed the above described packet of materials to students they believed fit my parameters. I always made clear to my assigned liaison that I wanted to meet with a range of students. I was as interested in speaking with students who were doing extremely well academically and/or socially, as those students who were doing poorly. I also made myself available to do classroom presentations as a means to recruit students, or to meet with student clubs. However, over the two and half years of my field research I ended up doing only three classroom presentations. A few times, girls brought friends of theirs to be screened for the study. The end result was a sample which included very few girls who had self-identified or emerged from snowballing. Instead, the majority of girls were identified by the intervention of one or two members of a school's staff. I worried about the non-randomness of this sample. Did reliance on a few school staff skew the sample of girls from each school, and thus the sample as a whole? Were the girls who were told about the study and who actually showed up for a screening appointment representative of a group who were better functioning or adjusted, more intelligent, more articulate than other immigrant girls at the specific school? I believe to some extent this was the case. However, after working with the material from the 92 girls with whom I did meet, I believe there is considerable variability in who they were, their level of adjustment, their level of intelligence, and their ability to articulate their narratives. I thus believe that my

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study cohort is in fact representative of many of the different adolescent immigrant girls who live in New York. Nonetheless, I would urge a future study which would be more random in selection to confirm my findings or discover significant areas of dissimilitude.

The number of girls varied from school to school. The first few schools contributed the largest numbers to the total study sample, a consequence of my goal to quickly establish a diverse group of girls representing the previously identified principal immigrant populations. Recruitment at other schools was at times predicated by my need to specifically recruit girls from one or another nationality to "round" out my sample, or was the result of a less than productive relationship with the school liaison. See Table 2-1 for a distribution of girls by school.

**First Screening Interviews**

One morning at 10 am a few weeks after my initial meeting with the principal from the first high school, I found myself sitting at a table outside the student cafeteria. In my hands was a long list of students and their lunch or study periods. Almost as soon as I set up the two chairs, the first girl emerged from the cafeteria with a slip of paper with my name on it. She sat down, and my screening interview began. For the next four hours that day and then on two other days I sat at the table meeting a total of 23 girls from five different countries.

In this first school I spent from 15 to 30 minutes with each girl. The time spent was determined by the girls' availability during lunch, i.e. did they eat first or come to see me first; or study period, i.e. did they first report to study hall. Each interview ended with the sound of the passing bell. The focus of the screening interview was to introduce myself

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and explain why I wanted to speak with them. I told each girl that her participation was totally voluntary, and that to participate she would need her parent's signature. I told her that whatever she told me would be kept confidential. When I wrote up my interviews, no one would ever know who it was with whom I had spoken or in which school I had done interviews.[3] I then asked each girl if she would be interested in having me ask them more questions. Most girls agreed. A few girls, probably no more than eight during the entire study, told me that they did not have time or were not interested.

I then proceeded to ask each girl a series of questions (Appendix: "Screening Instrument") to determine if she fit the study's parameters. Almost all the girls fit my parameters. Those who did not, 14 out of 92 girls (15%), had either been born in the United States but had lived for considerable periods of time in their mother's nation of origin or had migrated to the United States before their twelfth birthday. A number of these girls had circulated back and forth from this country to their parents' nation of origin.

If there was time during the screening interview, I asked each girl, regardless of whether or not she fit into my study, to tell me something about herself and her migration to the US. With whom did she come? With whom did she live? What was the level of her parents' education, their jobs in their country and here? I also asked how she was doing in school. Finally, I asked her to tell me on a scale of 1-5 how happy or unhappy she was in New York and how comfortable or uncomfortable she felt here. I hoped that these last questions would help me to identify the girls who were experiencing an easy adjustment and those experiencing more difficult adjustments.

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At the end of each screening interview, I thanked the girls who did not fit my parameters, and told them that I appreciated their time and candor, but my study was going to focus on girls who were foreign-born and had immigrated after their twelfth birthday. Each of the girls who fit into the study's parameters was given a letter (see Appendix) reiterating what I told them about the study. I also gave them a letter for their parents which explained the study and the voluntary nature of participation. A parental consent form was attached which clearly stated that no names or identifying characteristics would appear in the final study. Whenever a girl told me that her parent(s) did not read English I gave her a packet which included the letter and consent form in English and translated, as appropriate, into Chinese, Korean, Russian, Haitian Creole or Spanish (see Spanish version in the Appendix).[4] In several situations I did not have an appropriate translation, but the girls agreed to site translate the material for their parents.

**Use of Focus Groups**

My original research design was to screen a large group of girls identified by school staff, verify that they fit the parameters of my study, and then invite these girls to participate in a focus group. The purpose of the focus groups had been to explore a range of specific issues related to the migration experience in a relatively short amount of time, and to surface from the groups a sense of the critical issues of the migration experiences. I had also hoped that the group experience might stimulate members to share experiences and reactions enabling a linkage of seemingly different experiences. Further, I thought, given the girls' ages and age related issues of identity and identity formation, the group experience might provide them with an opportunity to hear that others shared many of

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their experiences and reactions. The group thus had the potential to be a mutually beneficial validation experience for group members and, therefore, provide a mechanism for me to perhaps "give" something back to the girls participating in my study. From the focus group I intended to identify a number of girls whom I would engage in in-depth interviews. I hoped that this strategy would allow me to quickly meet with a large number of girls, get to know the common issues amongst them, and then focus in on more individual migration narratives. As my research evolved, this step-wise progression and the use focus groups turned out to be impractical. But I am getting ahead of myself.

**Setting Up Focus Groups**

At the first high school I explained to each girl I screened that I very much wanted to meet with her again and further talk about her experiences. I asked her if she had a preference to meet in a group or to meet with me alone. Most girls did not to have a preference. But when they had a preference it was to meet with me alone. I informed the girls that before we could arrange a meeting they needed to return a signed consent form. The girls were then instructed to return the consent forms to their school liaison.

Within a week's time I checked with the school's liaison about returned consent forms. The majority of the students who returned their forms preferred to meet with me individually. However, there was a small number of girls both Spanish speaking and Chinese who were willing to meet in a focus group. I thus decided to begin, as planned, with focus groups.

**Two Focus Groups**

The two focus groups I held at my first high school were extremely different from

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one another in both process and content. The first group with whom I met was comprised of five Chinese girls ranging in age from 15 to 19. All the girls had been born in either China or Hong Kong. Few of the girls knew one another. I brought cookies to the group, but not one was eaten. I found it quite difficult to understand several of the girls' heavily accented English. Tracey (Hong Kong), one of the youngest girls, turned out to be the most articulate and verbal of the group. On the whole, however, I found the girls were quite reticent about speaking. Instead, I observed that subsequent to a girl responding to one of my questions, the others would just say "yes" or nod their heads in agreement. While the group did provide me with some insight about immigration and post-arrival experiences, after the group I found myself feeling quite frustrated. I wished the group had been more dynamic and the material much richer. I believed part of the problem had been my own anxiety. This was my first focus group. Although I had run some adolescent therapy groups when I was a psychotherapist at Kings County-Down State Medical Center, I had limited experience with focus groups as a research method. I also wondered about cultural dynamics in the group. Had Asian cultural traditions, particularly the tendency not to bring attention to the self but to meld into the group, affected group dynamics? Had the girls been reticent to disagree with one another or to assert their own unique experiences and observations? To what degree did the girls' concerns about English proficiency affect their ability to speak up in the group? And finally, to what degree did individual personality and issues about confidentiality inhibit group members from feeling comfortable about sharing experiences within a group context?

My experience in the group with the three Spanish speaking girls was very

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different. The girls all knew one another from the Spanish Club. They all ate the cookies, and even took some home with them. They were very verbal and seemed to know a good deal about one another. They appeared to be very comfortable sharing their experiences in front of one another, and there was a good deal of mutual support and also humor. The material from this group was much richer than that gained form the Chinese group.

In my original proposal I had imagined having focus groups of girls coming from diverse backgrounds. My experiences with these two very different groups made me stop and rethink my research strategy regarding the use of focus groups. I reflected on the dynamics of each group, the girls seeming linguistic, cultural and personal comfort and/or discomfort in relatively homogenous groups. If I observed strains in a homogenous group what would transpire if I had groups which mixed girls by nationality and language? I also thought about the problems I had encountered in recruiting even this small number of girls for their respective focus groups. As a result of my reflections and giving weight to both my methodological concerns and my own time restrictions, I decided that in the future I would place my energies on scheduling individual interviews with the girls. Thus, while I did try at several other schools to put together additional focus groups, the above cited two focus groups were the only ones held during the course of my study.

**Setting Up Individual Interviews with Girls**

Originally I had planned to do all my interviews after school, that is after 2 or 3 PM. Meeting after school worked well with my own employment schedule, and would, I thought, provide ample time for in-depth interviews. I quickly learned that my schedule would not work for the majority of girls. Many girls, particularly seniors, attended school

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for half days and were dismissed at noon or soon after. But more importantly, many girls told me that they could not meet after school because they were needed at home to care for younger siblings or had after school jobs. What I heard from the girls in my first high school was repeated at the second school and at each school thereafter. My interview schedule was thus discarded. Instead, I began to set up interviews with the girls during the school day, during their lunch, study period or any other period from which they felt they could get excused. I thus ended up seeing girls as early as 9:30 in the morning and spending the whole day at a school, with blocks of consecutive appointments or hours between appointments. A few times I waited hours after my first morning appointment, only to have the last scheduled appointment of the day fail to show up. Although I was extremely frustrated by no shows I did not keep very careful track of them. I estimate, however, that for the entire study period I probably had a no show rate of about 25-30%.

The majority of my interviews took place during the school day, during a 25-35 minute period, ending with the ringing of passing bells. However, I also did interview a number of students at the end of their school day. I always felt much more relaxed with the interview process when I did not need to keep one eye on the clock. In one instance, interviewing at the end of the day led to my being invited by the girl, Lisa, to her home just a few blocks away from the school. My visit to Lisa's home, the only home visit of the study, was an amazing experience providing rich material and new insights.

**Changing Strategies - The Screening Interview Melts into "The Interview"**

After doing a number of screening interviews, I realized that school staff were, in

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**TABLE 2-1**

**Interviews by School[5] and by Type**

| School | Screening[6] Only | Preliminary Interview | Extended Interview | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lazarus | 15 | 3 | 5 | 23 |
| Marshall | 6 | 4 | 1 | 11 |
| Blackwell | 5 | 12 | 6 | 23 |
| Jones | 0 | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| Antin | 0 | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| Goldman | 0 | 5 | 3 | 8 |
| Yezierska | 0 | 8 | 1 | 9 |
| Wald | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| TOTAL | 26 (28%) | 39 (42%) | 27 (29%) | 92 (100%) |

general, identifying girls appropriate to the study's parameters. And, that most girls were interested, at times, even eager to talk with me about their experiences. I thus decided to view my initial interviews as much more than a screening interview. Instead, as time permitted, my first meeting with a girl became the first part of, if not, the "interview." By assuming that the girl would be appropriate for my study, I shifted the focus of my questions from demographic profile into their experiences with migration and settlement. As a result, I only did initial screenings in the first three high schools, 28% of all girls with whom I met. And, I did either preliminary or extended interviews[7] with all the remaining girls (see Table 2-1). In retrospect, my change of method enabled me to gather important data from many girls I only saw once, and provided me with a much broader and richer

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foundation for my later analysis.

**The Core Study Sample**

During the course of my two plus years of field research I met and interviewed a total of 92 girls. After reviewing the screening and/or interviewing and/or focus group data for each girl, I identified 64 girls who fit the parameters of the study, and for whom I had sufficiently in-depth material to create a substantive profile of their pre and post migration experiences."**A Demographic Portrait" and "Emigration and Immigration** " identify the girls and describe the specifics of their migration to the United States. In later chapters the migration narratives and observations of these 64 girls form the heart of my analysis and discussion. However, in all the chapters, to enrich the discussion about a specific theme or further amplify a point, I have at times also included comments and observations from a number of the remaining 28 girls who fit some or all the parameters but for whom I had more limited data.

**The Interview - Content**

My interviews used Denizen's "progressive-regressive model" (Denizen 1989:66) in which I used the girl's migration as the event from which we moved forward and backward. The interviews were semi-structured but basically open ended. Thus while I worked with a series of stimulus questions in a range of areas: migration experiences, arrival experiences, family, school friends, future, the girls' very individual responses generally guided the principal direction of the interview. The result in Lofland's words was a "flexible strategy of discovery"(see Mishler 1986: 28). That is, I tried as much as possible to have the girl choose what she wished to talk about within the context of her

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immigration experience. No doubt, how I introduced the themes, the manner in which I followed up or did not follow up on a comment, my verbal and non-verbal encouragement of an aspect of her story, resulted in the girl's expansion or contraction of her narrative and the inclusion or exclusion of various issues and emotions. In addition, I was cognizant that in telling me her story, the girl was, in a sense, constructing or reconstructing reality. She was choosing both what she told me and also how she was telling me. The girl's "testimony" about the experience of immigration and settlement was, therefore, shaped by her age, culture and personality, as well as by the context of the interview itself (Atkinson 1992; Denizen 1989; Marshall 1989; Personal Narratives Group 1989). In listening, I thus had to be aware of the process of the production of the narrative: 1) what was the girl's agenda in telling me about herself and her life, 2) to what degree did her story match the more objective events of her experience (Personal Narratives Group 1989:202); and, 3) to what extent did implicit cultural norms and meanings escape us both, resulting in missed or misunderstood communication (Marshall 1989).

**My Identity and Status as the Interviewer**

My decision only to interview girls was in part predicated on my previously discussed intellectual concerns about the experience of being a female immigrant, i.e. being of and coming into societies where the meaning of femaleness and female roles and status' are shifting. In part, however, it was also predicated on my recognition that sharing gender, no matter how different our interpretations of gender roles, would give me access to more girls and the potential to discuss a wider range of topics than if I was a man, or was interviewing male teen-agers.

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From the beginning I was very aware that my ethnicity, at least how I was perceived or categorized, had the potential to be a critical element in how the girls would relate to me. At various times in my life I have been taken for mixed race ("black/white"), Arab, and Spanish. My somewhat ambiguous ethnicity, very frizzy hair and a "certain ethnic look", no doubt enabled me to cross-cut some of the problems that I might have encountered if I had a more defined ethnicity. I started some interviews explaining to the girls that part of my interest in the immigrant experience was the fact that I was the daughter of immigrants from Germany. But in other interviews I did not inject my own background. Some girls, nonetheless, asked me directly what I was. Many seemed quite surprised when I shared that my parents were German Jewish refugees. Given that racial/ethnic assumptions and sensitivities emerged, both explicitly and implicitly, during my interviews (see **"Web of Identity"**), I believe the fact that I was of European ancestry eased my interviews with some of the European, Russian and Asian girls who may have been less comfortable to be interviewed by some one of a different ancestry, especially someone of African-American, or African-Caribbean ancestry. At the same time, my ambiguous ethnicity may have facilitated my interviews with some of the girls from the Caribbean, Latin America and Africa. Girls, however, who categorized me as "white" may have related to me as they would to any one they perceived as a member of the majority and/or as a member of an "elite" or "ruling" class, including teachers and school administrators who were"white." For some this may have injected an additional element of power, for others it may have meant little.

I was equally aware of my position as an adult, and as an outsider who had come

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into their school and who had been given permission to interview them. These statuses gave me a degree of authority and potential power. While I repeated at various intervals that the interview was voluntary and there would be no consequences for their withdrawal, I can well imagine some girls were less certain of this reality. At the same time some girls may have imagined the potential of positive "sanction" for their participation, at least in the eyes of the referring faculty member. The girls' perception of my authority and/or the meaning they gave to it, no doubt impacted on the process and content of their narrative (Personal Narratives Group 1989:202). But to what degree information was gained or lost because of the inequity of our relationship can not be assessed.

**My Role as an Interviewer in the Process of Interviewing**

Throughout the two plus years of interviewing I was very aware of the permeability of my role as a researcher. I knew that I was not a "clean slate." I knew that there was no escape from the lens of my own cultural background (Hoare 1991:51), my own life experiences and values and particular interests. I also knew that I needed to remain conscious of and discipline my own tendencies to engage in a therapeutic encounter, and/or to become an advocate for a girl. At times my self-consciousness back-fired on me, i.e. in trying to avoid blurring the boundaries of my role/purpose as a field researcher, I felt anxious and became somewhat stiff in my interviewing. I believe in these instances, the content and the emotions of the interview became sidetracked, and some important material was lost.

My chief concern during my interviews was the potential of reviving intense emotions, inadvertently breaking through defensive boundaries and/or stirring up latent

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emotions. Any of these scenarios could conceivably cause the girls increased stress. As a former therapist I was particulary sensitive to the potential impact or consequences of such stress. As a sociological researcher, however, I understood the limitations of my role. I was not in the position to fully assess the girls' emotional status, or to clinically intervene. Further, I was all too aware of the limitations of school staff to step in, to provide necessary supportive services to students and their families. What were the ethics of this research situation? I realized early on that I would be unable to walk away if I discerned that a girl was having real problems. Even if I violated the norms of my research role, my past training and clinical work were too significant for me to ignore. The result was my trying to create a balance. As I interviewed, I was mindful of the potential impact of the interview on the girl. Thus, whenever I picked up intense emotions - frustration, anger, sadness, or depression - I assessed if, and to what extent, I should I probe further, or if I should carefully walk around or even move away from such content areas? In most cases, I trusted the girls' own sense of emotional boundaries, and continued to ask questions, even about charged issues. In the case of Maria, however, I sensed the acute vulnerability of the girl and decided not to probe too much. Nevertheless, Maria's depression was so intense that I decided to inject into the interview my own concern. I reflected back to her that she seemed quite overwhelmed and that it would be good if she could talk to someone about her situation. We talked about family members and/or school personnel. I also went a step further. I asked her if it would be okay for me to speak to the ESL coordinator who had referred her. Maria agreed. I therefore followed up with the ESL coordinator. I simply indicated that I thought Maria was having a particularly difficult

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time and it would be good if a school staff member would meet with her. The ESL coordinator shared that she was already aware of Maria's situation, and that she would indeed meet with her. In a number of other less intense situations, I asked the girls if they shared any of their problems with friends, family members or school staff. Some had and some had not. In these cases, I just suggested that it often helped to speak with others.

The need for some girls to have an advocate also emerged. I was conscious that I could not take on that role. I was only briefly in the girls' school and I did not want to start what I could not finish. On several occasions, I was frustrated that most schools had very limited resources and that school-based support staff were simply overwhelmed with the numbers of students assigned to them, often in the hundreds. The problems with undocumented status were particulary wrenching for me. In one instance, that of Lisa, an undocumented Chinese girl who was here on her own, I found myself having rescue fantasies including, for an instant, the possibility of my sponsoring her. But my better judgement quickly kicked in, and I was able to disengage from her after our three interviews.

Hunt writes:

> The sociological narrative is partly autobiographical reflecting something about the researcher's personality a well as those of the subjects who enter into ethnological dialogue (1989:41-42).

To some degree during my interviews, but more acutely later, as I listened to the tapes or read the transcripts, I was mindful of how I structured the flow of the interview. At times, during the interviews, I had just listened, my verbal silence communicating that the girl was in control as to how much or little to share and/or reveal. At other times, I

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had verbally expressed how moved I was. During some interviews, I had lost focus and missed opportunities to follow-up on some potentially important thread by not asking a follow up question. Similarly, in some interviews I found I had prematurely shifted focus to another issue and topic. No doubt, my own anxiety, both conscious and unconscious, about particular issues or domains resulted in my premature closing off some areas for discovery (Hunt 1989:58), i.e. my own counter-transferential issues intruding, to some extent, in the interview process. In addition, my concern about getting material on specific areas, my level of frustration with the progress of my work, the frequent less than satisfactory interview space, and/or the vicissitudes of my own personal life, at times, constricted the interview process.

Nevertheless, in general, I found that the girls related to me with great warmth, even affection. A number told me that they were very excited or pleased to be able to tell someone what they had experienced. In some instances, the girls had never been asked to share their experiences. Some girls told me that they had never really thought about some of the things that I asked them. For instance, how they choose their friends, cross-ethnic dating, what it meant to be a girl, how they had changed or not changed since their arrival here, what was the "American Dream" for them. I realized that for some of the girls the interview process actually structured or re-structured their experiences, i.e. it threw into the foreground issues that perhaps had been invisible to them. In responding to my presence and my questions, the girls were actually creating a new life narrative in which new linkages were formulated and events were organized into new patterns. Some girls seemed particulary eager to meet with me more than once or twice. I felt that for some of

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these girls the act of putting into words what had happened to them, and how they had experienced the events of migration and adjustment, was somehow "therapeutic." It helped them organize and thus gain some control over the past. In addition, my interest in their story, and my comments validated their experience and also affirmed their achievements, especially the learning of English. The interviewing process, my communication of interest and trust, the very fact that an adult was interested in their life stories thus seemed to emerge as an unintended compensation for their time. This was an important realization for me, because from the beginning of my field research I had been quite worried about how best to compensate the girls for their time. (See below - "Payment versus Gift for Interview")

**Taping the Interviews**

My screening notes were variable. Some seemed to contain a great deal of material. Others, however, evidenced my problem actively listening to what was being said and keeping legible and complete notes. To insure that I would capture as much of the interview process and content as possible, I decided to tape as many interviews as I could. At the same time I knew I could not be totally dependent on a tape recorder. I knew that at times batteries suddenly die, and tapes break. I would still need to make some notes during my interviews as well as write follow up field notes. I also realized that some girls would not be comfortable with having their interviews taped. Nevertheless, I brought a small tape recorder to each interview. I always asked permission to tape and also told the girls we could turn it of at any time. Most girls agreed to have their interviews taped. Several girls said no. And a few girls, who initially agreed, at various points in the

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interview asked me to turn off the tape. Interestingly, the content revealed when the tape was turned off did not form any pattern. A West Indian girl asked me to turn the tape off before she told me that she had sex with her boyfriend. A Haitian girl was scared to have me tape the story of her being mugged in her neighborhood. In yet another instance, an Arab girl told me of family violence, and the family's fear of reprisals from the former husband of her sister. For each of these girls, the sharing of their story did not seem to make them nervous, but the possibility of their voices being heard on tape, worried them. I did not probe what lay behind these fears, as I did not want them to feel that I was trying to find a way to proceed with the taping. Perhaps I was being over cautious. In retrospect, it would have been very interesting to better understand the nature of their fears about the taping.

All taped interviews were transcribed by me, by my mother or by a legal secretary who was paid. The legal secretary, who ended up transcribing the majority of the tapes, was the only one who used appropriate transcription technology. To insure that all of us were doing an accurate job, I randomly compared tapes against transcriptions. I was relieved to find a fairly consistent and high degree of accuracy. However, all three of us were challenged by a range of background noises that at times severely interfered with our understanding dialogue. In addition, some of the girls' accents made some words difficult to decipher. In these situations asterisks marked the dialogue. Early on, I decided that I would be overwhelming my initial research agenda if I engaged in socio-linguistic analysis of my interviews. Thus, to expedite the transcription process, notations for pauses or emotions such as laughter were not included. No doubt, the absence in the transcriptions

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of emotions, pitch, tone, speed and my only intermittent relistening to the tapes, diluted my ability to analyze the processes of narrative construction and the intensity of the girls' emotions about certain issues. Nevertheless, I feel, even lacking these more detailed data, I have been able to reconstruct and fairly accurately present those issues which the girls indicated as having greater or lesser meaning for them.

**Survey Instruments**

In planning the study, I was somewhat anxious that the diversity of the sample in terms of age, cultural background, intelligence, and life experiences, would make it difficult for me to engage in comparative analysis of their narratives. I was also concerned that some girls might have significant emotional and/or psychological problems and thus pose special challenges in terms of interviewing and analysis of their narratives. Further, I anticipated that the interviewing process would vary along a number of dimensions, time, depth, proficiency in English, general verbal skills, and also my own focus and skill. In my attempt to off-set some of these potential challenges, I decided to employ two surveys. Utilization of the surveys, I thought, would help to decrease the subjectivity of the interviewing process and standardize the acquisition of data. I also hoped that the use of a tested survey instrument would enable me to see how similar or different the girls were from each other, and help me rapidly screen out those with more significant psychological problems.

The instruments chosen were very different in form and content. The first instrument was the "Cooper-Smith Self-Esteem Survey," and the second was an adaption of the Higgens "About Yourself Scale" (Weller and Rommey 1988:67), which I re-named

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"This is Me." Both instruments were given out after the screening interview (see Appendix). The girls were asked to complete the surveys and return them to me when we met for the follow-up in-depth interview. When a girl brought a completed survey to our subsequent interview, I often started the interview asking her about her responses to the survey. In most cases, however, the girls ended up mailing their surveys back to me after our final meeting. And of course, there were many girls who never returned their surveys or only returned one survey. The return rate for the "Cooper-Smith" was 55% (55 out of 89 handed out). For the "This Is Me" survey, 56% (52 out of 92) students returned the survey. The return rate for completed sets of surveys was 49%.

**"The Cooper-Smith Survey"**

This survey has been used in classroom settings as a gross measure of self-esteem (Chiu 1988). The original survey asks the respondent to answer "Like Me" or "Unlike Me" to a series of "I" statements. The statements relate to three domains - school, family, and social self and peers. The results can be totaled or subset scores can be calculated for each domain. I thought the three domains fit very well into my thematic interests. I also thought the total and subscores would enable me to compare girls across schools and by nationalities or geographic regions and also surface potentially significant patterns and/or specific issues.

As the girls in the first high school returned their "Cooper-Smith" surveys, they shared with me their difficulty conforming to a binary format - "Like Me" or "Not Like Me." They asked me if they could mark their surveys in the middle between the answers, reflecting that "sometimes" they had the experience described by the survey statement. In

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response to the expression of repeated frustration, I re-formatted the survey answers into a five point Likert scale. 1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, and 5=always. Feedback from this revised format was much more positive. The construction of a number of questions and the use of negative statements, however, caused many girls to be confused how to answer; e.g. "I am sorry for the things I do," or "I am never shy," or "I don't get discouraged at school."

Some girls had a problem with language and were not sure they had understood all the questions. But a more critical problem with the "Cooper-Smith" was its class and cultural biases. As I listened to more and more girls, I became increasingly conscious that the frame of reference for the "Cooper-Smith" was an intact family in which parents and children spend time together, and in which expectations and needs/problems are discussed. In addition, the "Cooper-Smith" seemed to be based on an North American educational system in which students are expected to actively engage in their learning, including raising their hands and doing classroom presentations. With these familial and educational assumptions, some girls found it difficult to answer some questions and/or their honest answers misrepresented the girls' level of social and educational functioning, hence, their self-esteem. My use of the results of the "Cooper-Smith" was thus very cautious and mostly served simply as a background reference with limited reliability. With this said, I did nonetheless find some correlation between low subscores and my assessment that certain girls were experiencing difficulties at home or at school. In addition, I found myself curious if there were any patterns of response by school-sites or nationalities, which might point to differences in post-arrival experiences. I first grouped the surveys by school and

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then by nationality. However, I quickly realized that the numbers in each grouping were relatively small and/or the range was too wide for any helpful analysis. For example, by school site, while the mean of returned surveys was 6.4, the numbers ranged from only one returned to twelve returned.[8] Similarly, in terms of national clusters, the range of returned surveys was one to nine. With the numbers being so small and variable I decided it would be inappropriate to engage in any comparative analysis of the "Cooper-Smith" by school or national/geographic cluster. I did, however, decide to see if there were differences between those girls with the top 15 highest scores (score of 38 or above) with those who had the bottom 16 lowest scores (25 or lower), in contrast to a total sample mean of 31.2, a median of 32 and a range of scores from 18 to 44.

**TABLE 2-2**

**Findings from the Cooper-Smith Survey**

| | Mean Score | Mean Age | Mean Yrs Here | Mean GPA | Grades 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | INS Status[9] D | UD | UNK |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All 100% N=45 | 5.1 | 17.3 | 2.34 | 75 | 3 | 10 | 14 | 24 | 28 | 15 | 8 |
| Highest 29.4% N=15 | 6.3 | 17.7 | 2.7 | 85.4 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 11 | 7 | 5 | 3 |
| Lowest 31% N=16 | 3.9 | 16.4 | 2.7 | 82 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 10 | 2 | 4 |

A few differences stand out. As measured by this instrument, the girls with higher general self-esteem were slightly older, were more often in the 12th grade and had better grade point averages (GPAs) than those in the general sample, and those with lower

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scores. But again, the range within each variable and the small sample size made me wary of using the data as evidence of a significant pattern. Instead, I used the "Cooper-Smith" as a rapid profile of individual girls, and/or when I had another chance to interview the girl, I used low subscores to identify areas for further exploration.

**"This Is Me" (TIM)**

The TIM was developed to complement my interviews, and as a kind of fail-safe for the interview process. I anticipated, during my many interviews, limitations of time, the urgency of one or another aspect of their narrative, or my own inclination to follow up one thread more than another, or even to lose myself within their narratives, might result in my missing out on some areas of critical interest. If I asked all the girls to respond to a set series of questions, I would gain more freedom and flexibility in the interview process, while insuring access to the girls' feelings and ideas about some specific areas. Utilization of an instrument with open ended questions would also allow the girls wide latitude in how they chose to respond.

As I developed the TIM I worried if I was going to over-load the girls. In addition to their need to get parental consent, meet with me one or more times, and complete the "Cooper-Smith", I was also asking them to respond to a number of questions. I therefore wanted to limit the time the girls would need to spend completing, both the "Cooper-Smith" and the TIM, to no more than 30 minutes.

The initial TIM therefore had 11 questions. After piloting the TIM at the first high school, however, I revised the wording of the first question and added a question about gender. The final set of twelve questions fell into four principal areas: 1) identity including

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feelings about gender and being an immigrant, 2) perceived consequences of immigration in respect to life options, 3) sense of place, and 4) future dreams.

52 girls completed the TIM. This cohort included both, girls who participated in the two focus groups, and girls with whom I met for extended screenings and more in-depth interviews. The girls reported that it was much easier for them to complete the TIM than to do the "Cooper-Smith". The ease seemed to be related to the simpler language of the TIM, and the fact that they could answer as they wished. There were no pre-established categories. Their answers could be a single word, a string of words, a sentence or even a paragraph.

The TIM proved to be a very valuable and rich source of material. The material provided a rapid profile of each girl. The format enabled easy retrieval of data, facilitating my entrance into very different domains of inquiry. Frequently, I began the analysis of a specific area by first reviewing the girls answers to the TIM. I would then group similar responses. Only after this process would I turn to the interview transcripts, to confirm or further explore an emergent theme or patterns. At times, however, I did the reverse. After analyzing the transcripts and identifying a theme or pattern, I turned to the TIM for the condensation of an idea previously identified in an interview. My principal regret is that most completed TIMs were received after I completed my interview with a girl, even after I left a school. I therefore had little opportunity to ask follow up questions about any or all of a girl's TIM responses. Such follow up questions might have provided an opportunity to trace the history of their thoughts and reactions to specific questions such as those related to self-identity and gender.

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**Payment versus Gift for Interview**

Initially I had decided to give $10 to each of the girls I met for an extended screening or follow up interview. I felt such an amount would acknowledge that their time was important, confirmed the seriousness of the interview process, i.e. this was not a casual chat; and provide the girls, many of whom came from financially stressed families, a treat. However, right from the start, I found myself feeling very uncomfortable giving the girls an envelope with the cash. Most girls generally seemed surprised, if not embarrassed, to receive payment for their time. A few girls actually refused to accept the envelope. They told me that they had fun speaking with me. This response and my own discomfort led me to re-think the idea of compensation. I still wanted to somehow acknowledge them but in a less pecuniary fashion. By chance I discovered in a neighborhood "job market" store, a box of small photo albums. I thought that giving a photo album might be a perfect way to thank the girls. It was more a gift than a payment. It was something that was easily portable, and was something that people used around the world. It also communicated a message about the importance of keeping a history, albeit photographic. The girls' reactions to the photo albums was overwhelmingly positive. They all seemed delighted with the albums. In several instances, a girl who had completed her interview(s) with me, came looking for me to show me her now filled albums. As time permitted, I thus had the additional pleasure of seeing photos of the girls' family and friends, and a chance, albeit very briefly, to use the photos as a basis to learn more about the girl, her family and/or her friends.

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**Photographing the Girls**

Knowing that I would be interviewing many girls, and anticipating a delay between the interviews, the tape transcription, and the analysis, I decided it would be very helpful to have Polaroid photos of all interviewed girls. As with the taping, I knew that some of the girls would not want to be photographed. I expected the reasons would range from simply being camera shy, to religious reasons, to concerns about immigration status. At the end of each interview I therefore asked each girl if it would be okay to take her photo. I explained that no one else would see her photo, it would only be for my reference. But, as with the taping, I made it clear it was her choice. A few, both documented and undocumented said no. Again, I choose not to probe for their reasons. The majority of girls, however, agreed to have their photo taken. In a few cases, the request to photograph led to a discussion about the girl's feelings about how she looked. For the most part the girls just giggled, and/or took out a mirror to comb or fix their hair.

To my surprise, in three or four instances, a girl asked me if she could have a photo of me. The tables turned, it was my turn to giggle and become self-conscious. But I was warmed by the girl's request, and always agreed. I felt that each request signified that something positive had occurred during the interview, and that the girl wanted to keep her own tangible record of our meeting.

**Analyzing the Data**

In the end, with the screenings, non-taped interviews and my field notes typed up, and with the tape transcriptions, I had close to 2000 pages of material with which to work. In addition, I had the raw data from the two survey instruments, and pages that contained

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my preliminary analysis of field experiences and interview material as well as notes from my reading of social science literature and novels about the immigrant experience. The amount of paper and material overwhelmed me.

Originally I had wanted to write up my research as a series of portraits which would illustrate the experiences of immigrant adolescent girls. However, as I listened to the girls and later began to sift through the data, I realized that a thematic approach would be a more effective strategy in terms of both analysis and presentation of findings. The girls' responses, however, varied in terms of area or areas of focus and the depth of that focus. Some interviews ranged widely over many areas but we barely scratched the surface of each area. In other interviews we covered less ground, but the material was much richer. To start my analysis I decided to review all of the materials I had collected from an individual girl. This material included, as available, the screening interview, a transcript or summary of an extended interview, the "Cooper-Smith" and the TIM. Using long 14 column accounting sheets I headed columns by categories or domains as they emerged. If there was material on family interactions, there was a column for that. If the girl discussed religion, gender issues, peers, ethnicity, a column was created for each. Under each column I entered a summary note, or a quotation that seemed to capture the essence of her experience, emotions or thoughts. Some girls ended up having multiple pages of columns and notes. Other girls had only two or three pages.

I then reviewed all the graphed sheets and identified those domains which appeared most frequently and contained the most numerous notes and quotations. These categories or domains included migration process, immigrant status and identity, ethnic identity,

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racism, peers, including boyfriends, and sex, marriage, gender, family, employment and the future.

I next proceeded to analyze the material in each domain to determine what, if any, commonalities or differences emerged for the sample as a whole, and/or if any patterns emerged if I looked at the material by grouping the girls in clusters by national origin or geographic region (see "**A Demographic Portrait**"), by current age, and/or age at arrival.

The chapters that follow are the result of my analysis and my synthesis of the material gathered from a core sample of 64 immigrant girls from 32 different nations with additional material from the original research sample of 92 girls. The chapters have been structured to reflect the internal and external domains of the girl' experiences: migration, family, education, identity, and gender. The concluding chapter, "**The Past, Present, Future and the American Dream**," is a synthesis of the girls' current realities and their hopes for the future. In selecting and organizing the material, including quotations, I have acted as a mediator between the girls and the reader. As such, I have become an interpreter of their experiences (Atkinson 1992; Reissman 1993). In using a thematic versus portrait structure I also have fragmented a girl's narrative, thus losing the totality of a girl's unique experience. I regret this loss. I only hope that despite these dilemmas the following study accurately portrays what the girls told me, that the voices of many girls will still ring clear, and that the reader will be able, as I have, to learn from the collectivity of the girls' experience as adolescent immigrants.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Bilingual programs are developed when there are at least 20 students on grade who speak the same language.

2. The Board of Education has 110 high schools plus an additional number of alternative schools and auxiliary programs.

3. I have changed all the names of the girls, employing new names of similar ethnicity. I have also changed the names of all the high schools to the names of famous women who were either immigrants themselves or who spent most of their careers working with immigrants or writing about immigrant experience. I have tried as much as possible to maintain historical accuracy, such that school's construction followed the fame of the woman it honors. In disguising school identity, however, I removed some of the specificity of neighborhood location which no doubt would have contributed to a richer understanding of the girls' experiences.

4. Materials were translated by colleagues at Hunter College, the New York City Department of Health and the New York Task Force on Immigrant Health, or by other individuals in the fields of health and immigration. Unfortunately, lacking financial or personnel resources for back translations, the translations varied in their accuracy and/or completeness.

5. The full school names: Emma Lazarus (1849-1887) US born author of "New Colossus" poem at base of Statute of Liberty; Paule Marshall (1929) US born of Barbadian parents, author of Browngirl Brownstones; Elizabeth Blackwell (1821-1910) English born physician; Mary "Mother" Jones (1830-1930) Irish born labor organizer; Mary Antin (1881-1949) Russian born author; Emma Goldman (1869-1940) Russian born anarchist and social reformer; Anzia Yezierska (1885-1970) Russian born author; Lillian Wald (1867-1940) US born social reformer and founder of Henry Street Settlement.

6. The "Screening Interview" was a relatively brief interview during which I introduced my study and gathered basic demographic material and information on the girl's migration process. "Preliminary Interview" was a screening interview plus more extensive exploration of the girl's migration experience. "Extended Interview" was one or more interviews in which I explored a range of pre and post migration experiences.

7. Extended Interviews includes one or more interviews with a girl ranging from one hour to three hours. Average time one and half hours.

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8. This was a result of both the variable numbers of girls screened and/or interviewed by site and cluster, and variation in actual return rates.

9. D=documented INS status; UD=undocumented INS status; UNK=unknown INS status

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# CHAPTER III

# A DEMOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT

Who were the young women who spoke with me about their experiences emigrating to and settling in the United States? This chapter presents a demographic portrait of the 64 girls who comprise the core sample of my study.

## DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

### Nations of Birth[1]

The 64 girls came from 32 different nations.[2] The girls' nations of birth reflect both the major source countries of legal and undocumented immigrants in New York City, e.g. Dominican Republic, Jamaica, China, former Soviet Union, India, Korea and Haiti, as well as the leading source nations for immigrants in the rest of the United States, e.g. Mexico, Philippines (NYC Department of City Planning 1992). To provide a crude organizational structure and facilitate the analysis of socio-economic and experiential patterns, I created eleven (11) national/regional clusters. The clusters (see Table III-1), a modification of those used by the New York City Department of Planning (NYC Department of City Planning 1992), were: 1) based on the number of girls from a specific nation, e.g. Korea and Haiti; 2) reflected a geographic region, e.g. South Asia; and/or 3) reflected regions which shared a common language and/or history, e.g. Latin America, the English Caribbean.

The largest cluster is comprised of nine girls from the English Caribbean. Within this cluster the countries of Jamaica, Barbados, Belize, Guyana are represented. The

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second largest cluster include girls from mainland China and from Hong Kong. Eight Latin American girls make up the third largest cluster. These girls were born in Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Brazil, and also included girls born in the Dominican Republic.

**TABLE 3-1**

**The Girls' Nations of Birth**

| | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| **China/Hong Kong** | 9 | 14% |
| **English Caribbean** | | |
| Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad | 9 | 14% |
| **Latin America** | 8 | 13% |
| Brazil, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico | | |
| **Europe** | 7 | 11% |
| Czechoslovakia, France, Latvia, Poland, Yugoslavia | | |
| **South Asian** | 7 | 11% |
| Bangladesh, Indian, Pakistan | | |
| **Haiti** | 6 | 9% |
| **Former Soviet Union** | 5 | 8% |
| **Korea** | 5 | 8% |
| **Arab States** | 3 | 5% |
| Egypt, Morocco, Palestine | | |
| **Sub-Sahara Africa** | 3 | 5% |
| Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana | | |
| **Other Asia** | 2 | 3% |
| Vietnam, Philippines | | |
| **TOTALS*** | 64 | 101% |

* Per cent is greater than 100% due to rounding.

The nations of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh compose another cluster of seven girls. A European cluster of seven was comprised of girls from France, Latvia, Poland and Yugoslavia. An Arab States cluster included girls from Egypt, Morocco and Jerusalem/Palestine. A number of girls, however, did not easily fit into clusters given the

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cultural differences of the nations represented. A Sub-Sahara (non-Arab) cluster was composed of Eritrea and Ethiopia which share comparable histories and cultural traditions, but Ghana was also added to this cluster by dint of its geography. "Other Asia" includes one girl born in Vietnam and a girl born in the Philippines. A girl born in Cambodia was initially interviewed as part of this cluster, however, the girl was not part of the final data set because she arrived in the US at age 8 after 7 years in refugee camps in Thailand and the Philippines.

**Girls' Age at Time of Interview**

The girls I interviewed ranged in age from 13 to 21 years old (see Table 3-2). The sample's median was 17.5 years old.[3] For some girls their chronological age and their level of maturity seemed off kilter. In most of these cases, the girls' life experiences seemed to telescope their emotional age. No doubt my Western perspective of "teen-ageness" influenced to some degree my "assessment" of level of maturity in light of chronological age.

Of the total 92 girls I met during the course of fieldwork, the youngest, Natasha, came to the United States from the former Soviet Union as she was turning 12. At 13 and a half she was almost fluent in English and had the brashness of someone in her 20's, and speaking as if she already had a lifetime of experiences in the United States. On the other side of the continuum was Julia, a 20 year old girl from Hong Kong, who had arrived in the United States two years ago. Only in 10th grade, she seemed one of the least mature of the girls of her age cohort, and also one of the most anxious and frightened of all the

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**TABLE 3-2**

**The Girls' Age at Arrival, Years Residence in US and Age at Time of Interview**

| Cluster | Median Age Arrival | Median Residence | Median Age at Interview |
|---|---|---|---|
| China/Hong Kong | 15 | 3 | 17.5 |
| English Caribbean | 15 | 3 | 18 |
| Latin America | 13.25 | 2.75 | 18 |
| Europe | 15 | 3 | 17.5 |
| South Asia | 14 | 3.5 | 17.5 |
| Haiti | 14 | 3 | 17.4 |
| Former USSR | 12 | 2 | 14.5 |
| Korea | 15 | 2.5 | 18 |
| Arab States | 14 | 3 | 17 |
| Sub Sahara Africa | 17 | 3 | 18.5 |
| Other Asia | 16.75 | 3 | 18.25 |
| TOTALS | 15 | 3 | 17.5 |

girls with whom I had opportunity to meet. (Unfortunately, I only briefly interviewed this young woman as she did not return for her scheduled interview with me). Another 20 year old girl was Raquel, a graduating senior. Raquel, a refugee from Eritrea whose story will

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be told below, seemed wise beyond her years and moved me by the level of her thoughtfulness and maturity. Most girls, however, seemed to be a "typical" amalgam of a "teen-ageness", revealing both childlike and mature qualities as they shared their lives and their thoughts with me.

In terms of clusters, the oldest groups of girls (median age 18.5) came from the Sub-Sahara cluster; the Korean cluster with a median age of 18 (mean 18.1); and the English Caribbean cluster with a median age of 18 but a mean of 17.4. By far the youngest cluster was that composed of 5 girls from the former Soviet Union. It was striking that this group of girls had a median age of 14.5 (mean 14.7) when, as a group, immigrants from the former Soviet Union have the highest median age, 38, of the 20 major source nations to New York City (see NYC Department of City Planning 1992:71).

**The Girls' Length of Residence in the United States**

At the time of the study, girls had lived in the United States from 10 months to 6 years. Both the median and mean time of US residence was 3 years. The girls from the South Asian cluster had the highest median length of residence in the US - 3.5; and the girls from the former Soviet Union had lived in the United States for the least amount of time, a median length of 2 years.

**The Girls' Grade in School**

The majority of the girls [33 of the sample's 64 girls (52%)] were in the 12th grade. Some of these girls were scheduled to graduate at the end of the semester in which I interviewed them, other seniors had one additional semester to complete before graduation. 27% or 17 girls were in the 11th grade; 7 girls or 11% were attending 10th

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grade, and another 7 girls or 11% were attending the 9th grade. By cluster, girls from the former Soviet Union, from China and Hong Kong were most represented in the freshman and sophomore years of high school. The one cluster with only seniors was that composed of girls from the Arab states.

## PRE-MIGRATION FAMILY SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

### The Girls' Families' Socio-Economic Status

A family's socio-economic status is often the stimulus and the resource for the family's decisions about migration and emigration. To permit cross- national analysis of the girls' experiences, I had planned to focus my study on girls from lower middle class and/or working class (see "**Methods**"). Given vast differences in the economic structure of sending societies, and the assumed link between education and employment I had chosen parents' level of education, combined with pre-migration employment, as a surrogate for socio-economic status. I had therefore hoped to identify and then interview only those girls whose parents had no greater than technical school and/or high school education.

However, I quickly changed my mind about inclusion and exclusion of girls based on their parents' education history, or perceived socio-economic status. In part this change was based on my further review of migration statistics (NYC Department of Planning 1992) in which there existed important class differences in the migration streams from certain nations. In part, the change was based on my realization that to eliminate variation of parents' educational status might prematurely limit my understanding of the commonalities of post-migration adjustment, regardless of previous educational and socio-

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economic status. And, in part the change was based on insight gained during my initial screenings and interviews. There could be both a strong and a weak link or association between education, employment and socio-economic status. Thus, educational achievement in the nation of origin did not always reflect a parent's social and financial position and thus could be misleading about a family's social and economic status pre-migration. The following are some examples of a weak correlation. A girl's father who had only a high school education was the owner of a highly successful import business in Hong Kong. The fathers and/or mothers of several Chinese girls had taught primary and secondary school but only had high school diplomas. Similarly the mother of an Arabic girl had taught high school but had never attended college. And finally, representing the opposite side of the continuum was a Polish girl's father who had a masters in counseling but worked as a construction boss in Poland. For most girls, however, I did find a stronger association between a parent's level of educational achievement and the parent's employment pre-migration.

**Parents' Level of Education**

Out of a possible cohort of 128 parents for the 64 girls in the core sample girls, I had information about the educational level of 83% of the parents. Of these parents, 11% had some college education and 18% had received a bachelor degree. An additional 8% of parents had graduate degrees, including an Egyptian couple who had medical degrees, and a father from Ecuador who had a Ph.D. in biology. Other parents had masters in education, computers, and/or engineering. Several parents had law degrees. Comparing rates of higher education cross gender, I found that fathers had more graduate degrees and

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higher rates of completed bachelor degrees than mothers. 3% of mothers had graduate degrees, 15% had bachelor degrees and 15% had had some college. In contrast, 13% of fathers had graduate degrees, 20% had bachelor degrees, and an 6% had had some college.

20% of all parents had finished their schooling with a high school diploma (mothers 22% and fathers 17%). And 19% of parents had only received a primary school education (mothers 20% and father's 17%). Only three per cent of the total cohort had not had any formal schooling (mothers 5% and fathers 2%). Three girls shared that their parents were basically illiterate. One of these parents was a Haitian-born mother of a girl from France, another was the mother of an Eritrean refugee, and the third was the father of a Guyanese girl.

It is difficult to predict what the educational status was of the 28 parents for whom I have no information. In part, as an interviewer I may have been remiss in asking for parental education. However, in far more cases, the lack of data reflects that: 1) the girls' parents had died many years earlier, and/or 2) the girls had little or no contact with a parent and thus did not know the parents' educational background. Not surprisingly, I had more information on the girls' mothers' educational level, 81%, than I had on the girls' fathers' educational levels 75%.

The range of educational achievement within my interview sample, in general, reflects a higher level of educational achievement than I had anticipated. However, my sample is generally consistent with Census and INS data on the educational status of immigrants/refugees in terms of national trends, as well as by specific national/regional

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clusters.

**TABLE 3-3**

**Parents' Level of Education**

| Highest Level | Mother's N | Mother's % | Father's N | Father's % | Totals N | Totals % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No formal education | 3 | 5% | 1 | 2% | 4 | 3% |
| Primary School | 13 | 20% | 11 | 17% | 24 | 19% |
| High School Diploma | 14 | 22% | 11 | 17% | 25 | 20% |
| Some College | 10 | 16% | 4 | 6% | 14 | 11% |
| Bachelors Degree | 10 | 16% | 13 | 20% | 23 | 18% |
| Graduate Degree | 2 | 3% | 8 | 13% | 10 | 8% |
| No Information | 12 | 19% | 16 | 25% | 28 | 22% |
| Totals* | 64 | 101% | 64 | 100% | 128 | 101% |

* Per cents total more than 100% due to rounding.

According to the August 1995 Current Population Report, "immigrants 25 years and older are more likely to have a college degree than either natives or earlier immigrants" (US Department of Commerce, 1995:3). In my core sample 18% of parents had at bachelors degree compared to 20.9% of recent immigrants nationally, and 14.7% of natives and 13.9% of earlier immigrants (1995:3).

22% of the parents in my sample, however, had less than high school compared to 36% of new immigrants nationally. This significant difference in my sample's low end of educational achievement suggests a number of different issues. My sample was not random or stratified and, thus, my core sample may reflect a group of parents with higher educational achievement. Second, is the real possibility, given other family data, that many of the unknowns represent relatively low levels of educational achievement amongst these

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parents. Finally, but of significance, is the fact that there are real differences in educational achievement amongst immigrant groups. The patterns of their residence may contribute to the differences between national trends and my core sample differences, i.e. the proportional representation of certain immigrant groups in New York or nationally. For instance, Mexicans, both documented and undocumented, with fairly low levels of education (Portes and Rumbaut 1990:58) are the largest immigrant group in the US. However, they comprise less than 1% of immigrants to New York (NYC Department of City Planning 1992:30) and only one Mexican girl, Marisol, was in my sample. It is interesting to note that Marisol's mother had a college degree and her father had only a primary school education.

In my sample there were real differences in educational achievement amongst the clusters. Girls from China, Russia and South Asia more frequently had parents with a BA if not a graduate degree as compared to girls from Latin America and the English Caribbean. Girls from Europe had parents with the most graduate degrees. Girls from Latin America and Haiti had more parents with only primary education or no formal education. The national differences evident in my core sample have also been observed in national studies of immigrant populations. For example, between 1980 and 1990, 33.9% of adult Asian (China, Korea, India) immigrants were college graduates. In comparison only 7.9% of adult Caribbean immigrants (includes Spanish, English and French Caribbean) were college educated (City University of New York 1995:154). If I rearranged my girls to conform to the clusters developed by the New York City Office of City Planning, 32.5% of my Asian girls' parents had a least a BA degree, but only 13%

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of my Caribbean girls' parents had completed their education at a BA level. Although the comparative differences between regions remain consistent between my sample and INS/Census data, it still appears the parents of the girls in my sample have a higher level of education than general migration trends indicate for their nationalities.

**Parents' Occupation/Employment Pre-Migration[4]**

To further assess the girl's family's socio-economic status pre-migration, I asked girls about their parents' employment in their nation of birth as well as employment status in any nation of residence prior to arrival in the United States. Pre-migration employment was also thought to be an important element for my later analysis of family post-migration experiences (see below and chapter: "**Family and Household**"). Again, this exploration was done recognizing, as I did with educational achievement, that occupation/employment is not an exact indication of a family's prior social or economic standing in their home community. Significant differences in economic activity and also political situations may shape the nature of employment (NYC Department of City Planning 1992:77). Further, cultural and family traditions may dictate choices of employment and profession. Similarly, gender traditions may contribute to the nature of a women's work outside the home, and, if in fact, a woman will work outside the household. Nevertheless I believed parents' pre-migration occupations/ employment would be helpful to my later analysis of post-migration experiences.

To facilitate my own analysis and also facilitate some comparative analysis with Census and INS statistics, I decided to order my girls' parents pre-migration employment by using the Census occupational history classification system. This classification system,

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however, presented a number of problems. First, the Census' categories include very different occupations under the same rubric obfuscating some important differences in required educational background, skill and potential remuneration amongst the jobs. For example, "Professional, Specialty and Technical" is a very broad category. Parents with such varying jobs as physician, artist and teacher and soccer coach are included in this category. Second, some jobs reported by girls did not fit neatly into established categories. For example, several girls indicated that their fathers had been/or were construction bosses. While I decided to include this job under "Managerial" it also could fit under laborer. Without greater clarity about the father's responsibilities and functions, more "hands on" than supervisory, this may have been a mis-classification. I included under "Sales" mothers who had sold goods at a local marketplace. However, I wondered, given the informality of many marketplace economies, if this might be an inaccurate reading of the Census category. Lastly, the Census also separates out individuals who reported an occupation from those who do not. For my sample, I thought it was very important to identify those parents, all mothers, who in the nations of origin were homemakers and did not work outside the household. This "occupational" group later became a very important marker as I explored shifts and transformations in family roles and social economy post-migration. However, to insure comparative cells between my sample and the Census, the analysis below calculates a study sample which excludes this additional category.

Before proceeding with a discussion of my girls' parents' occupation prior to migration, and engaging in a comparison with New York City figures, I would like to raise a number of other potentially significant issues. First, my sample included parents who

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were both, documented and undocumented, as well as those for whom INS status was unknown. The Census/INS data only include legal immigrants. This difference may distort occupational histories on both the high and low ends of an occupational hierarchy given that both those with greater resources and those with fewer resources are found in the undocumented categories. Second, my sample represents parents who have migrated to the United States between 1980 and 1993, while the Census data are only for those immigrants who arrived 1982-1989 (NYC Department of City Planning 1992:63). Thus, while previous trends have continued, the comparison may surface both false similarities and differences. Third, some of my parents have lived in the US at least 10 years, coming to the US years before their children. The parents' age at time of his/her migration, no doubt, impacted on the nature of their pre-migration employment. Fourth, I was unsure how to deal with the category of unknowns. As was the case above in respect to parents' level of education, I lacked data on 21 of the parents. Working from knowledge that most girls acknowledged that their parents had worked, but girls just did not know at what, I decided to include this group of parents in my data set. And last, given that my total sample is relatively small and my clusters are even smaller, comparative per cents can only suggest similarities and differences which require further analysis to surface potentially real similarities or differences.

With this as a backdrop, I still was quite surprised by my findings about the girls'' parents' pre-migration employment. I was struck by the large per cent of parents who had occupations which are associated with more middle and upper class socio-economic status. And, in comparison to educational level, which seemed to be fairly congruent with

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national trends, my girls parents were more represented in the higher skill than in the lower skill occupations.

29% of my parents (fathers and mothers) fit into the "Professional, Specialty and Technical" category as compared to only 14% in the Census statistics. Similarly, my sample had considerably more parents in "Executive, Administrative and Managerial" positions than in the Census - 14% compared to 8%. Administrative positions were far more common 12% in the Census group than in my sample, 4%. And lastly, my sample had very few parents involved in "Service" jobs pre-migration, compared to the Census which had a considerable number, 24%.

Analyzing the data by gender, I found a continuation of the above contrasts between my data set and the Census/INS data set. 28% of my fathers had professional, specialty or technical jobs as compared to only 12.9% in the Census data. Executive and managers categories were closer in per cents but still significantly different, 14% compared to 8%. Many fewer fathers (11%) of my girls had been involved in "Precision, Production Craft and Repair" as compared to the Census cohort (17.9%). Similarly very large differences were found between my sample and the Census/INS cohort for the occupations included under the categories of "Operator, Fabricator and Laborer" and "Service." My sample had relatively few fathers in these two categories, a combined per cent of 10, compared to the Census/INS cohort which had a combined per cent of 41.

For mothers the results were similar. Once again my girls had a very significant per cent (30%) of mothers engaged in professional occupations as compared to the Census/INS, 15.9%. Far fewer of my girls mothers, 9%, had been involved with

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administrative support jobs prior to migration as compared to the Census/INS, 17.8%. Relatively few of my girls had been involved in service jobs (11%) as compared to the Census cohort, 31.9%. A very significant difference between my sample and the Census/INS cohort was the per cent of women who had pre-migration employment. In my sample of 46 mothers with known occupational data, 39% had only worked within the household. This is very low compared to Census data which reported that 57% of immigrant women had not worked prior to migration.

When I compared occupational histories by nation of origin, I found greater congruence between my data and the Census/INS (Department of City Planning 1992:83). However, here the small numbers in my sample's cells need to be kept in mind. The comparisons have only been included here as suggestive of patterns. For instance, fathers from South Asian countries in both, my sample and the Census/INS cohort, had extremely high rates of participation in the "Professional" and "Executive" categories. Fathers from Latin America, Haiti and the English Caribbean similarly had high rates of participation in "Precision" jobs in both, my sample and the Census cohort. In the Census cohort, however, "Service" and "Operator" type jobs were far more significant for Chinese, Latin American and English speaking Caribbean fathers than I found in my sample.

The Census/INS data reports that only 43% of migrating women reported pre-migration employment. Yet, for the 46 mothers for whom I had pre-migration data, 37 or 61% had worked outside the home. By nation/region of origin there was both congruence and lack of congruence between my sample and the Census/INS data. For example, in my sample not one of my South Asian mothers worked out of the home, a finding which is

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fairly consistent with the Census/INS data which indicates only 18% of immigrant women from South Asian countries (India, Bangladesh and Pakistan) identified an occupation prior to migration. However, 100% of the mothers' of my European girls, had worked out of the home as compared to only 45% of the Census/INS cohort for the same nations (Czechoslovakia, Latvia, Poland, Yugoslavia and France). The Census reports the following occupational distribution amongst European immigrants from these nations: professions (29%), service (28%), and administrative jobs 14% and precision craft 6%. In my small sample of 6 European mothers (includes the mother of sisters Kristina and Teresa Kosov), two mothers had been professional dress makers. One had been a journalist/photographer, one an art teacher and one (of Haitian background) had worked as a domestic. Given the smallness of my sample and the fact that two out of the five mothers worked as "dress designers/makers" which could belong either to the "Professional, Specialty, Technical" or the "Precision, Craft" categories. It is thus unclear how consistent or inconsistent my girls' mothers' occupations are with Census patterns. Like the European mothers, 100% of Russian mothers had worked prior to migration as compared with only 35% of the Census cohort. However, both the Census (31%) and my sample included a high proportion (60%) of women in the "Professions." In my sample of five Russian mothers: two had worked as teachers, one had worked as an architect, one had worked as a bookkeeper, and the fifth mother had worked as a hairdresser.

Amongst the mothers from China and Hong Kong I found some interesting patterns both reflective of and inconsistent with Census data. The Census cohort reported a high labor market participation of women, 56% with over 30% of women reporting

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work in farming or fishing. There was also a sizeable proportion of women who reported work as operators, 27%, and a much lower per cent, 9%, reporting administrative jobs. In my sample of 7 mothers, (I lacked data on two mothers), my mothers seemed to have higher skill employment than the Census data. One mother taught college, another taught kindergarten, one mother was a mechanical engineer and another was an accountant. Only one mother was reported to have worked as an operator in a garment factory and one in an office. And only one mother had worked solely within the home.

My Korean-born mothers appeared to be much more representative of the Census patterns. Three out of my five Korean mothers were homemakers compared to the Census data of 82% of Korean immigrant women who reported no occupations. Of the remaining two mothers one had worked on the family farm, and another had owned and operated a small local restaurant.

Haitian mothers in my sample were similarly more representative of the general occupational patterns reported by the Census. While girls reported that their mothers worked, the jobs were largely itinerant service sector jobs, e.g. selling goods at the marketplace or making dresses within the home. Service type jobs are overwhelmingly, 48%, represented in the pre-migration occupations of Haitian women as reported by the Census.

Unfortunately I lacked data for four out of nine mothers from the English Caribbean. In part this low level of data reflects the migration pattern of the English Caribbean with long separations between children and mothers, resulting in significant gaps in the girls' knowledge of their family's history. In addition, as mentioned above,

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many of the mothers who had migrated had done so at young ages with little, if any, pre-migration employment. Of the mothers for whom I have data, employment appears to be in the low-skill service jobs of cook, hairstylist, with the exception of one mother who was a nurse midwife in Guyana.

Looking at yet one more cluster, the mothers from Latin America in my sample were fairly representative of the immigrant women captured by the Census/INS statistics. Of the 8 mothers in this cluster. Two had been homemakers, one had been a factory worker, another a cook and two had been dressmakers. Only two had employment within the professional category having been teachers of primary school. The Census data similarly reflect a high concentration in the service sector, 47%, with fairly low rate, 8% of professional employment. The Census, however, reports 60% of Latin American women migrants are without pre-migration occupations, compared to my sample in which only 2 mothers or 22%, had been homemakers pre-migration.

## SUMMARY OF PRE-MIGRATION SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

What does all this say about the socio-economic status of my sample? It appears that the girls in my study tend to come from families with greater education and higher skills than the cohort reported by the Census data during the 1982-89 period. As a group, the girls probably are more middle class than working class or poor, but my sample also included girls who could be classified as coming from working class and poor backgrounds.[5] As indicated above, there are definite exceptions cross clusters and within clusters. In addition, the level of education and the pre-migration occupational levels of girls' parents do reflect many of the patterns of education and occupation observed when

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one focuses on individual nations and regions as reported by the Census and INS.

Perhaps the most significant finding in the above analysis, and one which will be further explored in the chapter on gender, is the much higher rate of pre-migration labor market participation of girls' mothers than is indicated in the Census/INS cohort. This might be a result of the somewhat higher socio-economic status of the girls' families or might indicate shifts in who is immigrating or might be an "accident" of the girls who were identified and I had a chance to interview.

## POST- MIGRATION FAMILY SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

The girls' parents' pre-migration education and occupations provided some indication of the girls' family socio-economic status prior to migration. However, migration can and does contribute to significant shifts in a family's socio-economic status. The nature of these shifts and the consequences for the family must be explored in order to understand the girls' post-arrival adjustments and current perspective.

### Parents' Occupations/Employment Post-arrival

Kristina Kosov and her family are undocumented, ethnic-Albanian refugees from former Yugoslavia. With tears in her eyes, Kristina explained that her father had come several times to the United States to visit relatives. In 1988, however, in light of increasing tensions in Yugoslavia, Kristina's father came to establish a safer world for his family. Three years later Kristina, her mother and younger siblings arrived. In Yugoslavia, Kristina's college educated father was a social worker, here he works as a pizza man and is the super of a building.

(My father) he doesn't speak English so there wasn't any other way that he can find

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> another job and that is why I am saying that here, for us, it is not as good as we had a life over there. Sometimes when I think of my father and who he was and how people respected him and what kind of respect he had there compared to here where he is a pizza man.

Kristina's father is just one of many parents who have experienced a significant change in their occupational post-migration status. Li's father, a chemical engineer in China now works as a busboy in a Chinatown kitchen. Alexis' father, a former national soccer coach in Russia, now drives a limousine. Leela's father, a civil engineer in India, now works as a clerk in a hospital. Fatima's father, who once had assisted a sultan with his finances and had run a currency exchange, now works as a cashier in a hotel lobby. Former college and high school teachers post-migration are found working in small manufacturing plants and garment factories. Only three of my girls' fathers had continued in their pre-migration professions. Isis' father, an Egyptian-born physician had practiced medicine in the US before his recent retirement. Amelia's father, an engineer from the Philippines, found work as a construction engineer in the US. And Doretha's father, who worked as an accountant in Ghana, earned a masters in business after his emigration to the US 11 years ago, and currently works as an accountant for a New York City agency.

Of the fathers for whom I have pre and post-migration data, I found those who previously belonged to the professional or managerial strata were, post-migration, less likely to maintain their pre-migration occupational status, or transfer their skills into entrepreneurial activities. More frequently these fathers now worked as operators and in service sector jobs. Only fathers who had previously been precise craftsmen such as mechanics, appeared to maintain a comparable occupational status post migration, e.g.

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auto mechanic.

As I compared pre-migration and post-migration occupational status of the girls' mothers, I observed a similar downward pattern. Li's mother, a mechanical engineer in China, works here in a garment factory. Anya's mother who had worked as an architect now worked as a home health attendant. A bookkeeper from Russia was now a housekeeper. Several former teachers of various nationalities were now working in factories. And two independent dress designers in their nations of origin were now working out of their field, one as a waitress, the other as a home attendant.

Of all the mothers for whom I had data, only one, Antonia's mother, had been able to successfully transfer her career as a journalist and photographer in Czechoslovakia to the United States. Interestingly four mothers, one from the Arab states, one from Europe, and two from Russia who had previously been teachers, were currently working only at home. In sharp contrast to this phenomenon, was the number of mothers who had previously only worked at home who were now working outside the household. Many mothers from this group were now employed in service sector and operator positions. Of a total of 18 mothers who had been "homemakers" pre-migration, 44% now worked.[6] But more than 50% of the South Asian mothers who had not previously worked out of the home, continued to be homemakers post-migration. Changes in the girls' mother's occupational activity suggests significant changes in the post-migration household, both in terms of financial status, and gender roles. These changes of role and activity will be further discussed in **"Family and Household"** and also in **"Identity and Gender."**

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## SUMMARY OF POST-ARRIVAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

What do the above parental employment patterns signify about the girls' families' post-migration socio-economic situation? In general, it appears that the girls families experienced downward mobility post-migration. Not only did parents engage in jobs with lower status, but also more mothers, including those in two-parents households, were working. And, as I will later discuss in "**Family and Household** ," children were now also working in order to contribute to the family's finances.

In addition to shifts in their own and parental employment, the girls also described major differences in their pre and post-migration housing, another surrogate for economic well-being and status. Given national, cultural and urban-rural differences in housing , e.g. family compounds in many South Asian and Latin American nations, I expected shifts in the style of housing occurred post-migration. Most girls, who had previously lived in family compounds and/or in self-contained and privately owned homes, now lived in apartments. However, girls frequently described a considerable shrinkage in household space. Where many girls had previously enjoyed having their own rooms, they now shared rooms with siblings and/or parents, or slept in the living room on fold-out couches.

It is unclear if the seemingly downward mobility of so many of my girls' families was reflective of a transitional period in their family's situation or suggestive of a more ominous permanent downward shift. For some the family's legal status contributed to limited employment opportunities, including those in the professions. For others it was a function of the amount of time parents were in the United States. Yet, for still others, it was an issue of English language proficiency and/or the need to take qualifying exams to

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practice, e.g. medical professions. However, the downward mobility of so many of my girls' families contrasts sharply with general statistics about immigrants with similar backgrounds (Portes and Rumbaut 1990) I am unsure if this suggests that my core sample was not sufficiently representative of the cohort of immigrant adolescent girls living in New York, or suggests basic changes in the structure of the US economy over the past decade, such that there are decreasing opportunities for immigrants to transfer skills from their nation of origin to the US? The absence of more current statistics, and interviews with the girls' parents, and/or a follow up study of the girls and their families in five years, makes it very difficult to move much beyond the above observation. Suffice it to say that despite their pre-migration statuses suggestive of more middle-class backgrounds, when I interviewed the girls between 1993 and 1994, most were living within reduced financial circumstances from that which they knew pre-migration.

This chapter has focused on developing a social portrait of the girls in the core sample and their parents. With this portrait as background, I turn in the next chapter to an exploration of the girls' experiences, their emigration and arrival in the United States.

## ENDNOTES

1. It is important to distinguish nation of birth and origin. As will be discussed below some girls have spent, prior to coming to the United States, a considerable time in a nation other than their nation of birth.

2. Five additional countries were represented in the total study sample of 92 girls.

3. Medians and means were calculated for all ordinal data. In most cases there were small differences between the two. For the study, I have decided to use medians, but will also report means if there was a significant difference between the mean and the median, e.g. situations where data might be skewed by outlier cases.

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4. It should be noted that 12 mothers and 14 fathers, 20% of all parents, still live in the girls' nation of birth. However, in an attempt to simplify language, I am using pre-migration employment for all parents regardless of whether they actually migrated before, with or after the interviewed girl. In addition, five fathers and three mothers had died prior to the girls' migration.

5. Even in the United States, middle class membership has become increasingly difficult to define by education. For example, education and salaries often are not related, e.g. unionized and non-unionized jobs, jobs in trades versus professional jobs, plumber versus early childhood teacher. In addition, within our changing economic landscape, a family's socio-economic status may shift during its life cycle, as de-industrialization and consolidation changes the labor market and the availability of jobs in all sectors.

6. Note, four mothers who had been homemakers in the girls' nation of birth did not migrate with their children and continue to be homemakers in the girls' nation of birth.

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# CHAPTER IV

# EMIGRATION AND IMMIGRATION

To complete my profile of the study's core sample, this chapter will describe the principle reasons, patterns and processes of emigration and immigration of the girls and their families. In my discussion, some of the salient elements of the migration process which have contributed to the girls' post-arrival experience will be identified. In later chapters, especially the chapters entitled "**Family and Household**," and "**The Web of Identity**," I will more fully explore the meaning of these experiences.

## MIGRATION PATTERNS

### The Decision to Emigrate

In identifying migration patterns, it is very important to recognize that the girl's migration was the end result of decision making process that may or may not have included the girl, and may have involved an extended process over the life span of the girl. The girl's understanding of the decision to migrate, both the stimulus for the migration and the intended consequences expected from migration, thus must be seen through the lens of the girl reporting after the fact, and as an adolescent communicating her present understanding of her migration. For example, while the original stimulus for family migration might have been the pursuit of improved career opportunities for a parent, the girl's perception of her own emigration might be described as family reunification. Similarly, a family's migration may have been based on certain expectations which may have been unrealized post-arrival, resulting in the development of a new or alternative

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"rationale" for migration and settlement. Depending when the girl became conscious of the migration decision, and/or an active participant in the migration process, she might articulate either the secondary reason that "makes sense" to her, or state multiple reasons for her family's migration. Girls also might remain unclear as to the impetus or reason for emigration. At times, this lack of clarity may result from the girl's non-inclusion in the family decision to migrate. At other times it may reflect the girl's assessment that life here is much harder than back home, "so why did we come?"

Within this context of reported "rationale" for migration, the girls' migration narratives reflect the migrant patterns of their country people and deviate from those more recognized patterns. Like others in previous waves of immigration to the United States, many girls came with their families to seek a "better future." For some, this meant the achievement of a higher standard of living, and/or access to better jobs than were available at home. For others, educational opportunities not available at home - the high cost of secondary education and/or the intense competition for scarce university places - were the stimulus for migration. This desire for better educational opportunities was most frequently cited by girls from Latin America and from Korea. While most girls who came for educational and/or economic opportunities saw the United States as their new and permanent home, some girls envisioned their stay in the US as temporary, the "means to an end," enabling their return to a more successful future in their nation of origin.

For some girls, the political and/or social events back home forced them, both as documented and undocumented refugees, to seek a safe haven in the United States. In this group were girls from current and former "hot spots" around the globe - Vietnam

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(Lan Bi), Eritrea (Raquel), Palestine (Fatima), Haiti and Yugoslavia (Kosov sisters). Many of these girls saw their lives here as transient. They were here to wait. Some were firm in their conviction that they would go "home." Others, were less certain what the future would bring, for now they were here, later "who knows?" The exceptions were girls from the former Soviet Union who identified themselves as "refugees" despite their mixed statuses including refugee, documented and undocumented immigrants. These girls saw the United States as providing a new beginning for their families and for themselves. For all but one of these girls the United States was going to be their permanent home.

**The Process of Migration**

As I listened to the girls' migration narratives, I was struck by the frequency with which they described their families and to some degree their households, existing and continuing to exist simultaneously, both in their nations of birth and here in New York City. In contrast to a more classical model in which migration is "unipolar,"occurring in a more defined time period from one nation to another, the girls described a more dynamic migration pattern termed "transnationalism." In this pattern, social fields in the nation of origin and in the US crossed geographic and cultural borders, defined the migration process, as well as impacted post-arrival identity formation, life choices and residential options. The phenomena of "transnationalism" has become a major focus of immigration research (Shiller et al 1992:1), and will provide the context for the varied and often complex processes of migration that dominated the girls' migration to the United States.

The Hart Cellar Act of 1965 is seen today as the watershed for the "New Wave" immigrants to which my girls and their families belong. As noted in the **"Introduction,"**

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the 1965 legislation changed the national mix of immigrants, and established family reunification, and not labor recruitment as the "stated goal of immigrant admission policy" (Bogen 1987:27). The admission of immediate relatives of United States citizens (native born and naturalized) and permanent resident aliens, and the preference system established in 1965 facilitate migration through social networks, or chains in which family migration predominates (Boyd 1989:643). Mirroring legal immigration, family networks also are "the central feature" (op. cit. 1989:649) of illegal migration to the United States.

For my sample, the complexity of the migration process was notable in the variety of patterns of chain migration and the immigration status of the girls and other family members, and in the definition of the pre and post-migration household.

Most of my girls were part of a pre-existent family chain migration with parents, siblings, grandparents and uncles and aunts entering the United States months, if not years before their own arrival. The exceptions were mostly girls who saw themselves as "refugees," and yet, as will be seen below, even for many of these girls family members facilitated their migration process either in terms of sponsorship, and/or in easing their transition post-arrival.

Amongst my girls, I found girls who were legally sponsored by family members who had preceded them, and girls who joined family members who themselves lacked appropriate documentation, resulting in the girls having no "papers." Under the immigration policy current when the girls arrived,[1] the legality of the chain migration, and the facility of the migration process were dependent on: 1) the INS status of the sponsor, and 2) the relation of the sponsor to the "potential immigrant." I thus want to begin my

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analysis of the girls' chain migration in terms of their INS status. As I begin this analysis, it is important to note that a girl's legal status always reflects the legal status of another member of her chain. However, a girl's lack of legal status, does not necessarily mean that other critical members of her family network did not have legal status. As we will see later in the migration narrative of Julie, there can be dramatic implications in immigrant families when a girl's status is not adjusted by a potential sponsor. In later chapters ("**The Web of Identity**" and "**Past, Present, Future and the American Dream**"), I will also explore the meaning and consequence of INS status on the girls' sense of identity and on their sense of a future.

**The Girls' Immigration Status**

I was quite surprised how many girls shared their status with me without my asking. And, when I directly asked a question about INS status, always explaining why I asked, assuring complete confidentiality and reminding them that this like other questions did not have to be answered, the girls were also quite open. I was therefore surprised to discover that I lack data on 17% or 11 girls of my core sample group. I assume that, if discussed, I failed to note the status. Or, I detected some anxiety in the interview and thus chose not to push such a sensitive question. Or, I forgot to ask. In a few cases, the girls seem to provide contradictory statements so I am at a loss as to their actual status. By clusters, however, there is a slight pattern for missing data. I lack data for 4 out of the 9 Chinese/Hong Kong girls. This might reflect that a majority of Chinese and Hong Kong girls were interviewed at my first field site. In addition to the girls' cultural "timidity", I may have been reluctant to ask about documentation early in my field research. The other

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clusters for which I lack data on girls are from the English Caribbean, Latin America, Haiti, and Europe.

Out of the core sample of 64 girls, 58% were documented, 25% were not, and for another 17%, as stated above, I lacked data. Thus out the 53 girls for whom I have data, 70% were documented and 30% were not.

All the girls from South Asia were documented. This was interesting, given that the same cluster was the only one which shared a single pattern of migration, i.e. the nuclear family migrated as a unit. Interestingly, all but one of these families had been sponsored by an uncle of the girl. The three girls from Sub Sahara Africa were also all documented. One girl, Raquel was a legal refugee from Eritrea; one girl was here with an older married sister, whose husband's diplomatic passport facilitated the girl's legal resident status; and in the case of the last girl, Doretha, her father migrated many years earlier and, as an American citizen, had brought over his family from Ghana. For the other clusters, the pattern of documentation and lack of data varied. However, the girls without documentation countered the stereotypic profile of "illegal aliens" in New York City but confirmed actual patterns of the undocumented in terms of national origins, e.g. Polish, Irish, Italian (NYC Department of City Planning 1992). The cluster with the highest per cent of known non-documentation were girls from Europe. Four European girls were living here on expired tourist visas. The fifth girl from the Czech Repiblic, Antonia, was documented, in her case through her mother who had married a naturalized citizen. A sixth girl had unknown INS status. Of the five Russian girls, three had documentation and two did not. The same situation was found with the Korean girls, three had

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documentation and two did not. I had incomplete data for the English Caribbean girls. However, of the seven for whom I had data, four girls had their "papers" and three did not.

**Patterns of Legal Immigration**

My interviews with the girls did not always explore who had sponsored the girl and/or her family, however, for those girls for whom the sponsor was known, the girl's parent (12 fathers and 6 mothers), or the girl's parent sibling (10 uncles and one aunt) were the most frequent sponsors. For four girls, a grandparent had provided the sponsorship. And for one girl, her older sister had provided the girl with "papers."

**TABLE 4-1**

**Known Sources of Sponsorship**

| | |
|---|---|
| Father | 12 |
| Mother | 6 |
| Sibling | 1 |
| Grandparent | 4 |
| Aunt | 1 |
| Uncle | 10 |
| Refugee | 5 |
| Lottery | 1 |
| Diplomatic Passport | 1 |
| Total | 41 |

**Aunts and Uncles**: As indicated above, the girls from South Asia most typically came as a family unit having been sponsored by an uncle. For most of these girls, the uncle and his family provided both, the legal mechanism and the emotional and social assistance needed to ease the stress of migration. For Leela, however, her uncle's sponsorship was

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the beginning of a three year painful odyssey, which included brief residence in the mid-west and New Jersey, a return to India and then a second more successful attempt to immigrate to the US.

> Leela's uncle, a naturalized American citizen had come to the United States 25 years earlier to pursue graduate education in science. In 1988 he sponsored Leela's father, encouraging his brother to bring his whole family to the mid-western city in which he lived. Leela and her family arrived with great expectations. Instead, they found her "very rich" uncle and his family totally Americanized, humiliating her and her family for their "Indian" ways. Leela's father, an engineer in India, was unable to find work in his field and, living in a suburb three miles from the nearest bus, made finding work in another field impossible. Family tensions flared and Leela and her family briefly relocated to New Jersey to stay with some friends. Subsequent to a medical emergency for Leela's sister and with their savings dwindling, Leela and her family returned to India. Two years later, with new savings and new contacts in New York, Leela's parents returned to New York, found jobs and sent for the rest of the family.

Li and her parents emigrated from mainland China after they were sponsored by her father's sister. After their arrival here they received a good deal of emotional support from Li's aunt. However, the aunt, a housekeeper for an international businessman, was unable to help them financially or in terms of the daily hardships they faced as non-English speakers. Immigration to the United States provided Li with a much desired opportunity to attend an American university. But for her parents, both successful engineers now working in Chinatown factories and restaurants, life in the United States was very difficult. Li's parents were both depressed and ambivalent about their decision to come to the United States. Should they continue to stay in the United States for their daughter's future or should they return to China where they had "much happier lives?"

For Yoon and her family, sponsorship had not ended with their arrival in the United States but continued to play a major role in the adjustment of her family to the

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United States. When Yoon was three, her father left Korea to find work overseas. After working as a bricklayer in Saudi Arabia, Yoon's father returned briefly to Korea before his sister sponsored his immigration to the United States. In the United States, Yoon's father lived with his sister and brother-in-law, working with them at a Korean grocery store. Two years ago Yoon, her mother and younger sister came to the United States to join her father. A month before the interview, Yoon's father, now experienced in the grocery business and with the help of his sister and brother-in-law, purchased a grocery store in Queens. Like so many other Korean grocers, the new business will be both family owned and run.

Blanca's family exemplifies yet another form of family migration through the sponsorship of aunts/uncles, the chain of generations coming one after the other to New York.

> Before Blanca was born her maternal grandfather migrated from Honduras to New York. Years later, when Blanca was 6, her maternal aunt followed her father to New York. The New York family worried about Blanca's family in Honduras. Blanca's mother, ill with diabetes, was having a difficult time supporting her six children. When Blanca was 13 her aunt sponsored her. Blanca came to live in her aunt's household. "I came here to have something I couldn't have in my country." In New York Blanca is getting the education which her family could not afford in Honduras. Two years ago, however, Blanca's mother died. Now, Blanca's aunt is working to bring Blanca's younger siblings to New York and to raise them along with her own.

**Grandparents:** Grandparents have played a significant role in a number of the girls' lives in terms of migration and also in terms of their post-arrival experiences (see **"Family and Household"**). Four girls from China, Ecuador, Guyana and Belize, had grandparents who sponsored them. In each case, the grandparent's sponsorship was linked

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with the sponsorship of at least one of the girl's parents. In all but one case, Marva, the girl lives in New York City with the sponsoring grandparent and at least one of her parents.

For Marva, a young woman from Guyana, her paternal grandmother turned her whole world upside.

> Marva had grown up believing her stepfather was her real father. When Marva was ten she met her biological father, who also lived in Guyana and was pursuing a degree in medicine. The meeting was in part precipitated by Marva's paternal grandmother, who many years earlier had migrated to New York. This grandmother felt that opportunities were better in the US and insisted that she sponsor the immigration of Marva's father and all his family. Marva, who did not know her father or his family, did not want to leave her mother. However, her mother, said: "I don't want you to go either. But it is going to be the best for you and the best for all of us, because you are going to get opportunities that I didn't have." Marva, thus, at age 15, came to the United States and is currently living with her father and her stepmother.

While uncles, aunts and grandparents have played a critical role as sponsors for many girls, parents have played the dominant role as sponsors. Fathers outnumber mothers as sponsors, two to one. Interestingly, all girls sponsored by a parent have experienced years of separation from the parent, in many cases the sponsoring parent had migrated to the US when the girl was still very young.

**Father-First Migration**: Men have traditionally been the pioneers for family migration. Through the 1920's men dominated migration streams to the United States (NYC Department of City Planning 1992:73; Seller 1981:5). While many men were single at the time of their migration, many were also fathers who left behind wives and children as they sought new opportunities for themselves and/or their families. Once established, most of these fathers sent for their families. Or, in cases when the fathers were separated or divorced from their childrens' mothers, sent for their children to join them in the new

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country. While "father-first" migration has diminished (Seller 1981:5) with the emergence of women as the initial or primary migrants for many world regions, "father first" migration is still a dominant pattern for some regions, and continues to exist even in regions where mother-first migration now dominates, e.g. Caribbean Basin (NYC Department of City Planning 1992).

In my sample, every cluster was represented in terms of "father first" migration, with the exception of the clusters of girls from the former Soviet Union and from South Asia. Surprisingly, given the more typical Caribbean pattern of "mother first" migration, (see below) six girls out of the 12 girls who experienced "father first" migration were from the Caribbean basin including girls from Haiti, Jamaica and Trinidad. The stories of these six girls were remarkably different. However, they shared two commonalities: 1) all these girls' parents had been separated or divorced prior to the father's departure; and 2) despite the father's sponsorship and the intent to live with him, all but one of these girls were now living with their mother or other relatives in New York.

Some examples.

> Josette lived with her mother in Haiti. When she was 12, Josette's father, who had lived for years in the US and had a new family here, visited her. Josette believes that this was the first time she had ever met her father. Months later, she moved to Florida to live with her father and his wife. But family tensions developed. Josette's father returned to Haiti, and Josette moved to New York to live with a paternal aunt she had never met. Sadly, as a result of all her changes in residence, Josette has lost touch with her mother who was a traveling market woman in Haiti who could neither read nor write. When I interviewed Josette, she had had no contact with her mother in two years.
>
> Evelyne, also from Haiti, had lived with her mother and only saw her father on his frequent business trips to Haiti. Evelyne's father had always promised Evelyne that he would bring her to New York. Unfortunately, Evelyne's father was killed in

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> Haiti under suspicious circumstances. However, before his death, Evelyne's father had secured her green card. Not long after her father's death, Evelyne relocated to New York where she lives with her paternal grandmother and her aunt's family.
>
> Lina had lived with her mother in the Dominican Republic. When she and her mother started to have problems, her divorced parents decided that her father should raise her in New York. Lina and her sister came to New York. But, after a year, Lina's father's violent temper and involvement with drugs made her move to an aunt's house. Two years later she moved again, to another aunt, and is contemplating getting an apartment of her own.

Six girls from China, Korea, the Philippines, Ghana, the West Bank, Egypt and Yugoslavia, had also experienced "father first" migration in which their fathers migrated first and later sponsored the remainder of the family. For many of these families, however, the time between departure and family reunification was significantly longer than had been anticipated.

> Doretha was four when her father left Ghana. In the United States, her father earned a graduate degree and became a citizen. However, it was only at age 17 that Doretha, her mother and her siblings finally emigrated to New York.

When asked why there were so many years before her family was reunited, Doretha said she didn't know, but was very happy to finally be with her "Dad." Fatima from Palestine, however, was more aware of the reason for the delay between her father's departure and family reunification.

> Fatima's Palestinian father came to the US when Fatima was only 6 years old. While the family had green cards for a number of years, and Fatima always had wanted to go to the United States, or as she called it "paradise," Fatima's mother did not want to leave Jerusalem. And so Fatima, her mother and her younger siblings stayed behind. In 1990, Israeli-Palestinian tensions were very explosive. Fatima's mother became more fearful of her children's safety. It was then, "from one day to the next," that Fatima's mother finally decided to emigrate and join Fatima's father in New York.

Marina from former Yugoslavia had a similar story to tell.

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> Marina's parents had originally come to the United States soon after their marriage. They had one child here and then returned to Yugoslavia where Marina was born. When Marina was 18 months her father returned to the US, visiting his family every summer. It was only in 1990, when the political situation for families who were religiously and ethnically mixed - Serbian and Croatian, Muslim and Christian - became dangerous, that Marina's mother finally agreed to emigrate once again to the United States.

**Mother-First Migration**: Five girls, one Barbadian (Julie), one Dominican (Carmen), two Haitian (Noelle, Amie) and one from Dominica (Wilma), described what has now become a fairly typical pattern of the Caribbean basin (now also an international pattern e.g. Filipino and Turkish women (Holley 1991:2; Richburg 1995:A1) of "mother-first migration." In this pattern, women from "developing" nations respond to expanding employment opportunities in more industrial or "core" nations, leaving their children behind to be cared for by relatives. After arrival in the United States, the mothers work frequently as child care workers or in the health field, sending money back home and making plans to bring their children to live with them. Many times, because of job pressures, and problems with their own INS status, years pass before the mothers are able to legally bring their children to the United States. For some girls, the years of separation may create significant problems in the reunited household. This reality, experienced both by documented and undocumented girls, will be explored through the narratives of several girls in **"Family and Household."** On the other hand, for some girls the long-awaited chance to be "home" with their mothers resulted in the creation or re-creation of a strong and protective mother-daughter bond. This reality, reflected in Carmen's and her mother's relationship, will also be explored in **"Family and Household."**

Two European girls, one from Latvia (Mila) and one from Czechoslovakia

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(Antonia), also experienced prolonged separations from their mothers. But, in these two cases, the politics of exit visas and the utilization of paper marriages are significant elements in the girls' migration narratives.

Antonia's parents had been divorced for several years when her mother left Czechoslovakia without proper exit papers. Undocumented in the US and in violation of Czech law, Antonia's mother entered into a paper marriage with a naturalized US citizen. Unexpectedly, the paper marriage transformed into a love marriage. But, it took five years and the Czech government to change before Antonia's mother risked returning to Prague to visit her daughter and bring her to the United States.

A paper marriage also provided Mila's papers. However, for Mila, her mother's marriage is a major secret. Mila's mother left her husband and daughter in Latvia to pursue a fashion career in the west. Unsuccessful in Canada, she came to the US where she entered into a paper marriage. Through this marriage she has brought her daughter to New York. Mila says her parents are still very much in love. However, her father still lives in Latvia where he "prefers to be a rich man in a poor country rather than a poor man in a rich country." Mila's father believes his wife's and daughter's legal status here were the result of their being "refugees," and he remains ignorant of his wife's paper marriage. This "secret" hangs over Mila and her mother, and it worries Mila who both, wants to be reunited with her father, but also wants to stay in the United States to attend an American college.

**Refugees and Lottery Winners**: Two more patterns of legal immigration were in evidence in my sample: 1) six girls entered the United States as refugees under the US

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State Department's definition, and 2) one family had won an immigration lottery.

Four of the six girls who had been granted refugee status came from the former Soviet Union, one from Vietnam, and one from Eritrea.

The girls from the former Soviet Union came principally as family units, in several cases joining other relatives who had preceded them. While all girls stated that their "Jewishness" was the reason that they left the Soviet Union, only one girl actually related experiences in which she or her family had been ostracized or discriminated against because of their religious background.

The wait between a family's visa application and receipt had been very long for many of the girls from the former Soviet Union. In some families, the girls had planned and waited with their parents for years for news of their visas. For other girls, "going to America" was only discussed once the coveted visa had arrived.

Anya's family typifies the process of a family planning and waiting, but also reflects the often additional traumas of migration journeys.

> Anya's family had planned to come to the US for many years. When they finally received their refugee status, Anya's father went by himself to the United States to find work and an apartment. Two months later he returned to help pack up the family. Anya remembers on the bus to the airport she was nervous but excited. But when bandits hijacked the bus and stole the $10,000 the family had saved, her excitement turned to fear. The family, however, were physically unharmed. Although the family's post-arrival has been cushioned by the help they have received from an uncle and aunt, and from NYANA, Anya is very unhappy. She misses her friends and family back in Russia, and is still thinking about the bandits who took her family's life savings.

In stark contrast to the Soviet girls' experiences, are the stories of Lan Bi and her family from Vietnam, and Raquel from Eritrea.

Lan Bi's father had been a military advisor working with the US army before

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Saigon fell. In an excerpt from her school essay titled, "Autobiography," Lan Bi describes her family's experiences.

> ...they named my family a "black history family" (bad family) just because we have a different ideology from the Communists. ...they took my father and threw him in jail, which the communists called a re-education camp, leaving my mother with 12 children on her back. Our lives really became dark and as "black" as they had wanted it to be. The stigma of a "black history" family stopped us from doing anything involved with the government. It forced my sisters out of school (including medical school), my brothers out of employment and, ruthlessly, it forced my family into a hopeless life. Seeing how the communist government mistreated us, I started to become scared and depressed about my future.

In 1991, however, as part of "Operation Humanity" Lan Bi, her parents, and ten of her twelve siblings emigrated to the United States. Today, Lan Bi and most of her siblings are living together in a two bedroom apartment. The family lives on her father's small pension (unclear if family also receives public assistance), and money earned by the children's intermittent work in nearby garment factories.

Raquel's pre-migration experiences were less tragic but still very stressful for her and her family. Eritrea had been involved in a 30 year war for independence from Ethiopia, Raquel's brother had been identified as working for the freedom fighters. Her brother and sister-in-law fled and were successful in their refugee application to the United States. However, even after their departure Raquel's family was suspected of being supporters of the independence movement. As Raquel and her remaining siblings entered adolescence, fears for their safety intensified. To insure their safety the family decided that the other siblings should join the older brother in the United States. Raquel's journey to the United States was probably the most dramatic of any girl I interviewed.

The family planned the departure without informing friends or other family

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members. Raquel vividly recalls the black night seven years ago when she and her older sister and brother said tearful goodbyes to her parents in an isolated mountain pass. Then for two weeks, walking only at night, they made their way to a rebel army camp. The rebel soldiers transported them by truck to Somalia where the siblings set up their household and began the long wait for the American embassy to process their papers. Raquel was only 12 at the time. She attended school for part of the day and helped her sister at home, but basically she and the others just waited. It took three years and three intimidating interviews before Raquel and her siblings received their refugee status. At age 15.5 she flew to New York where first she and her two siblings lived with her brother, his wife and their children before establishing their own household. Raquel, now a graduating high school senior, is planning to go to a state college and pursue a career in computers, but longs to see her parents. With tears in her eyes Raquel describes her mother, who can neither read or write, as the "most perfect mother in the world," someone whom she has not seen in seven long years.

Lastly, is the migration narrative of Salma from Bangladesh whose family won in the immigration lottery. Salma's mother died in childbirth and her father married her mother's sister. Four years before my interview with her, Salma's father won the lottery. While Salma did not know anything about the lottery itself she stated: "We came because it is easier to study here than in Bangladesh." Salma living here with her father, stepmother and siblings, feels happy and scared to be here, but believes that "here I can become whatever I want to become."

**Patterns of Undocumented Immigration and Unknown Documentation Status**

In addition to the narratives and migration patterns of documented girls are those of the undocumented and those girls for whom I lack INS status information. 16 girls out of my core sample of 64 girls were undocumented. An additional 11 girls had unknown INS statuses. The migration narratives of these girls mirrored to a great extent the narratives of documented girls. Most typical were family unit migration, and chain migrations in which girls rejoined parents years after their parents had migrated to New

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York City. Like the patterns found amongst their documented peers, girls who had experienced long separations, either lived with their parents here or moved on to live with other family members when reunification proved too difficult.

Grandparents, aunts and uncles, and older siblings also played a critical role in the migration story of a number of undocumented girls. However, unlike most documented girls whose relatives provided the legal means for migration, but not a home post-arrival, undocumented girls seemed to be specifically sent to live with relatives while the rest of their family remained back in their respective countries.

Eva's story exemplifies how migration has been used as a means to solve a variety of family problems.

> When Eva was about 6 or 7, her father left Poland to work in the United States. Here without papers, he lived with his mother who had migrated years before. Years of marital separation, however, resulted in Eva's parents divorcing when her father returned to Poland. During this period Eva remembers her mother developing a severe drinking problem. Eva became the parental child, caring for her mother and a younger sibling, and acting as a go-between her mother and father. The family situation was tense and Eva was not very happy. On a visit to Poland, Eva's paternal grandmother decided Eva should come to live with her in the United States. Eva would be removed from a difficult family situation, and the grandmother, widowed and alone would at least have someone with her in New York. When invited to the United States, Eva thought her trip was for a vacation visit. Three years later, lacking documentation, Eva continues to live with her grandmother, going to school and "working off the books" to help with household finances.

In contrast to Eva's story, in which the migration of the girl "solved" some family problems, is the migration story of Maria. Maria was probably the most visibly depressed girl I interviewed, a girl who seemed confused, if not lost. While I will further discuss the process and impact of Maria's migration in **"Family and Household and "The Web of**

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**Identity,"** her story illustrates how failure to realize migration expectations can transform the family's agenda and result in unexpected decisions and new problems for the adolescent immigrant.

> When Maria was 13 her father lost his job as an electrician in the Dominican Republic. Believing that prospects might be better in the United States, and having several other children already living in New York, Maria's parents decided to emigrate. Maria was asked if she wanted to stay behind with her grandmother or emigrate with her parents. After much thought, Maria decided to go with her parents. At age 14, Maria and her parents emigrated to New York taking up residence with Maria's older sisters. Three months later, unable to find work and unhappy with life in New York, Maria's father returned to the Dominican Republic. Maria's mother stayed for another six months, but missing her husband, she also returned to the Dominican Republic. By this time, Maria was attending a local high school. Maria's parents, concerned about yet again interrupting Maria's education, told her that she should stay behind in New York with her sisters. Maria was torn. She wanted to be the one to make the decision. She wanted to return to the Dominican Republic and be with her parents. But she also felt that she had already "left everything" in the Dominican Republic. Perhaps she should stay here and finish an American high school? One year later, Maria lives with a married sister with whom she does not get along and her sister's husband and a new baby. Maria misses her parents and talks of moving to an aunt's house in another part of New York City.

**Multiple Migrations: The United States as Second or Third Home**

With the exception of the above described refugee journey of Raquel, all the girls in the preceding narration stories migrated from their native country directly to the United States. An unexpected migration process, however, was reflected in the migration narrative of four girls who had lived from three to nine years in other countries prior to their arrival in the United States. In each case, the other nation had been perceived as the goal of the family's migration and not as an intermediate step on the way to the United States. Interestingly, two of the girls were born in China and two were born in Korea. The relatively high incidence (2 out of 5) of this pattern amongst Korean girls in my relatively

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small sample, suggests the various push and pull factors experienced by Koreans during the 1970's and 1980's. Population pressures, and rising expectations, along with the Korean governments policy of allowing migrants to take a maximum of $100,000 as re-settlement money, stimulated a large exodus of working and middle class Korean families during this period (Kim 1987). These families settled in different countries, dependent on prior family migration chains, expectations about a "better life", and/or access to immigration visas. The journeys of the two Korean girls are briefly summarized as follows.

> At age 13, Young-Ok left Korea and moved with her family to Liberia where her family believed they could establish a successful clothing store. Three years later the Liberian civil war forced Young-Ok and her family to leave Liberia. Instead of returning to Korea, the family relocated, without immigration papers, to the United States.
>
> Chong-Suk was 10 when her middle class family migrated to Paraguay where one of her aunts and uncles lived, to seek "a better life." Five difficult years later, the family left Paraguay and joined other family members in New York. This family lives in the US without legal immigration status.

For the two Chinese-born girls, the initial motivation to emigrate were very different from the Korean girls and from each other.

> Nancie's family decided they wanted to leave behind communism because it made life "bad." Nancie was 6 when her family migrated to Columbia at the suggestion of a relative who felt that life would be better there. Nancie's parents established a Chinese restaurant. Nancie thought things were okay, even though there were very few other Chinese families in the town where she lived. However, nine years later, when Nancie was 15, her mother's sister sponsored the family to immigrate to New York.

Lisa born in China, shares with Cong-Suk, Young-Ok and Nancie years living in a Latin American country. However, Lisa's migration narrative is unique and, with Raquel's, one of the more moving and inspiring of all migration narratives. Lisa's life dramatically

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represents the amazing resiliency of so many of the girls I came to know through my interviews.

> By the time Lisa was 12 both her parents had died of cancer. In the foot steps of a grandfather, Lisa and her two older brothers moved to Panama working off their passage in a Chinese grocery store. Lisa attended school but didn't graduate. After the US invasion of Panama, things became more difficult for the siblings. So, first her older brother and then Lisa migrated to the United States. On Thanksgiving Day 1989, Lisa, age 17, arrived in the Los Angeles airport. She was alone, did not speak a word of English and had no idea how to make a long distance phone call to her brother in New York. She spent the night in the airport and then bought a $600 ticket for New York. After spending two months with a "rich" aunt who had been against her parents' marriage and became psychologically abusive to Lisa, she lived briefly in a variety of living situations with other Chinese immigrants from Panama. On New Year's Day 1991, she moved into her current two room apartment which she shares with five adult Malaysian women whom she met when she worked at a Japanese fish factory in Queens. Having only contemplated "coming to America to find a husband and a job," she never dreamed of going to school again. However, with the help of a teacher from a community-based adult ESL program, Lisa was registered at a local high school and began attending 9th grade as a bilingual Chinese student. Two years later, at age 19 Lisa is an "A" student, trilingual in Cantonese, Spanish and English, who wants to go to college - but who as "an orphan without mother or father" and without documentation, worries about finding a job that will enable her to fulfill her new "American dream" to become a nurse.

**Unintended Immigration**

Before concluding this section, there is one more migration story that I want to introduce, the story of Michelle. I include Michelle in my sample despite uncertainty if she, in fact, should have been included in my study. Michelle's story is still incomplete. However, it suggests, as did Maria's migration narrative, the transformation of intent of "coming to America." For Maria and Michelle, the unintended consequences of living here have complicated their choices about residence, and in a sense taken on a life of their own.

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> Michelle was born in Paris of a Haitian mother and an Arabic father. Her parents separated before she was born, and Michelle has been raised by her mother, who works as a cleaning women. While Michelle's mother can barely read or write, Michelle has always been an excellent student. Michelle's mother decided that Michelle should learn English and so sent Michelle, at age 14, to live with her married brother in New York. In the ten months she has lived in New York, Michelle has become fluent in English and gets straight A's at her neighborhood high school. But Michelle now faces a problem. She wants to return to Paris to live with her mother. But she feels that she has lost a year of French schooling. She fears that this will now inhibit her chances of entering a French university and studying medicine. Should she stay in the United States, finish high school here and try to get into a good American university? Should she finish high school here and then return to France? Michelle is confused. Undocumented, she is not sure if she is now locked out of both the French and the American university systems.

The "permanence" of Michelle's life in New York is only one of a number of intriguing challenges this young woman faces as an undocumented French citizen of mixed ethnic-racial origin, attending a segregated inner-city high school in New York. Michelle's self-identity, her sense of herself as a potential immigrant, and the life she has experienced here will all be explored in later chapters.

## SUMMARY OF MIGRATION PATTERNS

The preceding brief migration profiles reflect a wide range of migration histories, each with its own power and drama, and each ultimately impacting on the girl's post-arrival experience. Before I begin to explore the meaning and influence of the girls' migration experience on post-migration life, let me summarize some of the basic patterns evidenced by the girls' narratives.

Most girls (52% of a total sample of 64 girls) migrated with their nuclear family unit, or migrated alone or with a parent to re-establish a two parent nuclear family household in the United States. This pattern, which includes families which experienced

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the previously discussed "father first" migration, was typically found amongst the girls from South Asia, China, Korea and from the Soviet Union. For a majority of "family migration" families, girls had either immigrant or refugee visas. The significant exception were several girls from the former Soviet Union who came without "proper papers."

**TABLE 4-2**

**Principal Migration Patterns[2]**

| | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Family Migration | 33 | 52 |
| Family Unit | (23) | (36) |
| Father First | (10) | (16) |
| Join Mother | 16 | 25 |
| Join Father | 6 | 9 |
| Join Siblings | 3 | 5 |
| Join Aunt/Uncle | 2 | 3 |
| Join Grandparent | 3 | 5 |
| Migrate alone | 1 | 2 |
| TOTAL* | 64 | 101% |

* Per cent total more than 100% due to rounding.

A surprisingly large number of girls (34% or 22 girls) came to the United States to join a parent who had come to the United States several years previously, often leaving another parent back home. This pattern suggests the pervasiveness of pre-migration parental separation and/or divorce prior to a girl's parent's migration.

25% of girls joined mothers who had previously migrated. These girls more frequently came from the English Caribbean, from Haiti and from Latin America. These girls were a mix of documented, undocumented and unknown INS statuses.

Not unexpectedly, given the tendency for girls to live with their mothers, only 9%

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or 6 girls from the total sample, joined their fathers here. These girls, 50% of whom were undocumented, came principally from Caribbean nations - Jamaica Haiti, Guyana and the Dominican Republic, but also from Mexico and Egypt. Interestingly, of these 6 girls one girl's father was a widower, and two girls lived with their fathers only briefly before moving to live with other relatives.

5% of girls came to live with siblings who had migrated earlier and another 5% of girls came to live with grandparents who lived here. Again this particular pattern of migration was more typical of girls coming from the English Caribbean and from Haiti than from any other nation or region. A majority of these two groups of girls were documented.

And finally, as previously described, two girls, Blanca from Honduras and Michelle from France came to live with an aunt and an uncle. Blanca was documented but Michelle was not.

## IMAGES, EXPECTATIONS AND POST-ARRIVAL REALITIES

As part of my discussion of the girls' migration experiences, it is important to also examine the girls' images and expectations of the United States, and to contrast these with some of the realities the girls encountered post-arrival. Later chapters will more intensively explore the girls' post-migration experiences in their families and households, within their schools and within their communities.

### Images and Expectations

In Bangladesh it doesn't snow, Aisha wanted snow, the more the better. In 100 degree weather she had dreamed of snow. She looked forward to coming to America, so

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she could play in snow. In contrast, Julie shivered in the Bajan sun when she the thought of the snow she would experience when she came to America[3]. In my interviews I asked the girls to describe what their images of America had been pre-migration. What had they imagined America, and their new lives would be like? To my surprise many girls could not recall any prior images. In these interviews I wondered what had hindered the imagining of a new life. Had it been simply a lack of information, and thus imagery? Had emotions of departure overwhelmed any ability to conjure images of a life so different from the one they were living? Or, perhaps, were the girls' pre-migration images so different from the realities they found here, that the pain of disappointment and disillusionment obliterated their former images from memory? Given the urgency which some of the other girls negated the very images they were sharing with me, I tend to believe that the absence of images for some girls was their way of warding off some of the pain of disillusionment.

For the girls who still remembered, what were the images and dreams, and what had stirred and created these images and dreams? Like other generations of immigrants who had relied on letters from loved ones to learn about America, many girls told of the letters, telephone calls and relatives whose trips back home provided clues about American life. But for many of the girls, girls who had come from all world regions, American movies and TV shows such as "Miami Vice" and "Dynasty" had fed their images of America. Images from Hollywood movies and TV shows had stuck with them. Like Doreta in the novel and film, The Perez Family (Bell 1990), who dreamt of meeting John Wayne, the Kosov sisters from Yugoslavia had dreamt of meeting movie stars like Don Johnson. Many girls had imagined big buildings, fancy houses and clean streets. Some

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thought that everyone, including themselves and their families, would be "rich like kings." Others thought that there would always be an abundance of food. The people they expected to meet would be very friendly, and most would be blond and blue eyed. When she left Poland, Eva thought she was about to begin a "great adventure." A few girls used the word "paradise" in describing their vision of America. Interestingly, "paradise" only meant material possibilities for one of these girls. For the other girls, "paradise" meant, no war or no longer living under a state of political and/or social uncertainty. Fatima, a Palestinian from Jerusalem imagined "paradise" to be a place free from war, where she didn't have to show her papers and would not be insulted for being an Arab. For Raquel, it meant escape from the political uncertainties of Eritrea. For Evelyne, paradise meant freedom from the street violence of her native Haiti.

**Post-Arrival Realities**

What did the girls actually find here? Li from China, and Carmen from the Dominican Republic, vividly remembered their trip from the airport the nights they arrived in New York City. Both remembered the lights radiating from the Manhattan skyline. 'It was like stars," "the city looked beautiful, a lot of lights, because of the lights, because at night you can't see anything, buildings look the same because of the light." Although Li and several other girls liked the apartments their family and relatives had found for them, many girls found that in the light of day, New York City was not what they had imagined existed behind "the stars." Some girls were actually "shocked" by their new homes and the dirty streets. Carmen recalled, that when she saw the first floor apartment where she was now to live with her mother and siblings, she started to cry."It was ..., too small one

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bedroom, the streets dirty and garbage all around." Carmen didn't go out the first week she was here, she just wanted to go back to the Dominican Republic. Lina was upset about the floor in her new home. It was wood. "I said, oh my god, it's wood, in my country (Dominican Republic) the people who live in houses with wood, are lower, and I said, oh my God my house isn't concrete and I'm living in wood." Wood floors and apartments with limited space, windows that looked onto air-shafts or alleys, dirty streets and homeless people these were the images that some of the girls recalled in negation of the images they once had had of America. And yet, for several girls rather than a simple erasure and negation of their images there was a transformation of their imagery. For example, while Raquel had thought America would "be beautiful, clean, people so nice, rich, everyone rich," and was amazed by the graffiti on the walls at the airport, and by the dirty streets in the Bronx, she held on to a more positive image of America. The image's **meaning** was just transformed. "It was beautiful in my mind...people talk that America is good. People talk, when they say it is beautiful, I think (now) they talk about freedom, I guess because it is free here."

Raquel indeed found freedom from fear, as did Fatima. But Evelyne wasn't so sure if she had found the freedom from violence she had so hoped to find. Evelyne remarked with irony, in Haiti "one can't talk, but one can walk. Here one can talk, but can't walk." Evelyne was not alone. The fear, and in some cases the actual experiencing, of randomized violence was frequently mentioned by the girls as they recalled what they had imagined and what they had in fact discovered about America. Many girls mentioned their upset to find that people were not as friendly as they had imagined, or as friendly as back

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home where everyone in your neighborhood knew you and looked after you. Here neighbor didn't know neighbor. People living on the same floor in the apartment buildings in which so many girls now lived, didn't know each other, or even greet one another in the elevator, stairwell or stoop. For many girls, even those who had previously lived in urban areas, a sense of un-ease, if not fear, had replaced a sense of community concern and protection.

**New Neighborhoods and New Neighbors**

Most girls had been very surprised that they had met few "Americans" in their neighborhood and/or schools. "Americans," for many of them, meant individuals who were blond and blue eyed. While I was not too surprised that movies and TV scripts were the basis for the image of America as a land peopled by blond and blue eyed individuals, I was startled that Charles Perrault's 17th century French fairy tale had been, in part, the basis of at least one immigrant girls' image of America.[4] When asked whom she had thought she would find here, Aisha from Bangladesh, said: "the people like I read in the storybooks, with blond hair and blue eyes, like Sleeping Beauty and movie scripts."

But it was not just the absence of blond and blue eyed Americans that amazed the girls. It was the discovery that many of their new neighbors were immigrants like themselves. Some neighbors had come from the same country as they had, others had came from the same world region. Many girls talked how astonishing it was to meet people from places totally unknown to them. "I didn't even expect to meet people from Vietnam, a place I had never heard about." (Aisha from Bangladesh). I was surprised that many girls had not anticipated finding immigrants from their country living either in their

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immediate neighborhood, or a subway ride away in Chinatown, or Elmhurst, or Flushing. Fatima had never expected to see so many other Arabs. Nancie, born in China and raised in Columbia, was astonished that Elmhurst where she lived was like a Spanish town, and Chinatown, where her mother shopped, was, well, a Chinatown.

The neighborhoods where most of the girls lived were immigrant enclaves, a result of chain migrations, and residential and job opportunities dictated by class, income and race-ethnicity. At times, these neighborhoods were fairly homogeneous, such as the Brooklyn neighborhoods around Flatbush and Nostrand where there is a sizeable English and French-speaking West Indian community; or Manhattan's Chinatown, or Brooklyn's Coney Island and Brighton neighborhoods where many Russians have settled. Some girls lived in neighborhoods which are very diverse in terms of national and geographic origin, such as Elmhurst, Queens. And some girls lived in neighborhoods where newcomers like themselves from the post-1965 immigration, lived alongside immigrants and their descendants from earlier waves of immigration, e.g. central and northern parts of the Bronx, and southwest Brooklyn. Some girls articulated their sense of comfort living in an immigrant and/or ethnic enclave. Li felt that living in Chinatown made things much easier for her and her parents. While at times she had to interpret for her non-English speaking parents, generally they could do all their shopping, even go to a doctor without having to speak a word of English.

Residential segregation acted for some of the girls who lived in Chinatown, and some of the girls from the Caribbean region, as a protective barrier from the racism and ethnic taunts experienced by other non-European immigrant girls. Many of the girls from

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the English and French speaking Caribbean, observed that unless they went into Manhattan, they rarely interacted with white Americans. In my interviews with many of these African-Caribbean girls, the issue of racism rarely came up, although frictions between immigrants from various islands did. (Issues of race and racism will be further elaborated in later chapters, **"The Web of Identity"** and **"Past, Present, Future and the American Dream."**)

For some girls, the presence of relatives and/or co-nationals in their apartment buildings seemed to provide a degree of comfort that they did not otherwise experience in their heterogenous neighborhoods. Thus, Amelia commented that, while she still missed her family's compound in Manila, the fact that almost everyone in her building came from the Philippines, made her less homesick. Similarly, a number of the South Asian girls lived in apartment buildings where other relatives also rented apartments. For them, the apartment building in some way reconstructed, albeit vertically, the family compounds in which they had lived in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh

As suggested above in regard to US racism, I believe for the Caribbean girls their segregated community did provide a buffer zone or type of "decompression chamber" (Gordon 1964), enabling a more gradual acclimatization to US life. However, I do not believe, for the majority of the girls, including those who lived in Chinatown, that their neighborhood or even their reconstructed compounds truly acted as "decompression chambers." Perhaps, some of the girls' parents, working within their ethnic enclave, ethnic restaurants, or working alongside co-patriots in garment factories, were able to experience a more or less "airtight" (Sung 1987:62) decompression chamber, and thus could move at

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their own pace to achieve a " workable adjustment to American society. (Gordon 1964:62). For most girls, however, school attendance and their daily interaction with students and teachers from diverse backgrounds, quickly confronted them with a range of new experiences and challenges about which they needed to make sense and to which they frequently had to respond. While I found that the girls' peer network provided some help with these experiences and challenges, I was repeatedly struck that it was the girls' families or households which emerged as either the principle locus for support, or the rudder for the girls' adjustment and adaptation to school and life in the United States.

In the chapter, "**Web of Identity,**" I will explore the girls' choices of peers and the meanings of those choices. But first I turn to the girls' lives within their families and/or households.

## ENDNOTES

1. In 1996 the Immigration Reform Act changed many elements of United States immigrant admission policy. All the girls in this study, however, entered the United States prior to 1994 and, thus, were under the 1986 immigration law known as the "Immigration and Control Act" (IRCA).

2. Note, this table only indicates the household to which the girl initially came, post-migration. After various periods of time, and often due to family problems, a number of girls moved on to live with other family members (see Table V-1).

3. Girls used the term "America" more than United States, and thus, even if politically and geographically incorrect, I will use the term which they used.

4. I wonder if the mention of Sleeping Beauty for this immigrant girl also reflected her desire to be woken, thus rescued, from the curse of migration by a prince from a far off land.

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# CHAPTER V

## FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD

As we begin an exploration of the girls' family or household, it is important to recognize the prominence of chain migration and transnationalism in shaping the structure and composition of the girls' current living situation. The physical location and the psychological definition of the family and the household have for many of the girls shifted over time. For some of the girls whose parent(s) or other family member(s) preceded them by a number of years, the integrity of the family household had been stretched spatially in order to accomplish the functions of maintenance, production and reproduction (Boyd 1989, 1982; Pessar 1982; Wood 1981). Yet, despite the bi-location of households, the family's households functioned as psychological or social anchor points (Behr and Gober 1982; Bender 1967). For most of these girls, their entrance into the U.S. household marked a re-integration of multiple worlds. For the majority of these girls, the re-integration went fairly smoothly, but for others it was a difficult, if not impossible, adjustment.

Given that the girls' past extensively and intensively penetrated their present, the following exploration will not be a chronological analysis of the girls' family situations or a linear one, i.e. their current lives juxtaposed with their past lives. Rather, as I discuss various elements of the girls' current lives, I will use their past experiences as a dynamic presence which is threaded through the present, at times acting as the warp for the present, and at other times, being the weft of the present.

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## POST-MIGRATION LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

In chapter IV, "**Emigration and Immigration,**" I discussed the different reasons for the girls' migration to the United States, and also identified the diverse patterns of their migration. While in many cases one can extrapolate with whom the girls lived at the time of their interviews with me, I think it is important to make explicit the girls' family or household situation.

**TABLE 5-1**

**Current Living Arrangements**

| | Number | Per Cent |
|---|---|---|
| Nuclear family (parents and siblings) | 31 | 48% |
| Single Mother | 12 | 19 |
| Aunt or uncle and their family | 4 | 6 |
| Grandparent(s) | 4 | 6 |
| Reconstituted Family (father and stepmother) | 3 | 5 |
| Siblings | 3 | 5 |
| Other Arrangement[1] | 3 | 5 |
| Reconstituted Family (mother and stepfather) | 2 | 3 |
| Single Father | 2 | 3 |
| | 64 | 100% |

Clearly, the most common (48%) household unit was composed of girls living with both, their biological parents, and, in many cases, also siblings. A grandmother from the former Soviet Union also lived with one of these two parent households. 8% of girls lived with one biological parent and a stepparent. In all these cases the stepparent came from the same nation of origin, but was basically unknown to the girls prior to their migration to the United States. Living with a single parent, and often siblings and other relatives,

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was the second most common household form (19%). All the other households were comprised of various relatives, with the exception of two girls: 1) Lisa from China and Panama, who lived with five adult women from Malaysia; and 2) Gabriella, who lived with a Brazilian school friend and her friend's mother.

Analyzing the household composition by national or geographic region, some striking patterns emerge. Seven out of nine Chinese/Hong Kong girls, six out of seven South Asian girls, four out of five of the Korean girls, and four out of five of the Russian girls lived within a consanguine nucleated household. However, only one out of nine of the girls from the English Caribbean, one out of six of the girls from Haiti, and not one of the girls from Latin America was currently living with **both** biological parents. Reconstituted families, i.e. with one stepparent, did occur in all these groups, but were not the dominant household form. Instead, single parents and living with other family members seemed to be more typical for the girls from these nations/regions.

While the majority of girls who now lived with both their parents, had migrated as a family unit, eight of the 31 girls or (25.8%) had come to the United States after their father, mother, or father and mother had settled and established a home here. In contrast, the majority of girls who lived within other household forms migrated through a chain process, alone or with another relative.

The dynamic interaction of migration process, family form and current household situation was quite striking in many cases, it will thus be focus for the next section of this chapter.

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**The Impact Of Migration Pattern on Household Composition And Family Dynamics**

For the girls (36%) who migrated as a whole family unit, their family, became the frame which transported their old world into a new one. As such, the family as a bounded entity, seemed to gain new meaning and significance for them. Many of these girls had previously lived in family compounds and/or in close proximity to their relatives. Now, the nucleated family became the center of their world. As such, they were very aware of the changes in the family's ability to spend time together and the intensity of their relationships with one another. Back home family members had often circulated in different worlds, often based on gender, but also on age. Here they became closer and more dependent on one another. To Kristina, Teresa, Mei, and Meena, their brother and/or sister were no longer just siblings, they had become their closest friend, providing comfort and support and a degree of protection, especially as they negotiated their schools and the community outside the walls of their households.

Migration as a family unit, however, was far less common than migration that had proceeded as a chain. Fully 64% of the girls had come to join other family members who had already migrated to the United States. Reunification with parents, siblings, grandparents and other family members was thus the dominant migration process experienced by the girls. As such, re-unification, even for those who re-established nuclear families here, emerged as a critical element in the girls' post-arrival adjustment. For some girls the transition was relatively easy. For others, the meaning - explanation and interpretation - of their separation, and now unification became a defining aspect of the girls' relationships with their parents and/or relatives. I first discuss those situations which

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seemed to have been relatively easy and then move on to those which were extremely difficult and painful.

**Family Reunifications**

In general, it appeared that girls who had previously lived with a parent and/or parents in their nation of origin prior to the beginning of the family's migration, or girls who had lived continually with one parent and now migrated with this parent to join their other parent in the United States, did relatively well in their post-immigration family household. Even as some of these girls experienced a real sense of loss for the relatives who had taken care of them during the period of separation, the opportunity to be together as a family made them very happy. This was the case with Amelia who greatly missed her aunt and cousins in the Philippines, but was happy to again be with her parents. For the Kosov sisters who had come with their mother and their siblings to join their father in New York, the sense of loss was not for someone physically left behind, but rather for their image of who their father had been. The sisters, independently, shared with me how shocked and upset they had been to find their father a pizza man and building super, not the respected professional he had been in their native Yugoslavia. Kristina told me: "The first time I saw my father I wanted to cry, because it was too hard for me seeing my father do that job."

Some girls migrated with their mothers re-uniting with fathers with whom they had not lived with for many years. Yoon from Korea, and Marina from Yugoslavia, related that after so many years of separation, it was difficult to get used to being a family again. Now two parents had authority and could make decisions, and family roles and

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expectations had shifted. Marina in particular was not so sure that her life had improved as a result of having her parents together again. Ironically, in fact, she felt rather than lessening the burden on her, she was being forced to become more independent.

Doretha's experience was somewhat different.

> When Doretha was two, her father left Ghana to attend school in the United States. He came back every two years to visit. A year ago, at 17, Doretha, her mother and siblings emigrated to New York. In Ghana, Doretha lived at boarding school. Migration for her has meant not only adjusting to living with her father but also with her family. She is unsure what she prefers. She thinks her father is too demanding, but then says she is happy that her whole family is once again together.

Five girls, who previously had lived with one of their parents in their native country, came to the United States to live with their other parent and his/her new spouse. Three of these girls came to live with their mothers and a stepfather, and two girls came to live with their fathers and new stepmothers. Several girls gained new half siblings and step siblings. In two cases, the girls seemed to feel that coming here was a good idea, and they got along well with both, their parents, and their stepparents. For example:

> When Marisol was 12, her father left Mexico "trying for a better life." In Mexico, Marisol lived with her divorced mother and her new husband. At age 15 she emigrated to the United States to be with her father, his new wife and child. Although there had been more than a three year separation since last she saw her father, Marisol felt that it was wonderful to now be with him. She enjoyed spending time with him and feels at ease talking with him. During our interview, she lovingly described him and how she had teased him on his recent 45th birthday that he was "getting so old." Marisol acknowledged that her father could be strict, but felt that her new stepmother helped to soften him, and often intervened on her behalf.

For two other girls, life in their new families with new siblings was far less satisfactory.

> When Antonia was two, her parents divorced. Her mother, a photographer left

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Czechoslovakia on an assignment in the West, and then, found it politically too dangerous to return to Prague. Antonia thus went first to live with her father and then her grandmother. Her mother, without papers, entered into a paper marriage with a fellow Czech living in New York. Her mother now claims she really loves this man. After years of paper work, often blocked by her father who was allegedly in the secret police, Antonia's mother brought Antonia to the United States. Antonia was at first happy to be with her mother whom she had not seen for six years. However, from the start, she did not like her stepfather. Antonia felt he was lazy and neither appreciated nor treated her mother well. Within weeks of her arrival Antonia and her mother began to have violent fights, which always ended with loving hugs and words of endearment. Two years later, the fights have continued. And Antonia remains jealous and resentful of her half-brother for whom she often has to babysit.

While Antonia acknowledged an ambivalent relationship with her mother, Marva was unambivalent about how she felt towards her father and her stepmother. In **"Emigration and Immigration"** I briefly described how, at age 10, Marva's world was turned upside down when she discovered, the man she had always called "father," was actually her stepfather, and that her biological father and his mother wanted Marva to come to the United States to continue her education.

At age 15, with the urging of her mother, Marva came to New York to live with her father, his wife and her children. From the beginning, Marva says her life in New York was difficult. Marva has felt that her stepmother favors her own children, and ignores her. The stepmother has refused to shop for her or to wash her clothes. Marva feels her father does not stand up for her. He rarely permits her to call her mother in Guyana. And he has never complimented or praised her for her considerable achievements at school, including the fact that she was named her school's valedictorian. Marva feels like a non-person at home. Yet, feeling protective of her mother, she has yet to let her mother in Guyana know how terrible life has become for her. Caught between educational opportunities in the United States and an uncertain life in Guyana, she feels without familial support, trapped and angry.

A number of girls from the English and French Caribbean, and from the Dominican Republic came to join a single parent. Most of these girls had left behind a parent or

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relative, usually a grandmother, who had raised them, often from infancy, to come and live with a parent in New York. In a few situations the girls had always known that someday they would rejoin with their parent in America. For some of these girls there had been some contact over the years, via telephone, letters and an occasional visit home.

> Carmen always thought that her stepmother was her real mother. When Carmen was four, her stepmother left the Dominican Republic to come to New York "to give us what we needed." As Carmen's father was no longer in the picture, Carmen's stepmother's parents raised her and her siblings. Carmen always knew that one day she would follow her "mother." Over the years, there were letters and calls. When she was 12 she came with her sister to New York and joined her "mother" and her son. It was only in New York she found out that her "mother" was really her stepmother. Carmen really doesn't want to know what happened to her real mother. To her, all her life her stepmother has, even from afar, been concerned about her well-being. Carmen, although she misses her grandparents, feels happy to be with her mother and siblings in New York, to be a family together. She feels lucky that she can talk about anything and everything with her mother. "Your parents," she says, "are your best friends, no matter what."
>
> Like Carmen, Sherie feels that in her mother she has found a best friend.
>
> Sherie was raised by her grandparents after her mother left Haiti to come to the United States. Sherie always wanted to be like her mother. But when she first arrived in the United States, she was scared of her mother. Now they are "like sisters." They share the same birthday, look like one another, and enjoy each others' company.

For other girls whose migration was never anticipated, or who had only dreamed about coming to America, there was little or no contact between them and the parent in the United States. For these girls, coming to America meant coming to live with a virtual stranger. The success of some of these unions seemed, therefore, quite remarkable to me.

> When Amie was two, her mother left her with her father and his parents in Haiti. But Amie always felt that her father favored her sister whom he knew since birth. "Whatever she made always made him smile." And she felt that her grandparents were too strict. Although she didn't know her mother, and hadn't seen her in 12 years, she dreamed that her life would be easier in New York. Her mother turned

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out "exactly as she had expected." And she is glad that she has come to live with her.

While some girls enjoyed relatively unproblematic reunifications with their parent, some experienced tense relationships often filled with anger and a sense of betrayal. In my years as family therapist at Kings County Hospital-Downstate Medical Center, I worked with many families struggling with the challenge of joining parents and children who were virtual strangers to one another. During this study, two different school-based social workers talked with me about the almost unresolvable generational schism which forms when there is considerable delay between parental departure and family reunification. Families are often just unable to successfully link the lives of the migrating parent with the child who had been left behind. The potential negative consequences of this "parent-first"[2] migration underscores the different perceptions of parents and children about what migration is all about. The parents feel that they left, to better the prospects for themselves and their children. The children feel they have been forgotten and/or abandoned. The realities faced by the parent in settling in the United States, securing stable employment and the necessary visas to sponsor their children, are either not comprehended by the children waiting at home, or simply are not adequately explained to justify the years of separation. Jama Adams in several articles (1986, 1990) describes the tension between the left child who has been raised, if lucky, by caring relatives, and the parents who sent home remittances which have provided for their welfare. In his discussion, Adams essentially describes the transnational household in which instrumental needs are provided by the distant parent in America, and the expressive needs are provided by a relative, frequently

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the grandmother, in the native land. In these situations, when the child finally leaves her native home, she leaves behind the familiar and, if lucky, also nurturing home life. She arrives in a new country and begins to live with a stranger. A stranger who now expects to regain her role as parent. But the child, doesn't see her as "parent." Her "parent(s)"is/ are back in the native country. Instead, whom she sees is someone who doesn't know her. Someone who expects now her love and loyalty, if not obedience. For the parent, who has labored and sacrificed all these years, the child should be grateful, and acknowledge the parent's sacrifice. What happens instead is the child's rage and resistence to accepting the parent and her "rules." Accusations and counter accusations spiral, each feeling betrayed by the other.

Noelle had "thought my aunt was my mother until one day my sister showed me her picture and I started screaming. My aunt told that she (the woman in the photo) was my mother. I got mad." Noelle had no contact with her mother during most of the 13 years they were separated. When Noelle's mother picked her up at the airport, Noelle only saw an old woman who "didn't know nothing about me." The result has been a relationship filled with tensions.

Of all the girls I interviewed Julie's relationship with her mother seemed to be the most filled with rage.

> Julie does not remember when her mother left Barbados. She was only four and was already used to being cared for by other family members. Her father was a distant but present person in her life. Over the years she heard from her mother but never saw her. Instead, her aunt and grandmother became the significant people in her life. At age 9, an uncle began to sexually abuse her. Not telling anyone about the abuse she dreamed of the US as place both to escape the abuse and to go to school. At age 15 she got her wish when she moved to New York to live with her

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mother.

Julie had thought her mother would be "a warm person." Instead she discovered: "she is a very cold person, a real bitch." Julie's pain was palpable as she described her relationship with her mother, an essential stranger who didn't know her all the years of her childhood and still "does not know me." Instead, Julie feels her mother's sister, who helped raise her in Barbados and now lives on Long Island, "who was there for me," is the one who really knows, loves and understands her. Julie believes her mother is intensely jealous of the aunt-niece relationship and tries to sabotage it by saying bad things about Julie.

> It's her attitude that I hate, attitude of her putting me down, that I am not going to do anything with my life, but I know full well, I'm going to amount to something and then, when I do, I don't want her to use the opportunity to say well, that's my daughter because I don't want to hear her after that, because she wasn't here for most of my life, she didn't help me get where I am, most of my life and now I just going to keep doing what I have to do by myself.

Julie also described physical abuse including an incident in which her mother was arrested. "My whole body was beaten up, because of her, because she doesn't have any control and no kind of patience, and I didn't even report her, it was the house (school) staff, they were the ones who reported her." Psychological abuse, however, dominated Julie's description of her life with her mother. Julie told me that her mother, who was a legal resident, used Julie's undocumented status to threaten her daughter. At the time of my interview, Julie believed her mother had still not filed the appropriate papers. "What kind of stupidness is that?" At age 18, on the eve of her graduation, Julie's biggest fear was that it is now too late to get documented through her mother. Without proper papers,

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Julie was worried how she would be able to go to college and/or get a decent job. In Julie's mind, the mother, who was not there for her when she was growing up, is now continuing to fail to protect her. As a result Julie holds an explosive grudge against her mother, "I'm afraid one day I am just going to pop, and just axe her, as she almost did to me." While there were, no doubt, many other factors, including personality, which contributed to the intensity of the conflict and rage between Julie and her mother, mother-first chain immigration provided the frame for this family.

Julie summed up her own experience and that of other girls like herself who had migrated to join parents they essentially did not know.

> They haven't been with their kids for so long, they don't let them know, okay, I didn't mean to do that, I wanted it different, whatever, and then when you actually start living with them, you know, they try to get to know you, they just jump in to, I'm your mother, you listen to what I say, and you don't know me, you don't know nothing about me and you don't try to know nothing about me, you just come out being my mother after you haven't been my mother for years, and I don't think, you can't do that, you can't just come out and be my mother, because I have a lot of people back home who (sic) I consider my mother.

While Julie continued to live with her mother, several girls who similarly had extremely fractious relationships with their parents post-migration, no longer live with them. In some situations the girls successfully relocated to the household of a sibling or relative. But for some girls, even relocation did not always improve their lives. Josette's narrative represented one pattern in which disappointment and disillusionment resulted in post-migration relocation. Josette came to the United States to live with her father. But after she arrived in Miami, Josette discovered that her father was often absent and her stepmother didn't want her. After several months Josette moved to New York to live with

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her father's sister and her children. But, this too, was a household filled with virtual strangers. Life with her aunt, "who never laughs", is somewhat better than life with her father. But Josette believes it is not the same as if one lives with one's mother "you don't feel comfortable with the person you live with, if you live with your mother, you feel comfortable with her. You can talk to her about anything and she (garbled), but if you ask her and she is not going to be angry with you." While Josette may have romanticized the relationship with an absent mother, she remains with her aunt because, in the four years she has been in the United States, Josette had lost contact with her mother who was illiterate and lived in a rural province in Haiti. Without any real alternative place to live, Josette doubts her father's sister will throw her out, but knows when she graduates high school her aunt will want her out.

Lina has also experienced instability since she left the Dominican Republic. Lina had come to live with her father in New York as a means to escape her bad relationship with her mother. Unfortunately, Lina discovered that her father was a drug addict. He was violent and abusive. Lina left his household to live first with one aunt and now another aunt. In a little over two years Lina has lived in three different households. She is depressed about her living situation, but says she does not want to return to the Dominican Republic. She dreams of living on her own and still thinks her life will be better here.

As I listened to the migration narratives of the girls, I felt that the attraction of their coming to America had been, in part, the romanticization of living with their absent parent. These girls imagined that life would be better and easier to live if only they could

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live with their absent parent in the United States. Unfortunately for Julie, Josette, Lina, and for several other girls, these expectations were never fulfilled. Instead, their parents turned out to be strangers, often stricter than their care-givers back home, and/or "just not nice." For these girls the chasm of time and geography were simply too great to bridge in the midst of adolescence. As indicated above, some of these girls relocated to live with siblings and other relatives and some continued to live with their parents despite potentially explosive tensions.

The girls who lived without their parents in the households of relatives and/or non-kin caretakers seemed principally to come from the Carribean Basin and a few also had come from Latin America. My observations were echoed by two school-based social workers who also had observed that many Caribbean students at their respective schools were not living with their biological parents, but instead living with older siblings and other caretakers. In most cases the girls had been part of chain migration. In many cases the girls had moved out of their parents'home to escape a tense or stressful situation, and in some cases the girls had, from the beginning, come to live with extended family and/or family friends.

For example, when Grace was 13 she left her parents, her 7 brothers and 4 sisters and migrated from Barbados to the US to live with her sister. Within a year, tensions between Grace and her sister resulted in Grace moving in with her sister's ex-husband and her cousin. Almost two years later, this arrangement continues to work out well. The seeming flexibility of housing arrangements seemed, in part, to reflect some of the household flexibility the girls had previously experienced prior to migration. As I listened

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to the girls describe their living arrangements back home and here, I thought of Carol Stack's observations in All Our Kin (1975). Stack's study of low income families explored how the extended family can provide a resource network, in which different locales respond to different needs and conditions over time. For the girls in my study, their experience with serial and rotating care-takers, while not always satisfying, acknowledged the extensiveness of their kin relationships. And further, the girls' kin relationships, dormant for long periods, had the capacity to be reactivated without much planning or preparation to respond to changing needs.

## POST-MIGRATION FAMILY FUNCTIONING

In 1928 Park wrote that migration serves as an agency which produces multi-dimensional effects, and releases energy which had been previously constrained by tradition and custom. In her paper on the educational achievements of Asian immigrant students in the United States, Meifang Zhang (1994) picks up on this re-vitalizing aspect of migration. Zhang suggests that structural relocation of the family "ignites the full play of family collectivism, strengthening family relationships"(Zhang 1994:4). She argues that in response to its initial experiences of dis-location, and re-location in a more peripheral, if not marginal, position vis a vis the host society, the immigrant family is often re-fortified. Even when traditional values remain undisturbed (Hondegneu-Soledo 1992), the family may become more flexible in the definition of its roles and functions. At the same time, it may return to older cultural forms, and/or may integrate new cultural forms observed in the host environment. While other authors have suggested that the post-migration success of specific immigrant groups has been the result of pre-disposing cultural traditions

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(Gordon 1964), Zhang argues (see also Steinberg 1981) that it is the combination of social-economic opportunities, American values, the social situation of the immigrant family, and not only the family's cultural heritage, which enables success post-arrival, especially in terms of educational achievement. I believe one can extend Zhang's thesis to other areas of post-arrival adjustment.

Worldwide, the structure and function of families have begun to change (Lewin 1995). Many traditional roles and functions of families have shifted. Some functions have shifted within the family cross gender and generation, and other functions have been shifted, in part or fully, outside the boundaries of the family. Some of these shifts have already occurred in the immigrants' nation of origin, prior to migration. Thus the "classical" family form associated with a particular culture or nationality may no longer be vibrant. Cultural traditions such as filial piety or family collectivism may be in decline. Family life may have become stagnant. And as a unit, the family may no longer be cohesive, and no longer provide the individual with a sense of stability and/or a cohesive environment.

While a family success post-arrival can not, and should not, be reduced to an assessment of its social capital (Coleman 1988), it does appear that a family's ability to be flexible, to re-engage members to accomplish the tasks of maintenance and survival, contributes significantly to its success in meeting some post-migration challenges. The next several sections will discuss some of the shifts in family roles and functions experienced by the girls, and explore the impact of these shifts on the girls and on family/household life.

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**Life Space and Adaptations**

In setting the stage for this discussion, I would like to borrow Lewin's concept of the "life space" and use it for the family or household as a unit. The immigrant family organizes and re-organizes itself in relation to the changes it experiences in its environment pre and post-migration. The family defines the nature of, and its responses to, those changes largely in terms of the assumptions and beliefs it holds, and in the resources and opportunities it has available. Sluzki, a family therapist, has identified (1979) a patterned sequence for this post-migration period: 1) preparatory phase, 2) act of migration, 3) period over compensation, 4) period of decomposition and 5) trans-generational phenomena. While I disagree with Sluzki's underlying assumption that the immigrant family ***will*** experience a crisis and decomposition as part of the sequence of adjustment, I do find Sluzki's framework helpful. Thus I believe over time the immigrant family does experience overlapping and somewhat sequential phases during which: 1) its expectations are tested; 2) family members interact with the new environment; and 3) roles and functions shift. Given that an individual's and/or family's experience changes over time, the migration narratives of the girls - their descriptions and reactions about their current family situation - were shaped by how long they personally had been in the United States, and at what stage they and their family/household were in the migration process. Further, and as stated previously, the nature of the migration process itself, the degree of continuity over time of the family as a bounded unit, and the family's ideology about return and or permanent settlement in the United States (Eppink 1979), also significantly impacted on the functional organization of the girls' families and on the girls' feelings

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about family life.

The girls who migrated with their families, or reunited a previously intact family, seemed to have in common an intense sense of family loyalty and a commitment to family survival that far exceeded any articulated[3] desire to realize individual interests and happiness. "Family survival, in the long run matters more than short-term individual happiness" (Ziegler 1977:332). As many of these girls came from South Asian and Chinese families, I first wondered if this phenomena reflected an imported cultural legacy of Eastern philosophies which tend to focus attention on the well being of the group over the needs of the individual. However, as I also heard these sentiments articulated by several girls from the Eastern block nations, Czechoslovakia and former Yugoslavia, I began to wonder if this phenomenon was the result of families turning inward and developing a sense of collectivity and cohesion in response to a strange, and at times hostile, environment. The fact that the girls who came from the Caribbean, and from Latin America and the former Soviet Union seemed, in general, to express less of a sense of familial survival and much more a need to envision their own individual futures, may have reflected the dynamic interaction of their coming from more "settled" and residentially segregated immigrant communities, a more continuous family/household history of economic struggles,[4] and/or a history of more sequential chain migration and more "fractured," blended and/or reconstituted families/households.[5] Perhaps in my later discussion of inter-generational relations, the possible origin of these convictions and sentiments might become somewhat clearer. For now, I would like to begin to explore how the families re-ordered former and, often times, more traditional division of labor and

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re-defined family roles.

**Family Roles**

In her 1992 study of Mexican immigrant families, Hondegneu-Soledo asserts that migration is both "gendered and gendering." In the Mexican case, migration decisions are "gendered," as they are principally made by the male head of the household. Once the migration process has begun, the process reshapes gender roles both, in the nation of origin and in the post-migration family and community. In other parts of the world, the actual decision to migrate may be shared by men and women, or even be made solely by single women, as is frequently the case in migration from the Caribbean Basin. Hondegneu-Soledo's (1992) basic thesis about migration resulting in shifts in gender roles, or gendering, therefore provides a helpful frame for the present discussion.

In father-first migration, mothers who are left behind to care for the children are frequently thrust into new roles and activities. In the absence of their husbands, brothers and/or fathers, women may become, for the first time, their family's principal decision maker (Ziegler 1977; Hondegneu-Soledo 1992). They may become more active in the public sphere, developing a public self separate from the family. As they gain a new sense of independence and even autonomy, these women may begin to advocate for their own emigration to facilitate family reunification (Hondegneu-Soledo 1992). Two of the seven girls who had experienced family migrations, which included long parental separations, and then reunification of the prior parental dyad, explicitly alluded to these gendered "transformations" prior to their migration, and then about the continued resonance of these transformations in their lives post-arrival.

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Yoon remembered that her father had made all the real decisions before he left Korea for the United States. After his departure her mother began to make the decisions. Yoon became so used to only going to her mother for permission, that now three years after the family has been reunited, she still finds it difficult to ask her father's permission. Yet, Yoon observed that since her mother's and her arrival in the U.S., her parents have developed more equity in their decision making. Shifts in the locus of family decision making in response to the absence of the father, may shift back to the father once the family reunites. At times, this is accepted by the mother, at times it becomes an area of contestation. This has been the situation in Marina's family. When Marina's father left Yugoslavia, her mother took on the role of family decision maker. This role lasted for the 13 years the family was separated, even during the two week visits Marina's made to Yugoslavia each summer. With the family reunited in New York, Marina's mother has been unwilling to give up her authority. But Marina's father, although generally silent about child-related issues, has been trying to re-assert unilateral control. Marina thinks her father is much stricter than her mother, and feels his assertion of paternal authority has caused considerable tensions in the family.

Unfortunately, I do not have information about the five other girls who had experienced parental separation. No doubt there were role shifts in some families and not in others. The girls' absence of focus on the shifts suggests a number of factors. First, at what age did the father leave? Very early departures of fathers, such as that experienced by Doretha who was four when her father left Ghana, developmentally inhibits observations about role shifts which may have actually occurred. Second, what support

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systems remained in place? For Mei, in the ten years of family separation she, her mother and her siblings lived with one or another set of grandparents or in close proximity to them. Here in the context of a multi-generational family network, there may have been little change in familial gender roles. Finally, political events, not family dynamics, occupied several girls' attention pre-migration or, at least, were more critical memories as they spoke to me about their pre-migration lives. This was definitely the case with the Kosov sisters who were very specific about family dynamics in the United States - their father made the rules and everyone followed them. However, in discussing their life in Yugoslavia, the focus of attention was not in their mother's role or activities, but rather the horrific things which had occurred in their home town after the Serbs took over. Similarly, Fatima's description of life without her father focused on her experiences of being an Arab living in Jerusalem during the "jihad" (holy war), not on changes in internal family dynamics.

When the girls did talk about their lives here in the United States, however, I was impressed with how frequently and spontaneously they mentioned shifts in family division of labor post-arrival. In Chapter Three "**A Demographic Portrait,** " I profiled the employment of the girls' parents. In comparing pre and post-migration patterns I noted that, in general, there was a downward mobility in the fathers' employment. I also observed that, of the mothers who had previously only worked within the home, 44% of these women now worked outside the home, and a small number of mothers who had worked prior to migration were not employed here.

Prior to migration none of the South Asian mothers had worked outside the home.

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Subsequent to migration, however, 50% of these former homemakers had secured employment outside their households. In sharp contrast were the mothers of seven girls whose six mothers (Kosov sisters had the same mother) had previously been employed, but who were now not working outside the home. A seventh mother, who had been a farmer in Cambodia, also was not employed outside the home. The majority of mothers who were not working post-migration, came from the former Soviet Union (3) and/or Yugoslavia (2). Three of these mothers had been school teachers prior to their migration. A mother from Jerusalem had also been a teacher. Interestingly, all seven mothers shared in common the fact that they had come here as either documented or undocumented refugees fleeing political and/or religious persecution. Two mothers from the former Soviet Union and the Cambodian mother were receiving public assistance at the time of my interviews. The mother of the Kosov sisters, who was undocumented was helping her husband as the super of their building. One undocumented mother from the Soviet Union was trying to find work. Fatima's mother (from Jerusalem) was not working and was not seeking work. The one mother who very much wanted to work, and wasn't, was Marina's mother. As mentioned above, Marina's mother had taken on increasing family responsibilities in the 13 year separation from her husband. However, now with the family reunited, Marina's father would not allow his wife to work. He wanted her home with the children.

**The Impact of Maternal Employment on Family and Household Functioning**

The South Asian girls perhaps experienced the most dramatic changes in household roles and functioning pre and post-migration. In their native India, Pakistan and

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Bangladesh, the girls' families' had household staff, some who had lived with their families, and others who came each day to help with cooking, cleaning and shopping. Asma described living in her family's compound with three servants including a 16 year old "houseboy" who did-the grocery shopping. When Asma had "been in the mood," she sometimes helped with the cooking but basically she knew neither how to cook or clean before she arrived in the United States. Living in India she had known that she would someday have had to learn to cook - "it is compulsory for a girl to learn," so as to supervise others. However, she never thought that the necessity of her learning would come so soon. Now, with both her mother and her older sister working jobs 6 to 8 hours a day, Asma is responsible for cooking and cleaning. "Maybe we mess up some things," she said in response to my question about how it was to do the household work, "but we have to do it all ourselves." Asma went on to say:

> A person like me would have expected a servant, but I always think I face the facts, so I don't know my future, so I have to know some things, and since I was a little bit lazy, maybe I learned that wrong, but I think I learned them now.

Meena' family had lived in a family compound with servants, and summered at one of India's hill stations. All this has now changed. The family of four now lives in a crowded one bedroom apartment where Meena shares a pull-out couch with her sister. As Meena' mother works and takes evening classes to become a dental technician, Meena must come home from school to cook for her family. Meena misses her free time to socialize with friends and to participate in sports. She feels chronically tired.

While Mei's family did not have servants in China - her grandparents had "(taken) care of everything," Mei's life has dramatically changed since arrival in the US. With her

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mother both working and attending school, Mei and her two siblings are now responsible to "clean the kitchen, do the bathroom, and vacuum the carpet," in addition to helping with the cooking.

Almost all the girls, whose mothers now worked outside the home, now were responsible to engage in those household tasks their mothers, and/or servants, had previously done.

> In Korea mom did everything for me, like cook and clean, now I have to do a lot of things, housework, I had to change my life for Mom.

To my surprise most of the girls did not seem to complain about this shift of responsibility. Some did sigh with tiredness like Meena, and others admitted they preferred not to do their new tasks, but most seemed to have the attitude that life had changed for them and they thus needed to change as well. "I don't like it, but "as you get older I think it is better,"commented Mei. And Asma commented, perhaps more bluntly, she was just "facing the facts."

This acceptance of significant changes in responsibilities because of the family's changed status was also evident in respect to the after school jobs many girls had taken in order to help out their families. However, before moving on to external employment, it is important to also discuss situations in which taking on new and additional household responsibilities were seen as burdensome. Interestingly, most of the girls who complained about their new chores, also seemed to accept that their new responsibilities were in keeping with their being female. Thus, while the girls and their mothers may have changed their activities and behavior in response to changes in the family's economic position and

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needs, in most cases normative ideology regarding gender roles did not similarly shift(Kim 1979; Hurh and Kim, 1990; Hondgneur-Soledo 1992). Issues related to gender identity will be discussed at length in Chapter Eight **"Identity and Gender."**

Blanca recalled that in Honduras, before she came to live with her aunt, she always was able to play outdoors with her friends. Here, as a member of a large household in which her aunt and uncle both worked, she had to come home after school to clean and cook. Blanca complained that she no longer had any time for herself. She went so far as saying that, at times, she prefers school to home because in school she can "relax." Blanca's changed responsibilities reflected, in part, a change in household, but no doubt also reflected changes in expectations as the individual moves from childhood to adolescence and then adulthood. But for Blanca, if new expectations and demands came with getting older, Blanca wasn't so certain she really liked getting older.

For Isis (Egypt) and Natalia (Haiti) the new responsibilities placed on them were also not welcome, but, like Asma, were somehow anticipated, for they were, after all, girls. Isis disliked cooking for her widowed father and her sister. She preferred to go out and get fast food or cold cuts. However, despite her protests, she understood and accepted it was an Egyptian woman's role to cook for her family. Similarly, Natalia felt burdened by her household duties. "I have too much work to do, I have to clean and cook; now my mother has a job for two weeks, so now I have to cook and clean and go to market, do everything."

Natalia's three brothers all worked at Burger King. But she said, at home they were lazy and spoiled. As she described her work at home, Natalia expressed anger that

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her parents really didn't make her brothers help out. And yet, she went on to tell me that this "is the Haitian attitude," and as the girl she has no other expectation that things should be different. "I'm the girl, I have to do it."

The nature of the work to be done was yet another issue that surfaced as the girls described family life. Teresa didn't mind that she had to help out at home, what she minded was the nature of the work she was being asked to do. Back home in Yugoslavia she never "had to touch garbage," but here not only did she have to deal with her family's garbage, but also with that of the other tenants in her building. This was both distressing and embarrassing to her (see Handlin 1973:70 in respect to earlier immigrants and "degrading work").

In sharp contrast to girls who had to help out with household tasks, was a small group of girls whose parents had decided that they should not help out at home. Instead, even when their mothers worked, these girls were to devote their time to their school work. Interestingly each of these girls seemed embarrassed about not helping out at home. Li's parents were both engineers in China. Here her father works in a restaurant, her mother in a factory. Li helped them with their English and interpreted for them whenever necessary. Li was willing to help out at home, but her mother refused her assistance.

Chong-Suk was born in Korea and lived in Paraguay for a number of years prior to migrating to the United States. Chong-Suk was also eager to help out at home. But Chong-Suk's mother, who now did home piece work for a garment company, wanted Chong-Suk to devote her time to her studies and to practicing the piano.

For both Li and Chong-Suk, who were getting A's at school, their parents

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strategies seemed to be both paying off and being reinforced.

**Employment**

The girls' employment outside the home was far more common than I had expected, although it mirrored the lives of earlier waves of immigrant households in which all contributed to the families economic survival (Handlin 1973:70). More than 35 girls reported that they had part-time jobs after school, and/or on weekends. While most of the girls were documented, many of the girls who worked, including Gabriella and Lisa who totally supported themselves, were undocumented. Many of the girls commented that in their countries, being employed at their age, mostly under 18, was very unusual. A Chinese student at Blackwell provided me with a survey she had done at her school. Polling other girls about their lives here and back home, the student had found that only 7% had held any kind of job prior to their migration to the United States. Now, over 44% of these same students were working. Some of the increase in per cent employed is an artifact of the students' ages, i.e. they were now older. Some of the increase had to do with the scarcity of jobs in their nations of origin. But much of the increase in employment was a direct consequence of financial necessity. The girls needed to help their families out.

In 1990, Woodward reported on a University of Michigan study which found that only 11% of high school seniors save their earning from their jobs for college and/or long term purposes. Many teens work to support their own consumerism. While this may not be the case for some working class and poor youth (some who may have already dropped out of school) who may work to support their families, conspicuous consumption, and not family finances is the motive for much youth employment. At the same time, finding jobs,

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particulary in poor and immigrant neighborhoods is not so easy. In New York City in 1993 the youth unemployment rate for the first three months of the year was 40%, and the joblessness rate for minority youth was even higher (Lueck 1993:A1; Lee 1992). Nevertheless, many of the girls had found jobs and were contributing their wages to help their family and/or household to survive.

Soon after Eva arrived from Poland to live with her grandmother, she began to work. She had only recently turned 15. She knew no English, and she was undocumented. But, neither her legal status, nor her lack of English stood in the way. Her first job was at a local Polish deli.

> Long hours, and just a tough job, it was really tiring because you have to bring in the meat, it was hanging, and you had to run back and forth and the boss was really tough, and my grandmother was really proud of me that they keep me there, if they took you and you passed and you are good, you can be like some worker, it was a good school to learn how to work, how to best work in the beginning, because it was really tough and you learn how to really work, but it was really very nice, too. I remember it as a good time.

At the deli, Eva often worked seven days, both after school and on weekends. After a year and a half, Eva decided the deli job did not provide enough opportunities for her to practice English. She thus switched jobs. Her new job was in a pharmacy. The pharmacy's prior owners were Polish, and some customers were still Polish. Eva's new boss spoke no Polish. Eva liked her new job. She was earning $5 an hour. She commented: "Now I have three days off which is wonderful. I have Sunday off for myself, and I have Monday and Friday off...this is a good place." Eva, now 18, has worked continuously since she arrived here three years ago. She sees her working as part of what she must do for herself and her grandmother and feels that she has learned a great deal

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from working.

Gabriella also lacks legal papers. But she has worked hard here. When Gabriella first arrived from Brazil she lived with her mother in New Jersey. When she discovered she could not register mid-year for high school ESL, she moved to Queens to live with a married sister. When I interviewed Gabriella, she no longer lived with her sister, but was basically on her own, living with a Brazilian friend and the friend's mother. Gabriella's first job here was as a housekeeper. Since then she has worked at numerous jobs including one at a pizza store and another at a newspaper distribution center. She is currently a cashier in a midtown hotel. Gabriella supports herself and also sends money to her mother in New Jersey who has been unable to work due to illness. Gabriella acknowledged that she gets tired. She goes to high school, is on her school's soccer team, works 20 to 25 hours a week and tries to visit her mother once a week. Gabriella has decided to return with her mother to Brazil. She feels that without her papers she can not get the type of job which would enable her to support herself and her mother and enable her to go to college. Just before I interviewed her, Gabriella had turned down a promotion to become a concierge (she was fluent in Portugese, Spanish and English) at the hotel where she works. The new job would have provided more money, possibly benefits and required more hours. However, Gabriella anticipated her undocumented status would be revealed during the employment processing. As she could not place herself at such risk, Gabriella lied to her boss and said she was happy as a cashier. For Gabriella, basic survival had to be enough, at least until she earned a GED, and bought her ticket to return to Brazil.

Lisa, who migrated from China to Panama and then to the United States without

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legal papers (she traveled on a Chinese passport), also did not have a work visa. Yet, she too has been able to find work and somehow survives here on her own, albeit marginally. For a year and a half Lisa worked in Queens at a Japanese sea urchin factory which was managed by a Mexican man. When I interviewed her, Lisa was working at a laundry on the Upper Westside. The $5 an hour Lisa earned helped to pay her $70 share of rent for a two room Lower Eastside tenement apartment in which she lived with five older women from Malaysia. Like Gabriella, Lisa is trying to balance school and work. But, unlike Gabriella, who has her mother and sister here and the ability to return to Brazil, Lisa is totally on her own in New York. (An older brother, also undocumented, lives in a mid-western city where he works in the kitchen of a Chinese restaurant.) It isn't the hard work that concerns Lisa, rather it is her status and her inability even to dream about college. How could she ever pay tuition, rent and food on $5 an hour? How will she be able to survive? It would be very hard to return to Panama where a brother still lives, and even harder to return to China where there is no one. Lisa envies those girls at school who have families who can share the worry. At the same time she describes herself as very strong. I can not but agree. Of all the girls I interviewed, Lisa seemed to posses the inner will to keep on going and to somehow make it here despite all odds.

Unlike Gabriella and Lisa, Raquel was a documented refugee and was still receiving some public benefits as a refugee. However, Raquel's living expenses and the need to send money to her parents in Africa meant that she and the brother and sister with whom she lived all worked. Raquel worked 20 hours a week at a Roy Rogers. She earned $4.25 an hour. The money was very much needed, but Raquel was beginning to worry if her job was

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contributing to her falling grades. She was unsure what to do. As a senior, she worried if her grades would affect her plans to attend college. But without extra money she would be unable to send money to her parents and would not be able to pay next fall's college fees, even if she was lucky and received a scholarship. Raquel's worries about money and college seemed as much motivated by her desire to help her family as by any, seemingly more individualistic, motive to earn a degree. For even as Raquel talked about her hopes for college, they were couched in terms of future employability and thus her ability to help her family still in Eritrea. As she balanced competing demands on her time Raquel felt she was much older, or had at least grown up faster than many of the US born students she had met here. These feelings about being forced to grow up sooner and faster were echoed by a number of other girls. They will be discussed further in **"The Web of Identity."** For now, I would like to continue to focus on the girls' experiences with working.

Asma and her parents jointly decided that she needed to find a job to bring extra money into their household. Asma looked for a job in fast food, "not like bars or like that." Asma found a job at Kentucky Fried Chicken. Working in the restaurant presented some special challenges for this very religious Muslim girl. I asked her, if someone from her background would work in a restaurant in India.

A: No, it is considered awful like sweeping the floors, working for other people. It's really considered awkward like. You know all those servants of low caste, they are the ones who are used to that. But after coming here I got used to everything because I saw people who are a more higher level of life, you know,

I:[6] No, I don't know, tell me

A: Like they have been more better than me in the past, but now they are working, they are sweeping the floor, so I will, so I saw them, and I said if they can do that, why shouldn't I.

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Asma's work at Kentucky Fried Chicken also presented her with the additional challenge. Observing the Muslim dietary laws, she would not eat most meat and would only eat the "blessed part of the chicken." I wonder what it must have been like to work 20 hours or more a week and not eat any of the food she prepared. Asma took it all in stride.

Like Asma, Aisha comes from an observant Muslim family. And like Asma, she was unable to eat most of the food at the Roy Rogers where she worked. But for Aisha the challenge of working was how she both handled, and was perceived to handle, herself in a public world where men and women interacted. Aisha acutely experienced the tensions, discussed in Azim Nanji 's 1993 article"The Muslim Family in North America," which arise when previously separate worlds of men and women are merged in work settings. Aisha was friendly and outgoing. However, when her friendliness toward male co-workers and male classmates who came into Roy Rogers was observed by other members of her Bangladeshi Muslim community, her parents were informed. Her parents, worried that her reputation would be sullied, forced her to quit her job. Aisha believed she did nothing wrong. She was very upset to be denied the opportunity to earn the money she felt she needed to help her family, and "to save for college and stuff." Her parents felt otherwise, the money she had given to them was less important than their daughter's reputation. The subject was closed.

A number of girls commented that their parents had expressed feeling badly that their family's circumstances made it necessary to ask their daughters, and sons, to work and contribute. In most cases the daughters, despite the parents reservations, seemed to

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take their employment in stride. Anya, however, was an exception and clearly stated her ambivalence at having to work at such a young age. She commented, in Russia, "teenagers don't work, only when they are 20 or something, they have to work."Nevertheless, when she was 15, her father had heart surgery and her family badly needed money. So, Anya went to work at a clothing store. At the end of that summer, Anya gave her parents about a $1,000 to help pay the bills. Anya recalled that she had felt good giving her parents the money, but also remembered how hard it had been not to have been able to join her friends at the beach. Her employment, like so much else she had experienced since emigrating, made Anya depressed. Anya's articulation of ambivalence contrasted with the sentiments articulated by most of the other girls who had to work. To my surprise most girls who talked about working , neither complained about working or seemed terribly upset about their long hours. Point in fact, several of the undocumented girls told me, with considerable disappointment, that they had tried to find work, but couldn't find jobs without "papers." Ironically, I, the interviewer, was the one who became unsettled thinking about the girls balancing their part-time jobs of 20 to 25 hours a week while attending high school **and** learning a new language and culture. And yet, when I thought about their working, and some of their other comments, I wondered if work had emerged as a multi-faceted opportunity for many of the girls. Through their jobs the girls could not only earn money for their families and even some extra money for themselves, but also explore a new culture, test out their English and, perhaps, even assert a degree of independence.

The jobs that the girls had found, both those documented and undocumented,

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ranged widely. However, with the exception of Julie, who worked as a paid intern at the district attorney's office, all the girls' jobs were in the secondary labor market, either low-skill service industry or factory jobs. At times, the jobs reflected an ethnic niche, such that one Korean girl worked in a midtown nail salon, and two other Korean girls worked in Korean-owned markets. Most of the Chinese girls who lived in Chinatown or in Sunset Park worked in garment factories, often alongside their parents. Caribbean girls generally worked in fast food places in their neighborhood, such as Roy Rogers and MacDonalds. A few girls from a variety of countries worked as sales personnel in stores like Woolworth and chain drugstores. One of the English speaking Caribbean girls had gotten a Christmas season job at Bed Bath and Beyond. A few girls worked as cashiers or waitresses. Amelia from the Philippines had a part-time job at the day care center associated with the Catholic school where her mother worked as a secretary. Lina had recently applied for a job as an operator with New York Telephone. The job offered some flexibility of schedule so she would be able to attend college in the fall. Lina had also heard that New York Telephone would provide a tuition scholarship for college. Lina was desperately hoping she would get the job. It would be her ticket for the future after she graduated high school in June.

The girls' wages were close to minimum wage, a few made $5 an hour. No one made much more. And, with the exception of Lina's potential job with New York Telephone, and Julie's job at the District Attorney's Office, most of the girls' jobs provided neither hope of advancement, real skill development or tickets to a better future. They were transitional jobs, worked out of necessity and, also, availability. For their futures, the girls had other ambitions. How realistic or unrealistic were these perceptions

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and hopes will be explored in the final chapter, **"Past, Present, Future and the American Dream."**

**Inter-Generational Issues**

In October 1991 (New York Times), again in October 1995 (New York Times), and again in October 1997 (Hoge), the media picked up tragic stories in which conflicts between immigrant daughters and their families had resulted in threats of death or actual deaths. The first story came out of Texas. On the night of November 6th 1989, a Palestinian father with the collusion of his Brazilian-born wife bludgeoned to death their 16 year old daughter, "Tina". Tina, a well-traveled immigrant student, had been an honor student. She had played competitive soccer and, in defiance of her parents prohibitions, had both worked at a local fast-food restaurant and had begun to date. The father enraged that his daughter no longer respected his authority had killed her. Both parents justified the father's actions on cultural grounds. Their assertions were echoed by members of their immediate family and their community. "The Isas had to discipline their daughter or lose respect. They would be embarrassed in front of everyone in the country" (New York Times 1991:A14).

In October 1995 in New York, Arelis, a Dominican girl, her mother and sibling were killed. In a plan apparently gone amok, Arelis had, allegedly, hired the murder suspects to kill her domineering father, whose old world ways had prevented her from having the life she wanted. In the aftermath of the triple murder of his family, the father acknowledged he had kept a "tight rein on his daughter" but denied that their relationship was so contentious that his daughter would have planned his murder (New York Times

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1995). And more recently, Hoge (1997) reported on some Muslim families in Britain which have threatened to kill daughters who left home refusing to agree to arranged marriages. (The attitude of the girls in my study towards arranged marriages will be discussed in Chapter Eight, "**Identity and Gender.**")

The drama of these inter-generational conflicts within the context of acculturation captures the public's attention and imagination and often forms a stereotype of immigrant families in which cultural conflicts are inevitable and that parent-child relationships are tense if not "deadly." The irony of this media attention is the attention the media also give to those immigrant children who have been the victims of violence in their immigrant, often poor, minority neighborhoods (McFadden 1990:B1, Pierre-Pierre, 1993:A1). In these news stories, the public grieves along with the immigrant family. The dead immigrant child or teen-ager is described as having been an honor student and/or an athlete. He/she was well-liked by his/her peers. He/she had overcome the challenges of being an immigrant, and had ambitions for the future that would have brought honor to his/her family and his/her immigrant community. In these stories, the immigrant family is portrayed as a unified family, collectively struggling to overcome adversity and find its place within the American dream.

While these contradictory images of immigrant families are also found in the sociological and psychological literature (Aronowitz 1983; Eppink 1979; Handlin 1951; Nguyen and Williams 1989; Rosenthal 1984; Rutter 1974, 1975; Sluzki 1979; Ziegler 1977), most often the image that emerges in the literature is of the struggle of immigrant parents and their children (Eppink 1979; Nguyen and Williams 1985; Sluzki 1979). The inter-

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generational struggle is framed in terms of immigrant parents' attempts to hold on to some of their more traditional ideas and practices, while their children, exposed to a different world, struggle to make sense, test out, and ultimately adopt some or all the cultural and social mores of the America they perceive and experience. Inter-generational tensions, including the shifts in cross-generational power (Giles 1990), have thus become a major motif in discussions about post-arrival adjustments of immigrant families. Unfortunately, and as discussed in the "**Introduction,**" many studies on immigrant families and communities (Horowitz 1985; see International Migration Review 1994) fail to discriminate if the child or teen in question was born here or abroad and/or at what age the foreign-born child arrived. Studies also tend to focus on intact families (Eppink 1979; Sluzki 1979). In addition, few research studies seem to explore the experiences of individuals and families in which extended chain migrations resulted in long separations, and/or in which post-migration households were single parented, and/or re-constituted or blended families. Aside from such novels as Edwidge Danticat's Breathe Eyes Memory (1994) and Julia Alvarez How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents (1991), the meaning of these other contemporary migration experiences and their contributions to inter-generational tensions seem to be generally absent in what has been written about post-migration family adjustment.

Further, many family studies assume a Western adolescent developmental process. Universalizing this process, adolescence is understood as that period in which the individual struggles to develop his/her own identity, resulting in a physical, if not psychological, separation from his/her parents. During this process of individuation or

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"self" definition, the significant "other" changes from parents to peers. However, parents often provide both the standard to be emulated as well as the standard from which to rebel. It is often assumed that, as immigrant adolescents interface with a new culture and society, the prototypical developmental challenges of adolescence are amplified, resulting in greater identity confusion and more intense inter-generational conflict. However, an understanding of immigrant families, which assumes a western concept of the adolescent developmental process, is inherently flawed. Individuation and separation from one's family of origin may not always be a task of adolescence. Similarly, and, particularly for girls, the peer culture may not emerge as the dominant or primary group of adolescent socialization. In fact, adolescence as a distinctive phase of development may not even exist. In short, analyses of the adjustment of immigrant families, which seeks only to understand family dynamics through a western framework of adolescence, may result in both overlooking and misunderstanding what is actually happening and, possibly, why it is happening.

With these thoughts as a backdrop, I wondered what was the experience of the girls I interviewed. How well did they get along with their parents? What did they perceive as their parents' expectation of them, and what were their expectations of themselves and their parents? What were the pressure points? What was the nature of disagreements or conflicts, and how were they managed or resolved? Would their narratives confirm either or both media stereotypes, or conform to that portrayed in the majority of social science and psychological literature? Would their adolescence mirror that found in their own societies or that found in the West and the United States? And would my findings affirm

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feminist research which concludes that social (and intellectual) development differs by gender (e.g. Gilligan 1982; Gilligan, Lyons and Hanner 1990)[7]?

In general, the girls I interviewed described good to excellent relationships with their parent or parents. The significant exceptions to this pattern were the experiences of girls who, as described above, had histories involving prolonged separations from their parent or parents; and/or whose post-migration household involved a stepparent married to a parent they basically did not know. No doubt, the more positive and less conflicted relationships between the majority of girls and their parents may be in part an artifact of sampling.[8] As discussed in Chapter II, "**Methods**," despite my best efforts, school staff may not have identified girls who were experiencing significant problems at home. Or, these girls may have been identified by school staff, but then refused to meet with me. Or, these girls, because of frequent absenteeism, may not have been known to, or remembered by, school staff, and thus not referred to me. Or, in sharp contrast to the profile put forth in most of the literature, the girls I interviewed may in fact be more typical than assumed. At this time, it is impossible to know how much sampling resulted in my findings and how much they reflect what really is going on.

One of the underlying questions behind this study has been the need to better understand how age at migration might significantly impact on post-arrival experiences. While the study was not planned as a comparative study to differentiate outcomes by different ages at the time of arrival, the pattern of family dynamics which surfaced in my interviews suggests that the girls' arrival at the beginning or during adolescence significantly shaped their post-migration interactions with their parents. All the girls, with

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the possible exception of those who had lived in more than one country prior to arrival, had been socialized into the mores of their parents' culture within the national context of that culture. Their childhood experiences, including their schooling, had already developed in them a social and cultural frame of reference. Transported into a new culture, the girls' anchor amidst the changes they experienced was both, their family, even their dis-membered family, and the culture into which they had been, even if incompletely, socialized. Family and native culture provided a sense of continuity and in that continuity, for many, a sense of protection from the strange world in which they now lived. Thus, even when cultural conflicts did surface, and they definitely did, they appeared in most cases to be contained and did not develop into Sluzki's (1979) crisis. In general, they did not heat up nor become explosive. Instead, I observed with many potential cultural conflicts either an explicit acceptance of parental authority or a form of accommodation or resignation that family and culture were stronger than whatever new behaviors or beliefs they were trying on or testing out.

Margaret Mead wrote (1978) that each generation grows up in worlds alien to those of their parents' generation. The discontinuity of these worlds creates some of the tensions between the generations because neither the adolescent nor the parental generation can truly know the experience of the other. This disjuncture has dramatically accelerated since World War II, as the industrial world has transformed into the post-industrial world. However, even as dimensions of that known world change, children generally grow up in worlds with which their parents are familiar. In contrast, both immigrant adolescents and their parents experience a new world in which neither has

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roots. As immigrant parents and immigrant children learn about the new culture, pre-existent collective family relationships (e.g. cultural traditions in which the individual is secondary to the group) may be reinforced, or new cross-generational bonds may develop as family members struggle together to make sense of the unfamiliar and to hold unto the familiar. At the same time, there may be real shifts in the power relationships between generations as the children become their parents' teachers, speak for them in their newly acquired English, and/or mediate for them in the new society (Giles 1990).

For many families strong cross-generational familial bonds mirrored their on-going immersion in a defined ethnic and/or religious community. With the singular exception of Aisha, to be discussed below, the South Asian girls seemed to have the strongest sense of family coherence and a minimal amount of cross-generational stress. All these families were actively practicing their religion -Muslim, Hindu or Sikh - and seemed connected to a wider non-spatial cultural community which reinforced the integrity of their family values and behaviors. I also observed that Ameila experienced a similar sense of family cohesion. While Catholicism was a part of her family's life, her cultural framework seemed, in part, to be reinforced by her family's residence in a building populated by other Filipinos. However, across all national and regional clusters, many families without a strong religious affiliation or ethnic community connection similarly experienced fairly strong positive cross-generational relations, e.g. Gabriella (Brazil), Hye-Sook (Korea), Carmen (Dominican Republic), Sherie (Haiti), Julia (China), Mila (Latvia), Eva (Poland) , to name just a few.

I asked these and other girls about their good relationships with their parents. Was

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it common? If not, what did they think was responsible for their good relationships? A number of girls stated that their parents' trust in them made it possible for them to communicate with their parents. The result was a positive feedback loop. Gabriella commented:

> Maybe it is just me. Just me, you know my mother, even though I know she cares a lot about me, she always let (sic) me go on my own. You know she trusts me a lot. I see these people, they can't do anything, they have practice the coach has to write a note so that their mother knows, you know, because they are always so worried about them. I know she worries about me. But she knows I wouldn't lie to her. I would never lie to her. They go through a lot of things so they can do what they want. And sometimes they go around and lie so they can get what they want.

Gabriella connected increased parental control to parental fears, both their perception of incipient community violence and to less tangible threats of an unknown culture. She also connected current levels of parental control to the level of independence permitted in their pre-migration communities. She suggested chaperones provided Brazilian parents with a sense of security which enabled them to give their children some freedom. Carmen also mentioned chaperones and how in the barrio (in the Dominican Republic) "you know everyone and everyone knows you, they take care of you if anything happens" which allows parents to be less controlling than here. And yet, in the absence of chaperones here, neither Gabriella's nor Carmen's parents seemed to impose serious restrictions on their daughters as the girls reported their schoolmates parents had.

Carmen believed her mother trusted her. This trust developed out of their open communication, mother to daughter, and daughter to mother. Carmen believed that parents don't talk to their children enough, and thus the children must rely on others, "perhaps the wrong person" from whom they get information. She acknowledged that

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mothers seem less ashamed here to discuss their daughters' periods, men and sex. She feels that her mother has been open with her, and thus she does not have to go behind her back as some of her Dominican and other Latina friends. But Carmen conceded that at times she disagrees with her mother's ideas.

> She (her mother) says I shouldn't talk to guys in the street because people start talking, maybe think that they you are fooling around. I say mom that doesn't mean anything that I talk to them in the street, I have many friends and they respect me, so I don't know why she is always complaining about that.

Carmen also objected to her mother's repeated warnings about boys and the fact that her mother frequently "starts asking me things like who is that guy and this and that and I don't like it." But even when they disagree, and even when she gets mad at her mother, Carmen recognizes the love her mother has for her and that what she is hearing is her mother's worry. She thus feels that she can sit and talk to her mother. "Your parents are your best friends, they will always be there for you." Carmen concludes. This last comment is quite remarkable from a girl whose mother is really her stepmother and from whom she was physically separated for over 8 years.

Mei who, unlike her school mates, spends time with her parents, concluded that parents who don't spend time with their children send a message that they don't care and the result is that children then don't care.

> Students never study, they don't seem to care, ... Their parents don't care, parents work long hours and never see their children and have no time to sit with them."

Natalia (Haiti) and Tracy (Hong Kong) both were frustrated that their parents did not really talk or spend time with them. Natalia wished her parents were "more similar" to the parents she sees on TV, on such shows as "Family Matters." "In TV families when

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kids have trouble they talk to their parents, they (her parents) are not like that, when you have a trouble they scream at you."

Natalia, however, is close to her aunt who lives upstairs from her family. When Natalia needs adult support, her aunt is there for her.

Tracy was less fortunate, she felt abandoned and neglected by her parents.

> All changed,...family spent more time together in Hong Kong, mother didn't work there, this is the US. Have to rely on oneself, parents have no time to care for you, they just care about their work.....They don't care about us, if you have a problem "solve by yourself," they don't care, not interested, problem is stupid, don't care.

Tracy's and Mei's comments were interesting contrasts to most other students who saw the long hours of their parents' labor as signs of their love and interest in their children's well-being. However, their comments contained echoes of a 1994 poll which found that 4 of 10 teens surveyed felt that their parents did not spend time with them, which resulted in their estrangement from their parents (Chira 1994), and distrust between the generations. The girls' comments, and the national poll affirms, regardless of cultural background, migration process or other family characteristics or experiences, that communication in which each generation **listens to and hears** the other, makes such a significant difference to family relations.

**Family Integrity, Sacrifice and Filial Gratitude**

Family sacrifice, on the girls' and their siblings' behalf, was another theme which emerged in discussions about cross-generational relationships. Meena felt that she needed to repay her parents who sacrificed a "luxurious" life in India to come to the United States for her and her brother. While Meena's parents have not stated specific expectations for

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her, Mei's parents have been somewhat more explicit. They want her to have a "better life that does not depend on labor. I don't have to work hard physically to get money for my living." They have said, "you are on your own now, whatever you want to do we will support you." Mei understood her parents to be saying that, "we have brought you to new opportunities, it is now up to you to make use of them". This sense of opportunity provided through parental sacrifices, also surfaced in my interviews with several girls who had long separations from their parents. For these girls their parents' decision to leave them behind, their mothers' and their sufferings, had to make sense. Thus, now reunited, they wanted to prove that in the long run, it all is "worthwhile," to utilize well the opportunity they have afforded them, to make their parents proud. A corollary of this theme was the sense of a number of girls that they should not complain neither about the losses they had experienced through the migration nor their unhappiness with the life they now lived. While not always happy, the girls felt, as Ziegler (1977) found with Italian immigrant children in Australia in the late 60's, that they needed to hide their negative feelings and doubts from their parents. The flip side of this was the expression of concern registered by several girls about the emotional well-being of their parents. A number of parents who had experienced a lowering of employment status and an increase of economic worries post-migration were depressed and/or enraged that their expectations had not been realized. Li said that she worried about her father who had been an engineer in China but now was reduced to a restaurant worker. Meena similarly felt that her father was much more depressed than she had ever seen him. In each of these situations, the daughters seemed especially committed to achieve success here so as to make their

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parents sacrifice worth-while. However, Lubra's commitment to succeed was more tenuous. Lubra's told me that her father felt he was unable to make a decent living in the United States or to reclaim the status he had once had in Morocco. As a result, Lubra went on, her father had begun to drink heavily and had become abusive. Lubra felt her mother was willing to return to Morocco, but that her father would not go back a "failure." Lubra, experiencing great stress at home, worried if she would be able to do well at school. But even taking into account Lubra's situation, the girls' seemed to be communicating a family-centered orientation in which "family survival, in the long run, matters more than short-term individual happiness" (Ziegler 1977:332).

The above comments reflect how some of the girls understood their own behaviors and the dynamic relationships of their families. As an observer, however, I frequently wondered if the girls' strong commitments and embrace of their family's needs and values, were much more a result of pre-migration cultural and familial socialization and the girls use of that pre-history to anchor them post-migration. Many girls shared with me their disgust with what they saw in the streets, on TV and in their schools. The America in which they lived did not seem as attractive as that which they had imagined. Their shock at the lack of "decorum" of others made them turn back towards their own culture and family mores. Kristina compared her family's culture with the one she observed amongst the students at her school.

> For example, I'm not allowed to have a boyfriend and that doesn't bother me because they have boyfriends but, for example, flirting I hate. I think for Albanians it is not good. My parents don't like that. I cannot stand to stay with people who really flirt, like girls who flirt and talk dirty words. I hate that because my family no one talks, in my family cursing and stuff. Nobody does that and I don't want to

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> have that kind of friends, who do bad things and they talk bad in front of me. I don't want my friends to curse somebody and to hear bad words that I am not supposed to hear. Those are not the kind of friends I like to have.

**Parental Authority**

Respect for one's parents and other adults was a central tenet for many girls and mapped their behavior within their families. Although most frequently associated with eastern cultures, "filial piety"- "hsiao" in Chinese - is fundamental to inter-generational relations in many cultures. A child is thought to be obligated to provide both, emotional and economic support to his/her parents, and to bring "glory to the family" through educational and occupational achievements" (Lin 1993:272). Obedience and cooperation are stressed within a context of interdependence. The family's honor not the individual's desires is all important (Zhou 1997:199). We saw above, in relation to Aisha' parents prohibition of her working at Roy Rogers, how the transplantation and/or actualization of this cultural value may present problems for immigrant families striving to survive. Even when the girls shared that their parents were strict, and that they disagreed with them on specific issues, I observed for the majority of girls that parental authority was accepted as a given. This is not to say that the girls did not, at times, reveal a range of attitudes and behaviors - passive acceptance to accommodation to circumscribed protest. But, throughout my interviewing, I was surprised how infrequently the girls described behavior which was in direct opposition to their parents' rules and/or wishes.[9] Part of this may also relate to the girls taking on more adult responsibilities, and thus being pushed to mature faster, typical adolescent worries paling in face of more significant issues of family survival. On the whole, I believe, that for these girls, acceptance of parental authority was

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a central element of their sense of their family's integrity and identity.

Salma seemed to exemplify the total acceptance of her father's authority. Salma's mother died when Salma was four years old. Her father married her mother's sister with whom he had four more children. Salma doesn't wear the traditional Muslim dress at school because she gets teased and is called "Hindu." Once she also had her nose ring pulled by a classmate. When she returns home she puts on her traditional clothes. Salma said she is too shy to talk about her future with her father. She would like to become a nurse, but doesn't know if he even wants her to go to college. When I interviewed Salma, her father was in Bangladesh taking care of real estate, but also looking for a husband for her. Salma knew she would be able to see a photograph of her chosen husband, but that she would not be allowed to meet him before her wedding. She, however, said that she trusts her father and will obey whatever he decides for her future - college, career, even husband.

Asma described her family as very religious, but she does not think her parents were particularly strict. She agrees with what her father and mother have taught her, including how to behave towards elders.

> You respect them and don't shout at them. In my religion we are not supposed to lift our heads and speak like this, we are supposed to bend our head and look at the ground and speak to elders.

Asma explains that her father is her role model, I asked if she always agrees with him.

> I: OK, how are you and your parents getting along? I hear that you and your father are pretty close to each other that he has become your role model but are there certain things you and they disagree about?
> A: I don't think so.

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I: Is that typically Indian or do your family and other families try to....

A: It is not typically Indian but may be you can say its typical, but it is not very typical you know, most of the Indian families, the children will agree with the parents, and the parents will agree with the children, maybe they don't agree inside but they usually tend to agree because they believe that children should respect their parents. It is not like here, where children sue their parents, argue with their parents.

I: What is your reaction to all that?

A: I am surprised.

I: You are surprised?

A: Yeah, its like, I don't think I'll ever do that, maybe he won't let me do things, but I will always respect my parents.

Asma's comments indicate that all might not be as easy as that which appears on the surface, but that because of "respect," children will not raise their voices and protest parental authority. Asma was surprised to learn that in America some children sued their parents. Amelia (Philippines), who watched day time talk shows, was equally surprised and was aghast at the lack of respect many children here seemed to exhibit towards their parents. Neither Asma nor Amelia's exposure to the possibility that children could, and did, disagree with their parents suggested to them that there might be other options for them. To the contrary, exposure to alternative family dynamics seemed to push them back towards affirming their own traditions.

Marisol, like Asma, enjoyed a very warm relationship with her father. Marisol feels that she and her father can talk and also can tease one another. Her father does not want her to date. And he has told her that when she dates in the future, he wants her only to go out with men from their Mexican community. However, Marisol wants to be an actress. But her father says "no daughter of mine is going to be an actress."

Teresa also would like to be an actress, or a model. But, like Marisol's father,

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Teresa's father was against such a career for his daughter.

> My father says no, it is not right for Albanian culture... Because the people who go to model, or act or (sic) musician, they would say that the girl... Anton's daughter, she hangs around the streets and she is *** (undecipherable).

Teresa goes on to describe her father.

T: My father is strict in everything but if he doesn't like something we don't even ask him. We just agree with him whatever he says. If he says "Don't wear the thing", we don't talk about it no more. We just forget about it.
I: And what would happen if you decided to wear it?
T: I wouldn't do that.
I: Would you have to move out?
T: No, I wouldn't like to do that. They are my parents and I don't want to make them nervous.
I: So Dad has his ideas. What about Mom? Does Mom go along with Dad?
T: Yeah.
I: Does she ever agree or say that it is okay that she wears such and such?
T: No. Whatever he says goes.

It seemed for Teresa that there was little possibility that her desire to become an actress would be realized. Her father, backed by her mother, had decided and there was no room for negotiation. It is less clear in Marisol's case. In the past, Marisol's stepmother, who is considerably younger than her father, had successfully stepped in as her ally. As a result of the stepmother's actions, Marisol's father had, at times, softened towards Marisol's wishes. Will Marisol's stepmother be able to help her realize her wishes for a career? That remains unknown. In the interim, Marisol says her father makes decisions and "there is no playing." In sum, each of these girls understood and accepted the power of their father's authority.

Jyoti's story suggested an alternative form of accepting parental authority and family tradition. Jyoti comes from a traditional Indian Hindu family. For the past 20

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months she has been secretly dating a former classmate, who is a Muslim, from Pakistan. Both Jyoti and her boyfriend know that dating is not allowed in their families. In fact, in both their families, arranged marriages are the rule. Jyoti believes that her family has already begun to look for an appropriate husband for her. Her boyfriend also thinks that his family has begun to make inquiries in Pakistan for a potential wife for him. The couple know that neither of their families would ever accept their marriage to someone of a different religion. When asked her feelings about an arranged marriage, Jyoti stated such a marriage would be okay for her. She only would want to be sure that the man has a nice personality, respects and loves her. When asked about having to give up her current boyfriend, she seemed relatively calm; it was inevitable, they knew that. She seemed neither conflicted nor resigned, but rather, practical. This was how things would be. I was really struck by the contradiction between Jyoti' serious breach of family rules, simultaneous to her calm acceptance of the more traditional life her family planned for her. Her rebellion thus seemed to be situational, circumscribed without either actively interfering with or altering the traditions of her family and community.

In contrast to Jyoti and her acceptance of family tradition, Aisha exemplified the clash between parents' culture and a daughter's desire to live more independently. Previously I described Aisha's parents' reaction to her association with young men in the context of her employment. Aisha also recalled an incident when she felt her privacy had been violated. An older brother had gone through her schoolbooks, found a note from a male class-mate, and showed the note to her parents. Her parents became furious and "started to argue about it. And after that they started the marriage thing all over again."

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The "marriage thing" was finding a suitable man for Aisha. Aisha told me she did not want to get married until she finished college. But, while she acknowledged that her protests would probably in the end not make much of a difference, she has continued to do things to sabotage the process.

A: Two months ago they said "This is your last semester, be ready". I said "Be ready for what?" They said "Going back to Bangladesh and getting married". "But I have college to finish. Don't talk to me about those". My brother and my mother was (sic) there and said, "Why not, you are going to be 17" "This is the time to finish my college and if I want to get married I will tell you guys". "What kind of thing you are saying, do you understand"? "I am saying the right thing, the thing I think is right". They were so surprised, looking at me "What is this?" I said "I am not the one you can just force to do this like you did my sister. I am not the one." They said "You are turning bad. You are not going to talk to your friends" and then I was cut off from my friends for one week.

I: So they punished you for saying what you said?

A: Yes. But I said "Forget it", I don't care.

I: So what do you think is going to happen now?

A: I don't know. My sister-in-law who is in Bangladesh, my brother's wife, said "Why don't you send her pictures so that next year when she comes back maybe we can get her married". My mother said "Where are your pictures" and I said "I tore all of them up". She said "Why" and I said "Because you were going to take them so I threw them away".

Aisha described another incident when her father invited a potential suitor to the home. For the occasion, Aisha was asked to dress up and to cook the evening meal. Not interested in marriage, regardless with whom, Aisha over salted the food, and then she walked poorly when she walked in front of the suitor. She remarked, " I was trying to do something bad so he wouldn't like me." Aisha's attempts to actively obstruct the process in which her parents are engaged have probably only slowed the process. I asked Aisha her feelings about the future. She told me that she had tried to protest her family's Muslim traditions but it was very hard - she is all alone, not only against her parents but also her

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brothers, "there are four against one." She also shared, that at times she gets confused about what is really the best things for her.

> ... My parents they were born there and they got used to it. 50 years of living with the same thing and when I came here I was 14 or 15, I see new things. So when I do new things in my way and sometimes I have to balance with them, sometimes I have to balance with this. I can go this way, I can go that way. I am stuck in the middle.

Inside, Aisha is not always sure what is the best thing for herself. She wants badly to go away to college, for she believes only through a college degree will she be able to escape and have the possibility of the freedom she wanted. "If a girl has (sic) educated and she can handle herself, whatever her parents say doesn't matter." But Aisha thinks her parents wont let her go away to college. I asked her what would happen if she tried to defy her parents' wishes and refused to get married when and to whom they wanted. Aisha simply answered, "no, there is really no way out."

Thus despite her best, and often quite creative attempts, Aisha seemed to recognize that her family and its culture were stronger than she was. She therefore felt increasingly resigned to the fact that "after (high school) graduation is done, they (would) send me back home to get married." Would she then return to attend college? That future remained less certain.

**Other Areas of Inter-generational Conflicts**

In my interviews with other girls, areas of contestation and protestation did emerge but rarely in terms of the cultural conflicts that have been described above. I did not hear much evidence of the structural power struggles identified in "Counseling Haitian Students"by Gilles (1990) wherein parents lose their authority, because of post-migration

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shifts in their legitimate, expert, referent, reward and coercive power. I also did not hear from any of the girls what I and others had witnessed amongst some immigrant teens - "calling BCW (Bureau of Child Welfare)" as means to thwart their parents' attempt to discipline them (Dugger 1996; Thrasher 1988). I also did not hear the girls express reservations or concerns about their role as family interpreters, and or mediators with the external world, e.g. going, on behalf of their non-English speaking parents, to the bank or post-office or to the schools of younger siblings. The ambiguities of role and power which can result when children become their family's interpreter and/or mediator (Gany and Michael 1993; Haffner 1992) did not seem to be an issue for the girls I interviewed. And, finally, not one girl mentioned what I had at times experienced growing up with immigrant parents and have heard from others, embarrassment about "old world parents' dress, speech and/or manners. (See Julia Alvarez' How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents (1991) for a beautiful description of this teen-age angst.)

Very few girls raised any of these issues, even obliquely. Instead, some girls complained about their parents' unrelenting pressure for them to do well in school. Some girls felt, no matter how well they did in school, their parents were never quite satisfied or relaxed their pressure. Doretha (Ghana), who was a B student, resented her parents' pressuring her. She just wanted to "hang out with her friends, and talk on the phone." In contrast, Li (China), who was already earning A's, felt satisfied with her schoolwork. She just wished her parents would ease up and stop comparing her with other students.

More common than complaints about parental pressure for good grades, although far less frequent than anticipated, were inter-generational conflicts about what was and

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what was not age-appropriate behavior. What was the proper age to: wear lipstick or nail polish, date, attend a party and/or stay out late with friends? Some girls ignored parents' limits and prohibitions. For example, I asked Patrice (Barbados) if there were things about which she and her mother disagreed.

P: Yes.
I: Like what?
P: She doesn't want me to have a boyfriend cause she thinks I am too young.
I: And what do you think?
P: I think I am old enough. She thinks I am going to have sex and get pregnant. That is because of what she did. But I am not like her.
I: Do you have a boyfriend?
P: Yes.

Rowena's father didn't want her to date, but her mother said dating was okay but not sex. Unknown to both her parents, Rowena had both, a boyfriend back in her native Guyana and had had sex with him. In her mind, her parents' concern was a non-issue. Her boyfriend was in Guyana and she was in New York. She planned to be true to him and, someday, would go back and marry him. (See Chapter VIII, "**Identity and Gender**" for a more in-depth discussion of the girls' dating and sexual activity.)

Several girls mentioned that their parents worried that they would use drugs and/or smoke. Most of these girls seemed to feel that these were unwarranted worries. No one acknowledged involvement with drugs. Natasha (former USSR), however, told me that she had smoked cigarettes. Ironically, Natasha brought up her smoking in the context of how "cool" her mother was, rather than as an example of an inter-generational conflict.

N: My Mom is cool. I think she is cool because she is not old and she had me when she was 17. She still understands me. My grandmother I can't say that but my Mom is cool because she knows how I feel and she lets me go wherever I want.

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I: Are there areas that you and your Mom don't agree on?
N: I smoked for a while. I told my Mom, she knew about it. She said "I can't make you stop it because even if I watch after you, if you want to do it, you are going to do it. I know that. But I prefer you didn't." And she said how bad it was and everything. I smoked for a little while but then I dropped it because I get bored with things all the time. I mainly smoked because it was a habit. I needed something to do.
I: Was there any pressure from any of your friends?
N: Most of my friends smoke. So I tried and then I tried again, and then I got into it and then I just got out of it. I don't smoke now.

Although not common, more intense inter-generational conflicts did occur in several families and households. These conflicts seemed to fall into two patterns. The first pattern was identified above in terms of the seemingly unresolvable chasm between parents and daughters who had been separated for long periods of time and now were unable to successfully reunite as a family. This category is perhaps best exemplified by Julie, whose experience with her mother was described earlier in this chapter. The second pattern is related to the first, but is focused more on the girls' current sense of being unappreciated for their efforts within the home or at school. This pattern is exemplified by Marva's experiencing a seemingly indifferent father despite her considerable school achievements; and also by Evelyne who feels her efforts go unrecognized by her grandmother and by her aunt's family.

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the experiences of some of the girls who were reunified with their parents post-migration. In my discussion of "parent-first" migration I focused on the sense of betrayal and disappointment that resulted from the different perspectives children and parents have about the "rationale" for migration and subsequent separation. Here I want to briefly revisit the issue of "parent-first" migration, focusing

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more on the nature of on-going inter-generational conflicts post-reunification. In my own work as a family therapist and in the counseling sessions of school-based support staff, immigrant youth frequently describe their pre-migration images of their parents. The images which have sustained them are, unfortunately, often romanticizations, larger than life fantasies about their parent(s). When the child meets the real flesh and blood parent, the parent can't but fail to live up to the idealized parent. But there is no time to mourn the idealized parent. Instead, the real parent, who has his/her own fantasies about the child left behind and for whom he/she sacrificed, begins to relate to the child from his/herr perspective. This perspective may include a number of potentially problematic assumptions. First, the child in front of them is not the child they left behind or even in the photo. They have grown up. Yet, the parent may relate to the child as being much younger. Two, the parent may be stuck in time. While they may have been able to perpetuate in their own minds and in the immigrant community in which they live the culture in which they grew up, the child has experienced a changing culture, often one that is heavily influenced by American popular culture. Failure to recognize the passage of time, the parent may be asserting a "home culture" that is, in fact, non-existent and thus unfamiliar to the child who has just migrated. The cultural time warp between parent and child, gets further aggravated by the child's rapid exposure to American culture in the media and at school. In addition, as the parent is already in a different stage of post-migration adjustment, he/she may be unable or unwilling to recognize and/or allow the child to move through a period of mourning for the loss of nation and home. Parents who feel that they have waited and worked so hard to be reunited with their child may expect a

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level of affection and gratitude that, even in the best of circumstances, takes time to develop. The child's failure to express either affection and/or gratitude may cause the parent to feel rejected, if not betrayed. Finally, there is the issue of the developmental stage of the child. Coming during adolescence, the child may be ready to move into more independent activities, or at least become more involved in worlds separate from the family. In contrast the parent may be trying to get to know the child, or at least trying to establish his/her personal idea of family togetherness. The mismatch of the above perceptions and expectations provides fertile ground for inter-generational problems.

The second pattern of inter-generational conflict may be rooted in the lack of familiarity between parent and children when there have been years of separation, but I believe this pattern is also common in families where there has been no separation or even migration. In these circumstances of inter-generational tension, the prevailing problem seems to be a general lack of communication and sense of support between the generations. Parents seem unable to provide encouragement for and/or recognition of their children's activities and accomplishments. And children may feel that no matter what they do, they can never please or satisfy their parents. Further, in some cases the demands that the parents make on their children may be unrealistic given the child's age and/or emotional and developmental capacities. Both, parent and child, perpetually feel that their needs are not being met and resentment and conflict develop. In interviewing immigrant adolescents who share their anger about their parents, it is too simplistic to attribute these problems to cross-cultural conflicts or as consequences of the migration process. I believe, therefore, in both Evelyne's and Marva's situations that migration played a role, but a

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minor one. I briefly touched on Marva's problems at home earlier in this chapter. From Marva's description it is clear that her stepmother has not accepted her presence in the household and has, basically, isolated Marva from the rest of the family. Marva must clean her own clothes and also must buy her clothes and toiletries from the money she earns from her summer job and her after-school tutoring. Despite the ostracism of her stepmother and step siblings, Marva has managed to do extremely well in school.

> I can remember when I came up here, the first report card I got since I was in America the average was an 87 and I think I did so well cause in Guyana I never used to get that. I was so happy with myself and I went home and showed him my report card and he didn't say anything and then when I came up in 11th grade and my average was a 97.94 or something like that he didn't even look at it.

Her father, however, has not acknowledged her school successes, in fact she thinks he takes credit for her hard work.

> I really don't think he knows how good I am doing in school. When he comes to school night he thinks he did well. He thinks he does well because he is interested in his daughter's education. He thinks he succeeds and he has nothing to do with it. I am the one who sits down every night and goes to bed late studying.

Marva is now second in her graduating class. She has been accepted by several colleges. While Marva would like to leave home and attend college "upstate," she feels that her father wants her to go to CUNY because it is much cheaper. In my interviews with her, Marva also complained that her father did not allow her to go out with friends or even to attend her senior prom.

> Sometimes he (father) makes me so mad. I just regret coming over here. Just looking at his face alone just makes me mad. I would say, some children in this school, just looking at them and you know "Oh my God this girl didn't even do her work. She just goes out." They keep talking how they go out this weekend and everything. And I am sure their parents like them. I don't do anything. I just do my work cause if I was in Guyana, I used to get 50s and 60s and my mother used

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> to brag about it. She used to go around and say "You see her, she is going to be the next president" and stuff like that. But he . . sometimes I think that he is not proud. I've been getting 100s on my report card.

Marva is tough. She has succeeded in doing well despite a very difficult home life and despite the fact that the high school was one of the worst ones I visited. A school which was chaotic, and one in which violence and failure were not uncommon. I believed Marva's success reflected the anchor she carried with her, the mother she had left behind in Guyana, who believed in her and who had sent her to New York so she could have opportunities unavailable in Guyana. That support and love seemed to carry Marva this far. I wondered, how much farther it would carry her.

Unlike Marva, Evelyne felt she basically had no one. A 21 years old high school senior, Evelyne was one of the oldest girls I interviewed, but also one of the more depressed girls. For Evelyne, the memory of her father who allegedly had been killed by the Tonton Macoute, served as one of the incentives for her desire to emigrate to the United States and live with her paternal grandmother. But life with grandmother has not been what she anticipated. Evelyne sleeps in the hallway of her grandmother's apartment, on a bed that is closed up during the day. She does her homework in the kitchen and otherwise uses the kitchen as her living space. She has no room of her own, and no privacy. Evelyne cooks for her grandmother and massages and exercises her grandmother's arthritic legs. Evelyne also works 20 hours a week at MacDonalds. She has few friends. Evelyne described being trapped. Her grandmother frequently yells at her and threatens to" throw my clothes into the street, but she don't do it, but maybe someday she will." Despite Evelyne's efforts to help her grandmother, the older woman is never

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satisfied.

> She doesn't eat salt and I cook and she doesn't like (it) and yells at me, you can't do anything for me, I bring you here and you don't do anything for me, go out to your boyfriends, why don't you stay with them.

But Evelyne feels that she can't really go out.

> I cook for her (grandmother). I never go out, not to movies, I just stay home, not because she tells me, because they don't say anything, I can go, they won't tell me not to, but then they will say bad things about me, I don't like that and I have really no place to go.

She adds, "I'm 21, but if I have a man who likes me I can't have them over. I can't be in the street talking to him because they will have no respect for me." Evelyne feels caught between her dreams and the realities of having little money, constant complaints and criticisms, and no fall back situation in Haiti. She sees marriage as her escape.

> Wish I could go somewhere where I can talk, have privacy. I want God to help me do everything the best I can, then I will marry a good person so I can leave the situation have an easier time.

Evelyne reminded me of Cinderella. She lived beside the kitchen instead of under the stairs and, instead of horrible stepsisters, she had an ailing and bitter grandmother. But, like Cinderella, the spell that had been cast over her would only be lifted by her marrying a man who would take her away. And yet, Evelyne also had plans to attend college and get a license as a physical therapist. I wondered, however, without more support from her family, if she would be able to escape through her own efforts or through the appearance of "her prince."

This chapter has explored the girls in relationship to their parents and their families. It has examined how the family has provided, for some girls, an anchor or sense

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of continuity; and for other girls has created a frustrating, if not problematic, context for their post-arrival adjustments. The next chapter shifts focus to the other principal context of the girls' post-migration lives - their experiences passing through the school house door.

## ENDNOTES

1. This category includes one student who lived independently with non-related adult women, one student who lived with the ex-husband of her aunt and his daughter, and one student living with a school friend and her friend's mother.

2. In my study, "mother-first" migration seemed to result more frequently in generational schisms. Often in father-first migration the children were left behind with the mother who then came to the United States with the children, and the child thereby had continuous parenting from at least one parent. In mother-first migration children are frequently left with a grandparent or other relative and the child then joins a single parent or a re-constituted household with a stepfather when they migrate years later.

3. Again, did the cultural traditions of the girls inhibit expression of individual desires? I strongly doubt if cultural timidity and/or self-effacement played a significant role as the girls were quite candid and forthright with their opinions about other familial and personal issues.

4. To some degree, there were differences in class origins. Thus, even though many of the other girls' families were struggling economically, most of these girls came from families that pre-migration had enjoyed more middle class lives.

5. The emergence of regional patterns, however, may also be an artifact of the non-randomness of my study sample.

6. In transcriptions the letter "I" indicates the interviewer.

7. This study focused only on girls, however, other studies (Rosenthal 1984; Nanji 1993) have compared girls and boys in immigrant families, and have observed that girls often have a more fractious relationship with immigrant parents because of the clash between more traditional and modern gender norms.

8. In contrast to my study sample, a high school guidance counselor and a social worker from different boroughs, but who both worked in schools with large populations of West Indian immigrants, reported to me that the majority of the

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girls they saw had been physically, if not sexually, abused by family members in their native countries and here. From their perspective, also a skewed sample, the majority of immigrant girls had significant problems and lacked familial support.

9. Most girls seemed quite candid with me about family matters including INS status, I therefore do not believe the girls were especially cautious about revealing family conflicts and/or discussing their own "rebellious" behavior.

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# CHAPTER VI

# PASSING THROUGH THE SCHOOL HOUSE DOOR

> "Free public education is the legendary gold that paves the streets of America" (Sommers cited in Sung:1987:93)

How real or legendary is the gold of American education? What is the American educational experience, has it, and will it, pave the way to a successful future for the immigrant adolescent who has come in search of it? These issues will be explored in this chapter.

The chapter begins with several migration narratives in which a girl's migration to the United States was, partially or fully, the result of her family's desire to improve the girl's educational opportunities. These migration stories are followed by a brief look at the historical interaction between immigrants and American education. The eight high schools which served as my field sites and which were attended by the girls in the study are then described. The rest of the chapter focuses on the realities observed and confronted by the girls as they passed through the school house door. Social relations and intergroup relations, school culture and atmosphere, the girls' academic achievements, school-based programs and activities are all explored. The chapter closes with a discussion of the girls' plans after high school and some reflections on their educational prospects.

## Education: A Stimulus for Migration

Marva, whose migration narrative has been described in preceding chapters, essentially came to the United States to enjoy the benefits of an American education. Benefits that schooling in Guyana would not have provided. Here in New York, despite

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loneliness and a multiplicity of family problems, Marva had far exceeded her own expectations. Graduating second in her high school class, Marva has been accepted to a number of public and private American colleges.

Evelyne (Haiti) had always dreamed of coming to New York to attend school and, eventually, go to college. In Haiti, schooling especially for the higher grades and for college was costly - one had to pay tuition and buy one's books. College completion was an uncertainty for most students. In addition to cost, colleges frequently closed down in response to political unrest in Haiti. Evelyne is now completing her senior year in high school and hopes to attend the City University of New York: "To help myself and my kids later, that's why I go to school here to prepare myself and my family."

In Korea, college is highly competitive and very expensive. There are limited spaces and relatively few students are accepted. Up to recently, girls often had a much harder time than boys getting "on track" for college, i.e. girls needed to score much higher on the competitive entrance exam for the academic high schools which were in turn the principal route to college (Kristof 1996). Jassun, Chong-Suk and several other girls from Korea told me that a "big factor" in coming to the United States was their parents' belief that the US offered greater educational opportunities than Korea. Hye-Sook, the daughter of rice farmers, shared: "Here I would have an opportunity to do whatever I wanted to do, here I would have a chance to get money for college," a near impossibility in Korea. Girls from Latin America also spoke of the costs of education in their countries and how coming here was thought to improve their educational opportunities. In Latin America, school costs often increased with educational level. Families had great difficulty paying

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school fees, especially if there were several children. Even when schools were free, there were the costs of buying books and uniforms.

Although the girls from other regions of the world did not indicate that the pursuit of educational opportunities was the principal motivation for their migration, several articulated that coming to America was perceived as increasing their chances of having a"successful life." Rashida from Pakistan stated: "This country (USA) is definitely a developed and civilized country, (with) more chances for education."

**American Education and Acculturation: The Historical Context**

American education has been regarded as the key to the American dream and as that process by which the nation has incorporated peoples from diverse nations. It has been argued that schools have acted as a principal agent of socialization, helping homogenize (Blumberg 1986) the differences between and amongst the newcomers and fostering their assimilation (Berrol 1995). Schools have been perceived as acting as the "great equalizer," affording equal opportunities for all, regardless of background, transforming the "wretched of the earth" and enabling them to both make a new beginning and succeed in America. These perceptions about the agency of US schools and education have captured the imagination of many. They are perceptions which continue to inform the debate about school reform, and continue to be the context for a "litmus" test against which current newcomers have been judged. Colin Greer (1972) and other revisionist scholars (e.g. Apple 1979; Giroux 1983) agree that schools have in the past, and continue to act, as a critical community institution which inculcates newcomers to the "culture"of America. They argue, however, that despite perhaps "best intentions," US

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schools have historically neither provided an equalizing function for immigrant groups nor provided mobility for most first generation immigrants. Instead of leveling the field, American schools have acted implicitly and explicitly to reproduce ethnic/racial and class hierarchies of American life (Blumberg 1986:183) and thereby have maintained or reproduced the existent status quo.

Schools have acted to acculturate immigrant students to American values - the concepts of democracy and individualism (Greer 1972:22). However, the actual experience of American schooling has often been in sharp contrast to these valued ideals. Immigrant students have experienced autocratic school systems, in which conformity, not uniqueness and/or individuality, advances a successful school career. Many of the schools they attend have resonated with explicit and implicit prejudices of class and race, and immigrant students have been encouraged or actually forced to give up their family's and community's traditions.

Schools are "places where newcomers and established residents experience a variety of pressures that draw distinctions among people, and represent local institutions that dominate control of resources which affect the relations among newcomers and established resident youth" (Bach 1993:53). At each point in history, schools have thus reflected American society's attitudes toward newcomers. Today, many of the inner-city schools to which many immigrant students go have become little more than holding pens. Instead of providing an environment for students to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for upward mobility, many of these public schools have scarce material and/or human resources, and evidence not only a lack of investment in students, but little

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expectation that their respective students can or will succeed. In many of these schools "the hidden curriculum" has become very visible. In these instances, the school has emerged as an agent in the "crippling" of immigrant and second generation students rather than as an agent setting them forward on a path of upward mobility. The success of an immigrant group must, therefore, be understood in terms of an individual immigrant's past experiences and present abilities, and the combination of social, human and cultural capital brought by the national group, as well as, the attitudes of the community in which they live and the type of schools to which their children go. The success of various immigrant groups both at the turn of the century and at present must be viewed from this perspective.

**Diversity and Size of Schools**

The eight high schools in which I did my field research were all large and overcrowded. School registrations ranged from 2300 to 4500, and the rate of utilization ranged from a low of 122% to a high of over 185% of capacity (Board of Education, Office of Compliance).

Securing data on the numbers of foreign-born students enrolled in Board of Education schools, however, was somewhat problematic. While the Board of Education includes a field for nation of birth on its registration form, I was told by Board of Education staff that this field is inconsistently completed. Data on the total numbers of foreign-born students for any given academic year or any specific school, they told me, were thus unavailable. However, the Board is mandated under the Emergency Immigrant Education Census to collect data only on foreign-born students who have been enrolled

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for three years or less, "Recent Immigrant Students."[1] Census data provided another source of information.

According to the 1990 Census, 188,864 students (20.1%) were foreign born during the 1989-90 school year (1990 Census as cited by Batiz-Rivera 1996). For the same period the Board reported that 3.8% of all students were identified as "Recent Immigrants." In his paper "The Education of Immigrant Children: The Case of New York City" (1996), Batiz-Rivera used Census data and the Board's Immigration Census of Recent Immigrants in an effort to determine the per cent of foreign-born students. Based on these calculations, Batiz-Rivera estimates foreign-born students were 30.3% or 320,071 out of a reported 1,056,251 students attending pubic schools in 1995. These students represented 204 different nations (Batiz-Rivera 1996:4-5). For 1995 the Board reported that 11% (34,875) were identified as "Recent Immigrants." While the central Board of Education did not provide me with numbers for my eight field site high schools, they estimated the per cent of foreign-born students in these schools to "range from 9% to 38%." Staff, however, in my field sites informed me that 30 to over 60%of their registered students were foreign-born.

In general, the eight field site high schools were "zone" schools, i.e. schools whose students lived in a designated residential catchment area. Lillian Wald High School had both, a traditional program for students in its catchment area, but also several specialized programs for which students could apply from across the borough. And, at Anzia Yezierska High School, I found a number of English Caribbean students who lived out of zone in some of the borough's poorest and most disadvantaged neighborhoods.

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The girls had originally been zoned to attend their neighborhood schools. But their zoned schools had been classified, in terms of drop out rates and violence, as some of the worst in New York City. As a result of parental advocacy, and by reason of their involvement in track, these girls had been able to go out of zone to attend high school.

By and large, the eight field site high schools reflected, and were as diverse as the neighborhoods in which they stood. Elizabeth Blackwell and Mary "Mother Jones" high schools were the two most international schools. Blackwell was over 60% foreign-born (principal's communication) with over 112 nations represented. Jones had a mix of Mid Eastern, Asian, Latin American and European students, as well as the grandchildren of prior waves of European immigrant families. Emma Lazarus High School was, principally, composed of Chinese and Latino immigrant and native born students, with a minority of African American and European ancestry students. Paule Marshall High School and Emma Goldman High School were both a mix of English and French Caribbean students, with a sizeable number of US-born Caribbean students and also African-American students. Goldman High School also had some Asian immigrant and European-ancestry students as well. Mary Antin High School's (the principal reported 60% foreign-born and 23 language spoken) and Lillian Wald 's diversity included many East European students but also included an array of South Asian and North African students in addition to the grandchildren of prior waves of European immigrant families, and the children and grandchildren of southern US African American migrants. And finally, Yezierska had a majority of East European and Russian immigrants and their children and grandchildren, as well as sizeable minorities of Latino, English Caribbean, Asian and African American students.

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The schools varied in appearance. The oldest school had been built at the turn of the century. And the newest school was built over thirty years ago, in the mid-sixties. The six remaining schools had been built 50 to 70 years ago. Some schools had had their main buildings expanded, others had added separate annexes. One school had mobile class units to accommodate an excess number of students. A few schools had recently undergone substantial renovation, others had had partial renovation. Some schools were dirty and dingy, with broken windows and missing interior doors. One school's walls were painted aqua blue, others had greying marble or institutional beige or green. Some schools had well-lit halls and stairwells, other schools were dark even on the sunniest of days.

As I walked the school hallways I frequently found the schools' bulletin boards confirming my initial perspective of a school's social climate and general attitude about its student population, immigrant and native born. The halls of some schools were decorated with trophies of student accomplishments and show cases that contained books and artifacts about and from the students' cultures. In many schools I found bulletin boards which reflected the diversity of the students - club notices, pictorial essays of nations around the world. One school had essays both in English and in a number of other languages which described the experience of migration. Another school's bulletin board was filled with student photographs of an ESL class trip to major sites in New York City. But other schools had blank or gutted bulletin boards and one school had "Fuck You" scribbled across the bulletin board situated near the school's main entrance way.

**Passing Through the School House Door**

As I climbed the entrance steps to Blackwell High School, I was acutely aware of the worn marble steps on which I climbed. Deeply engraved in the marble were the

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imprints of almost 100 years of students' footsteps. I wondered about all the many lives and all the stories of the students whose footsteps had left their mark. Many generations of students had entered and exited the school - many of each generation were immigrant like the ones I was about to interview. What was it like for new immigrant students, many speaking little if any English, to cross the school house door. What sign of welcome or lack of welcome greeted them. At Goldman High School, one of the most seemingly disorganized and student unfriendly schools in which I interviewed, it seemed ironic that Emma Lazarus' poem, very worn at the edges, but still inviting the teeming masses to our shores, was prominently hung just outside the principal's office. Did the students entering Emma Goldman High School and the other schools sense a "promise," did they feel welcome? And what were the students expectations when they crossed the school house door and climbed their school house steps for the first time?

In my interviews at Blackwell and in the other seven schools I asked the girls what they had anticipated about "going to school in America" How did their past schooling compare and contrast with what they found here?

Hui-Wen from China via Macao had imagined a big beautiful school with a lawn and mostly white people. When she arrived here at 17, she was placed in the 9th grade for which she felt she was too old. Although the 9th grade placement gave her three years of American schooling, now at age 20, she is very anxious that she is "too old." "I was put back two years when I came here, I don't have much time like my friends who are 18." Julia worries that she will have little time to begin a career when she finishes college.

Antonia was overwhelmed when she first arrived at her high school. Her program

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card was not ready and she was totally lost and confused, no one spoke Czech. She ran home crying and said she would never go back. But she did within several days. Three years later she speaks fluent English and has many friends. Antonia now feels so at home in her high school, that earlier in the year, she ran for junior class officer. She told me, "I successfully lost," and then went on to say that it was only when she lost that she realized how much she had wanted to win. Antonia isn't sure if she will run next year for senior class officer, but if she does, she says she will run a very different campaign.

In contrast to Antonia's early return to school, Kristina became so overwhelmed by her first few days at school, she decided not to return to her local high school. In Yugoslavia Kristina had been an excellent student. However, during the civil war, the Serbs took over her town, forbade students to speak their native Albanian, and were rumored to have poisoned food in the town's school cafeteria. Kristina had stopped going to school in the weeks before she and her family fled. Two weeks after arriving here she started school.

> I spoke English a little but it wasn't as good as I speak now. So when I started school here there were all kinds of people, and I had to get used to it and I felt alone in the school. So I told my parents I am never going back to that school again and I left school for one year. But the next year I realized that what I am doing is (sic) wrong and I came back to school. I always loved school and I always had good grades.

Like Hui-Wen and many others, Kristina was placed in a lower grade than expected. And like many other students she had mixed feelings, both resenting being with younger peers, but also finding that it gave her more time to get used to American education.

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The educational system that the girls found here was for some girls a real "shock." Girls from almost every nation stated that what they were being taught here were things that they had covered in lower grades.

Noelle (Haiti) recalled:

> When I came here, they put me in the third grade and they gave me some easy math, which I learned in the first grade and when I got to the fifth grade I learned things I had learned in the second grade.

Nicki (Jamaica) was not only angry that she was placed in a lower grade, but felt that because of being placed in a lower grade she had forgotten most of what she already knew in math and science. "What they learn here in the 8th grade I already learned in the 5th grade." She reflected that, as she already "knew it," she lost interest in school, and ended up failing almost every class. Nicki now feels bored at school, and passes her days reading books under her desk during class. Nicki, a graduating senior, has a GPA of 67.

Many girls commented that the work here was so much easier than back home. Girls had been used to hours of homework. "I was up to one in the morning doing homework," stated Kristina, "I had to study a week before a test, so I had to start (sic) every night, study a few hours for that day." Raquel from Eritrea remembers having hours of homework "even in 5th grade." Many girls felt they didn't have to study as hard here because tests were often multiple choice. Patrice from Barbados said that school was harder back home, because there they had big tests and essays, often being examined for an entire semester's work. In the US with more frequent tests there was much less material to prepare. School thus seemed less stressful. While some girls did share their anxiety about doing well on the standardized tests needed for college entrance, especially

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if their English skills would be sufficient, a number of students expressed relief that there was not a single test which would determine the course of their academic life and future career options.

Isis went into great detail describing how, in Egypt, there were a series of critical tests which resulted in students being tracked for university studies or vocational careers. Analogous to the pre-admission exams in Korea for high school, during the Egyptian equivalent of 9th grade, an exam is given which determines the type of high school to which a student would go. Even if the student successfully places in an academic high school, during the 12th grade another exam is given which "decides your life." Isis explained:

> Right now I am in 12th grade and graduating to go to college. Over there this year is like the worst year of your whole entire life. This is the year in which decides if you go to college - have a future or you get married and stay home for good, because they have a test which is really hard over there, they have a different system there than over here, and during the finals, the last year's test, they have there a really complicated test. Most people don't pass. You have to be an absolute natural genius - you have to study day and night you can't go out, you can't watch TV listen to the radio during a whole year so you can enter and pass and may be able to go to college.

Despite some initial relief that school here was less arduous than back home, many girls were quite worried about the adequacy of the schooling they were getting here as compared to the more rigorous education they had received in their nations of origin. Michelle's comments echo comments made by many other girls.

> M: In France they give more work, cause you have to learn all . . . if you have a French story, you have to learn the passage by heart and when you get your test, they ask you questions. There is no multiple choice, you just write what you know.
> I: You have to write an essay. And here it is more multiple choice?

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M: Yes. I don't like that system sometimes cause somebody can have 100 without working or studying or something, just be guessing and everything and then when they are going to get a job, they are not going to be able to work.
I: So by having to write an essay you have to think about things?
M: Yes, you have to think and sometimes make some opinion about what you think. It is kind of difficult.

Michelle's worry about the potential impact of our current system in preparing students for the future, and Michelle's and other girls' perspectives about US education and its comparative value will be discussed below in the context of the girls' aspirations for a college education. The tension between perception and reality in regards to these aspirations will also be discussed below.

**School Climate and Social Atmosphere**

For now, however, I would like to turn to the concern and discomfort many girls shared in respect to their school's climate or social atmosphere. [Given the state of the physical plant of several schools (see above), I was struck that not a single girl commented about the physical environment in which they went to school. Was the absence of any comments a reflection of relative deprivation or just resignation?]

Two issues/concerns related to social atmosphere surfaced repeatedly: 1) the disrespect students displayed towards teachers, and each other; and 2) the pervasive attitude that to do well in school was to be "uncool."

Many girls were "shocked" by the lack of decorum in the classroom from the clothes students and teachers wore to the attitude students had towards their teachers and school administrators.

Many girls reported that in their nations, school uniforms had been required. While

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some girls were pleased that they no longer needed to wear uniforms, others missed wearing them. Yet, despite their specific feelings about uniforms, several girls generally felt that school uniforms decreased competition and created a sense of decorum in the school. Julie believed that, in Barbados, one's school uniform provided an important identifier for students, indicating to others the school one attended. Wearing a school uniform made students more respectful and disciplined both in school and on the street. To do otherwise would have reflected poorly on one's school. For Julie the absence of school uniforms here contributed to the lack of discipline in her school.

Very few of the schools in which I interviewed had dress codes of any sort. The codes that did exist prohibited the wearing of hats, beepers and walkmans. Little restriction was given to the casualness of dress or even how revealing clothes could be. A number of girls were very surprised that they could wear almost anything to school. Several South Asian and also several Haitian girls judged the short skirts worn by some of their female classmates to be immodest and thus inappropriate for school. To their surprise teachers said nothing. In fact, a few girls remarked that they were surprised how casually some of their teachers dressed, often wearing what students wore, jeans and sneakers. Several girls indicated a preference for the more formal attire of their teachers and fellow students back in their countries.

But, far more disturbing than the absence of a strict or enforced dress code was the girls' unease about the disrespect their fellow students had towards teachers and administrators, and even towards other students.

Repeatedly the girls told me that in their nations teachers were given the utmost

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respect. Many girls described how they had to stand when a teacher walked into their classrooms. Doretha observed that, in Ghana, to raise one's left hand was a sign of disrespect and for that behavior one might get punished or suspended.

In her native India, Asma explained, Islam teaches one to respect one's elders:

> In my religion we are not supposed to lift our heads and speak like this (looks directly at me), we are supposed to bend our head and look at the ground and speak to elders. Teachers are very strict in India. It is like, no eye contact if you make a mistake, they like beat you up and they have a right to scold you, they can do whatever they want. They are more like the parents. But they used to teach well and only be there for the students. .... the students they respect teachers a lot, they are scared to use bad language in front of teachers, or even behind them, they really respect them.

According to most of the girls, teachers in their respective countries were always addressed with deference and with the use of "sir" or "madam." No one ever would call out an answer.

Here, Asma and several other girls were shocked at students who would yell out answers, even curse at the teachers. Asma commented:

> The students over here are more (sic) worse, they, well maybe the students over there (India) are really good because the teachers are real strict, but the students over here they accuse teachers of something and they shout at the teachers, they use bad language and it's unbelievable.

Rowena's father was illiterate, Rowena herself has severe learning problems, but Rowena believes that here, in the United States, she might finally learn how to read. She commented: ".... (they) don't behave nice to teachers, kids curse out teachers... Why they are doing that? They aren't getting any education that way."

Carmen from the Dominican Republic shared Asma's and Rowena's shock.

> When I came here in 1986, I was shocked by the kids, because one of the kids started to curse at the teacher. In my country we don't do that. We respect teachers, our parents tell us that the teacher is our second parent. That we have to respect them no matter what. The American kids they curse a lot, so I think about

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> that, they also like to have freedom, they enjoy it, they like to go out. They don't like to follow rules.

Michelle made a similar observation:

> ... everybody keeps saying, "Oh, I am entitled. It is a free country and everything." So everybody does what they want. In France they don't talk about France is a free country, so they try to be nice to each other. Not all of them, but ...

I asked Carmen why she thought there might be such a difference in school behavior between the US and the Dominican Republic.

> In my country, you see more people who are poor, people without any money, that's what I think makes you appreciate things, you have to take care of things. You see there are so many people in my country who want to go to school but they can't because they don't have any books. Because there you have to buy your own books. It's not like here where you borrow books from school. Not in my country you have to buy your own books, even if you don't have to pay for school, you have to buy your own books.

Carmen's comments echoed the comments of other girls from Latin America, and also echoed those of girls from nations in Asia and Africa where college seats were highly competitive. It seems to me that the girls were saying that when scarce resources precludes school attendance and/or completion, education rises in value and respect. In contrast, they observed and experienced in the United States, a culturally pervasive sense of entitlement and personal freedom which diminished students' sense of responsibility and students' respect for their schools and their teachers. One ESL teacher, an Italian immigrant, said that "schools used to teach students and students used to learn, but now students don't even bring pen and paper." At another school the ESL coordinator described her views of school culture and society: "kids do little critical thinking, they want to be served and not think about what they are learning..." She then went on to say that students generally seem to be disinterested in learning. To her this reflects what they

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see all around them, "society is for entertaining, and for as little work as you can get by. Reading and writing do not seem to be encouraged anymore."

The girls spoke with some anguish about how difficult it was to counter the student culture in their schools which asserted that to do well academically was "uncool." Vernie from Jamaica explains: "Kids will beat you up because you do better. They want you to help them cheat... (its) hard to separate from this pressure not to do well, but teachers encourage you to do well."

Marva, the high achieving student who had not wanted to leave Guyana, observed:

M: I don't know. They call me names when I get high grades.
I: They call you names?
M: Like nerd and geek and stuff. I don't think they are accustomed at Emma Goldman High School for somebody doing extremely well. So when they see you come from Emma Goldman High School and your grades are really good they are saying "What is the secret".
I: Who is calling you this?
M: The students.
I: So there is a whole group of students who aren't doing so well and the students who do well get teased about doing well. But what are the backgrounds of the kids who aren't doing well? Are they also from Guyana and Haiti?
M: No.
I: Where are they from?
M: America.
I: So they are born here and their parents are American or they are from the West Indies?
M: I don't know. I think it is different. It is mixed. Some of them are from the West Indies or other parts of the world but most of them are American students. They usually say things like . . ."They coming over here and getting all these high grades and going to the best colleges and we are over here all of our lives and we can't" and stuff like that.
I: And what do you think about that?
M: I don't think it is fair because we are coming over here but we are working. They are here all the time. We have to adjust to the situation and American lifestyle and still we are able to do well. They should be the ones that have it easier cause they are here from birth. They know everything. They have

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all the facilities. We don't have that.

A guidance counselor who works in the ESL program of Mother Jones observed: "often the kids are nice the first year, then they learn the ropes." "students quickly learn their rights, and then use them against the staff and teachers, who then have their hands tied."

Various studies (DeWind 1994; Gibson 1988, 1992; New Voices 1988; Ogbu 1991; Portes and Rumbaut 1990) have concluded that immigrant students do **both** better and worse than their native-born counterparts. The studies, however, vary in their definition of immigrant student, the nation of origin, the age of the students and the years they have attended a school in the United States.

For example, in a study of 5000 immigrant students in San Diego and Miami the sociologist, Ruben Rumbaut found that:

> Immigrant children do better in school than their American born classmates, but their performance declines as they become more American... that as immigrant children become Americanized, they move in the direction of their America counterparts. (NYT 2/23/94)

However, in a study of New York public school students, grades 3 through 12, Josh DeWind (1994) found that recent immigrant students' (three years or less) "median scores of proficiency remained somewhat lower than other students," but that "the increase (over time) in the immigrant students' scores in math, reading and English tests was higher than all other students." (DeWind 1994:5) Analyzing the recent immigrant student scores by nation of origin, DeWind found that six of the largest immigrant contributing nations - China, Guyana, India, Korea, Soviet Union and Trinidad and

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Tobago performed better than other students (which contain both native-born and immigrant students here for more than three years). The fact that many of these students come from "similar racial and ethnic minorities who are experiencing greater difficulty attaining success in school," DeWind writes, "makes their attainment even more striking." (DeWind:1994:6).

Ogbu (1991) and Gibson (1988, 1992) have written at length about the apparent different attitudes that native born and immigrant minority youth have towards education. In the inner city schools that both groups often attend, the school is generally viewed by the immigrant student as a means to achieve in a new society. What she learns in school, and the acculturation process in which she is immersed, are viewed as a beneficial resources for herself and her community, **in addition** to the traditions she brings (Gibson 1992 ). It is not a trade off, a reduction or subtraction of identity. In contrast, US-born African-American and Latino minority students, categorized by Gibson and Ogbu as "involuntary minorities" believe that education will not right their subordinate position in society. They look at their parents who aren't doing well and conclude "it makes no difference, why bother." In many of their schools these students also experience daily the negative messages of society, the inequitable distribution of resources, the hidden curriculum with its self-fulfilling prophecy of failure. In such a context, many native born minority students believe that to accommodate to school requirements, to achieve academically, would be to "act white," to be a "wanabe" (Gibson 1992:20), in sum, to betray their brothers and sisters in the black or Latino community (Gibson 1992:20; Fordham and Ogbu 1986). Resistance to that accommodation process emerges in the name

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calling, the disciplinary problems and the school failures of many of these students.

In contrast, many immigrant students bring with them a sense of opportunity, and an assumption that effort and perseverance are a key to success. The realities they experience here are always contrasted with the ones they left behind. It is often only here that they are confronted with the experience of minority status. As will be discussed in the chapter on "**The Web of Identity**," for many, their adjustment to a new minority identity and status is accomplished within the legacy of their native culture and history. Their innate abilities, race or socio-economic status (Gibson 1992:12) are not perceived as the true arbiters of their future success. Rather, perseverance is. And the educational credentials they hope to gain are seen as "the best hedge against discrimination," and the best assurance that they will, in fact, be able to better their lives (Gibson 1992:15).Throughout my interviewing, girls repeatedly told me how important education was to them and their families. Carmen commented:

> Education is the most valuable weapon in the world, (sic) can take it with you everywhere, not like my book bag which at times gets too heavy and I want to leave it behind."

Most of the girls said that their parents encouraged their doing well in school. In their families getting an education was not giving up their group identity (Gibson 1992:23), in fact, it was frequently the means to enhance their group identity, and raise the status of their family and their community.

One national study reported that immigrant students spend more time doing homework than their native-born counterparts (New Voices 1988:64 and New York Times 2/23/94). Several Korean girls seemed to emphasize how very important their

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school work was to their families by telling me that their mothers did not want them to even help out at home with the housework.

C-S: The only things I do in my house is study and I play piano. The only things I do are like that. They don't want me to do housework. I don't know why.
I: So you would be willing to help but she doesn't want you to?
C-S: Exactly.
I: Is that unusual? That daughters want to help and mothers don't want them to help?
C-S: I think it is, because she is more concerned about my studying and doing well in school.

Other girls who had to balance their school work with helping out at home and/or working at after-school jobs, also expressed that they and their families still expected that they would do well in school. A singular and poignant exception to this perceived sense of familial support of school excellence was Marva's situation. As discussed previously, Marva had one of the highest GPAs of all the students I interviewed. She was president of her school's Arista and was very proud of her accomplishments. Yet, Marva - with both anger and tears - told me that her father never commented about her good report card nor praised her achievements.

Few girls made any reference to their parents' active involvement in their schools or with their school work. In fact, many girls observed that it was they who were teaching their parents English and about US schooling. Yet, as Gibson (1988) found through her study of Punjab students in California, even when parental involvement in school is not direct, or parents have a "non-intervention strategy," the immigrant families she studied seemed to instill in their children a belief in the value of getting an education.

Immigrant families' encouragement to do well was often echoed and reinforced by

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the immediate peer group of the girls I interviewed. It appeared from the comments of the girls that their school friendships (See also **"The Web of Identity"**), even those which crossed ethnic boundaries, involved girls like themselves who had emigrated as teenagers and shared the same desire to do well and succeed in school.

Given the above pressures and counter-pressures, how successful then were the girls in "keeping on track"? How did they do academically in their respective schools?

**School Achievement**

Data on school achievement were gathered directly from the girls and not from their teachers or other school staff, nor from reviewing their report cards or grade sheets. Some girls were very specific about their GPAs, having recently received their report cards. Other girls gave me a more general GPA such as in the 80's, others told me select grades in different subjects. While I have no record of a few girls, overall the girls in my core sample were doing well[2].

In my review of the girls' GPAs, I was interested to see if any patterns occurred which might suggest factors which contributed to the girls' high or low achievement. My analysis was limited by the non-random selection of the students, the small number of students in my study, the still smaller numbers in each national/regional cluster. In addition, I was aware that scores of some clusters would be skewed by the absence of data or by outliners - the existence of extreme high and low scores. Further, I knew that cluster characteristic varied in terms of the girls': 1) age at arrival, 2) years in an American school, 3) grade, 4) current placement in bilingual, ESL or mainstream classes. Recognizing these analytic issues, I proceeded with two strategies. First, I developed a

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table of the median scores of each cluster. And second, I identified the 6 girls with the highest and the six with the lowest GPAs. What follows is the results of my analysis.

**TABLE 6-1**

**School Data**

| Cluster | Median Residence In Years | Median Age | Median Grade | Median GPA | Number Schools* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| China/Hong Kong | 3 | 17.5 | 11 | 90 | 2 |
| English Caribbean | 3 | 18 | 12 | 79.3 | 3 |
| Latin America | 2.75 | 17 | 12 | 82.5 | 4 |
| Europe | 3 | 17.5 | 11 | 90.5 | 4 |
| South Asia | 3.5 | 17.5 | 12 | 85 | 3 |
| Haiti | 3 | 17.4 | 11 | 78 | 2 |
| Former USSR | 2 | 14.5 | 9.5 | 63.3 | 1 |
| Korea | 2.5 | 18 | 11 | 90 | 1 |
| Arab States | 3 | 17 | 12 | 85 | 2 |
| Sub-Sahara Africa | 3 | 18.5 | 11.5 | 85 | 2 |
| Other Asia | 3 | 18.3 | 11 | 83 | 3 |
| Column Medians | 3 | 17.5 | 11 | 85 | 2 |

* number of schools represented in the cluster

Our discussion must start with a review of the grade levels of the girls. In terms of actual numbers, the majority or 52% of the girls were seniors. However, in an attempt to address the real differences in cluster size, I developed the median grade for each cluster. In terms of clusters, the median grade was the 11th. The median grade for girls from South Asia, the English Caribbean, Latin America and Arab states was the 12th. The median grade for girls from all the other clusters with the exception of girls from the

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former Soviet Union was the 11th grade. The girls from the former Soviet Union had a median grade of 9.5. The sample median GPA was 85, the sample average GPA was 83. Three clusters had at least a 90 median GPA, with girls from Europe having the slight edge with a median GPA of 90.5. Interestingly, both the Korean and the China/Hong Kong clusters had ranges of almost 20 points with the lowest GPA being 75 and the highest GPA being 94. In contrast, the European cluster was more centrally weighted with a range of only ten points, from 85 to 95.

The 11th grade was the median grade for each cluster with a 90 or over GPA. And the median age and length of time in the United States for these three clusters (Europe, Korea, China/Hong Kong) were also similar with median length of time being 2.5 to 3 years. The girls, at time of interview, had a median of 17.5 to 18 years of age.

In contrast to the similitude of the high GPA clusters, the low median GPA clusters had far more variation in their median scores. The lowest cluster median, 63.3, was that of the three girls (out of five) from former Soviet Union girls for whom I had data. The girls' individual GPAs ranged from 59 to 90. The number of students are too small to draw any conclusions, but it may be significant that these girls also had the youngest median age at arrival, the shortest median length of time in the US, the lowest median age and had the lowest median school grades, the middle of the 9th grade, of all the 11 regional clusters.

The Haitian/Guadeloupe and the English Caribbean clusters had median GPAs of 78 and 79.3 respectively. The English Caribbean cluster had a wide range of scores (73 to 94) and included Marva whose GPA of 94 was one of the highest of all the girls in the

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study. The Haitian cluster had a narrower range of scores 70-80. While both Caribbean clusters had girls who had lived here for a median of three years, the English speaking Caribbean girls were slightly older with a median of 18 years of age and a median grade level of 12. The Haitian girls had a median age of 17.4 and an 11th median grade level.

While the highest GPA clusters matched fairly well the median scores for the entire study sample, the clusters with the lowest median GPAs appeared to deviate from the study sample medians. Once again, the girls from the former Soviet Union appeared to be at greatest variance on all characteristics, age of arrival, age at interview and grade level. Can we possibly explain the girls' poor performance by these variant characteristics? The absence of data for two of the five girls from this cluster makes me hesitate to suggest, that these characteristics lead to poorer school outcomes. Instead, I will examine the situations of the six girls with the highest and the lowest GPA scores. Having full information about these twelve girls will, hopefully, provide me with a better opportunity to see if there are in fact any striking patterns which emerge, which may be influencing current school achievement.

I will begin with the students with the lowest GPAs.

Fourteen and half year old Alexis had the lowest GPA (59) of all the girls in the study. Alexis explained to me that she had been a good student in Russia. Both her parents were college graduates and her mother, at times, worked as a teacher. When she first arrived in the United States she lived for a year in New Jersey. In New Jersey she felt very lonely because no one spoke Russian, but she did extremely well in school where she was one of three students in an ESL class. She had a GPA of 95 and, once, was the student of

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the month. In New Jersey, Alexis felt that she received a great deal of attention and support from her teacher. When Alexis moved to Brooklyn, she entered junior high school and was placed in an ESL class with 35 other students. Her grades dropped. Today, despite parental pressure, Alexis continues to do poorly as a 9th grader at Yezierska. She still has ESL classes, but she is also mainstreamed for global history, biology, math and gym. Alexis finds school hard (Coopersmith school subscore=2). She worries a lot about her English (I thought she spoke quite well) but acknowledges that school is no longer her main concern. Instead, Alexis's many friends especially her Puerto Rican boyfriend, are her preoccupation.. Alexis is undocumented.

Natasha, with a GPA of 63.3 had failed three subjects the last marking period before I interviewed her. Natasha was from the former Soviet Union and attended the same high school as Alexis. Natasha's mother attends college here. I do not know her father's level of education. Natasha had not liked school in Russia. In Russia she had to be at school by 7 in the morning, wear a uniform and have her long hair pulled back. In Natasha's old school everyone knew one another, students, teachers and even parents of students. While Natasha misses this sense of community at Yezierska, she has made many friends including students who are seniors and who come from other countries. Natasha's new friends are now her principle interest, not her classes or her schoolwork (Coopersmith school subscore=4). Natasha seemed to be old beyond her 14 years. She was clearly very intelligent. In two years she had almost mastered English, speaking with remarkable fluency. However, Natasha says she doubts she will be able to succeed in school and is unsure if college will be part of her future. Natasha has her green card.

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Noelle is 16, she has been in the United States for three years. In the 9th grade of her high school she has a GPA of 70. Noelle has been suspended three times for fighting and has been in trouble with the dean many more times. Noelle was very candid about her dislike of school in Haiti.

They used "long whips like the ones they used in slavery time. Except they (sic) a little thinner." Noelle explained that teachers have the authority to whip students and often whip them in front of the whole class. In Haiti, Noelle was whipped "all the time. I hated school. I always used to rip my books up." Coming to New York has not improved Noelle's school experiences (Coopersmith school subscore-NA). But Noelle felt that her school problems were not her fault. Teachers picked on her.

N: The teachers get me in trouble for nothing. You know, when the teachers hate you, hate your guts. Just because of that.
I: How do you know when a teacher hates your guts?
N: The way they act at you. They be like giving me trouble all the times.
I: I don't understand, I don't know how they do it. How do they do it? Give me an example.
N: You are sitting in the front and they tell you "Get up, you don't want to learn" and they put you in a back seat. That is #1. #2 is when you participate and they just call a Dean on you and tell you did this or this when you didn't.
I: What kinds of things do they make up?
N: Lies. They say you throwing chalk at the teacher, throwing papers, not doing your work, come to class late every day, cut out, things like that.
I: So they will make up a whole lot of different things even though those things aren't true?
N: Yeah.
I: Does anybody defend you or do you always have to defend yourself?
N: Sometimes other teachers defend you too.
I: Have you found people who would defend you here?
N: Here in this school, yeah.
I: How did you find them?
N: I be good in their class, do everything.

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Noelle was one of the more unhappy students I interviewed. One of 8 children, Noelle was raised by an aunt in Haiti after her mother migrated to the United States. Noelle believes her aunt raised her right "to be dependable and sophisticated." Three years ago, sponsored by her mother, Noelle migrated to the United States. Noelle defines her relationship with her mother as "terrible." Noelle's mother had some high school education in Haiti, but Noelle does not think she ever graduated. Her mother, who had worked as a dressmaker in Haiti, works in New York in a food factory. Noelle's father completed grade school and has worked as a plumber.

Amie was also from Haiti. She was in 10th grade and at 17 years old had lived in the United States for three years. Amie had a GPA of 71 (Coopersmith school subscore=3.5). Like Noelle, Amie's mother had migrated to the US when Amie was two years old. Amie was raised by her grandmother. However, unlike Noelle, Amie was very happy to come to the United States and enjoys a good relationship with her mother who sponsored her immigration. Amie does not know her father's highest level of education. He died when she was 6 years old. Amie's mother had little schooling, reads and writes some French, but has not learned much English in her 15 years in the US. Amie thus acts as her mother's interpreter. At Emma Goldman High School, Amie is in a bilingual program. While math is her most difficult subject, Amie very much enjoys her history class in which she learns about other countries. Amie has found Emma Goldman High School to be a "difficult" school to attend. She is scared of the fights which frequently take place between the Haitian and Jamaican students, especially after a student was killed in the school cafeteria. While Amie has made friends with students who are US-born and also

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from other countries, most of her friends are recent immigrants from Haiti.

18 year old Grace, a native of Barbados came to the US five years ago to live with her older sister. She now lives with her niece and her niece's father. Both of Grace's parents have a primary school education and continue to live in Barbados. Grace received B's and C's in Barbados where she thinks she "learned faster." Grace feels that she knew a lot of stuff before she came to New York. Here her grades are "okay. They could be better, but not so bad." Grace has a 73 GPA (Coopersmith school subscore=6). Grace feels that she is not giving herself a chance: "my head don't like to work in class. If I am dealing with people like hygiene, the body, that is easy, but math and chemistry, my head can't take that kind of stuff." Grace has been running track since her first days in school in Barbados. It was the intervention of her junior high coach which resulted in Grace attending Yezierska High school instead of her neighborhood high school which has a bad reputation. Grace does not have her immigration papers. She thus has been unable to find a job and worries about paying her graduation fees. Grace also worries about going to college. Without a social security number or immigration papers ,Grace feels that she will not be eligible for a track scholarship, which she believes is her only ticket to college.

Tracy came from Hong Kong four years ago. She just turned 16 and is in the 10th grade at Emma Lazarus High School where she has a GPA of 75 (Coopersmith school subscore= 1.5). Tracy's parents both are high school graduates. Tracy likes her English classes but hates her social studies class where she feels that there is too much memorization. Tracy feels that her parents pressure her too much, but at the same time do

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not really care about her and only care about their work. Tracy feels that since she came to the US she has had to learn to depend on herself and be more independent of her family. She is unhappy living in the United States and would like to return to Hong Kong. I do not know Tracy's INS status.

How do the above girls with low GPAs compare with their fellow students who have been very successful at school with GPAs 94 and above?

Teresa (16) and Kristina (18) Kosov are sisters, who three years ago, came as undocumented refugees from war torn Yugoslavia. Kristina, as described above, stayed home for a year after her arrival. Thus, although two years older than Teresa she is in the 11th grade, and Teresa is in the 10th. Teresa has a GPA of 95 (Coopersmith school subscore= 4.5) and Kristina a GPA of 94 (Coopersmith school subscore=8). In Yugoslavia, both girls did extremely well in school. The girls' father has both a college and a graduate degree. Their mother has an eighth grade education. In their separate interviews, the girls recalled that school was more demanding back home. The school day went from 8 am to 7 pm with an hour break. There were many more tests and class presentations. Kristina thought that what was typical high school in Yugoslavia was probably what she would find in a US college. Both girls have been upset about the disrespect of students towards teachers. Teresa prefers the strict atmosphere she had back home. Kristina, who had thought of becoming a teacher, says she would not become a teacher here because of how students behave in school. (This sentiment about a career in teaching was shared by Aisha whom I will discuss below.) Kristina is very worried about college. Despite excellent grades, she does not have a green card and thus doesn't think

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she can go to "a good school". She thinks that the more expensive the college the better one's employment prospects will be, and she doubts her family will be able to pay much in tuition.

17 1/2 year old Meena (India) has been in the United States just about a year. She is in the 12th grade at Blackwell high school where she has maintained a 94 GPA (Coopersmith school subscore = 6.5). Meena's father has a college education. Her mother had some college education in India and is studying here to be a dental technician. Meena liked school in India, especially her music and art classes. She finds school in the United States much easier. In India, you had to memorize more, such as the whole periodic table. There were no calculators in her school, so one also had to do all the math on paper or with log sheets. In New York, one is given multiple choice exams. Meena still finds science and math two of her favorite subjects, but misses having music and art classes. Meena has a green card. She plans to attend college and study the sciences.

Aisha is 16 years old and in 12th grade at Mary Antin High School. She has a GPA of 94 (Coopersmith school subscore = 6.5). Three and a half years ago Aisha migrated from Bangladesh. Next month she will have her first interview to begin the process of becoming a citizen. Aisha's father has a 10th grade education and her mother has a primary school education. Aisha has always liked school. She attended a government school in Bangladesh where she had to wear a uniform. Her teachers were all "old men and women." Here she finds the teachers are very young. While the primary grades are co-educational in Bangladesh, the older ones are segregated. Initially, she found it very "scary" to be in co-ed classes, but now feels very comfortable. She feels that the ESL class

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creates a community. As discussed in the previous chapter, Aisha very much wants to go to college but worries that as soon as she graduates high school her parents will arrange her marriage. Aisha believes further education would give her increased freedom. Once married, however, Aisha fears that she will never get to go to or complete college.

Hye-Sook (18) was born in Korea. Her parents who both have high school diplomas, were rice farmers. The family came to the United States two and a half years ago to insure that Hye-Sook and her siblings would have educational opportunities which were not available in Korea. Hye-Sook was a 90 plus student in Korea. She was also very active in school activities. In the United States, Hye-Sook's GPA is 94 (Coopersmith school subscore = NA). But Hye-Sook says that her problems with English have prevented her from engaging in extracurricular school activities. She had been in a Korean bilingual program but now has both ESL and mainstreamed classes. Hye-Sook frequently worries that her English will impede her educational progress. Yet, she acknowledges she gets even higher grades here than in Korea. Hye-Sook is very interested in science and has applied for the Westinghouse scholars program to study genetics. Hye-Sook, who is also an intern at a city hospital through the Board of Education ADAPT program, says she uses all her free time to study for the regents and SAT exams. Hye-Sook has a green card.

As previously described, Marva (18) is a Guyanese immigrant who has, despite family problems, done extremely well in school. In Guyana Marva went to a special competitive school which was "not the top one academically but close to the top." There she got 50 and 60s, good marks for the Guyanese system. In Guyana, Marva had a math teacher who "really believed in me." This teacher tragically died in a car accident, but

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Marva speaks of him as someone who remains part of her life, a real role model who instilled in her a love for school and learning. Marva feels that her mother, who has a nursing degree, had always supported her academic efforts bragging about Marva's good grades. In contrast, living in New York with her father, who has a college degree, Marva feels she gets no support.

M: Cause I can remember when I came up here, the first report card I got since I was in America the average was an 87 and I think I did so well cause in Guyana I never used to get that. I was so happy with myself and I went home and showed him my report card and he didn't say anything and then when I came up in 11th grade and my average was a 97.94 or something like that he didn't even look at it.

I: And how about your stepmother? Does she recognize it at all?

M: No. I think she is jealous because her children do not do so well. They get like 60s and stuff. But I don't think that is a reason to reject me. If I show my friends my report card, they go "Oh my God, if I got this my mother would buy me a car"
and . . . .

Marva's school, Emma Goldman High School, has a reputation for violence and for poor student performance, a real "dumping ground." But Marva feels that she has learned a lot at school. Although she missed getting into the honors program because of her late entry during the school year, Marva has found teachers who will work with her. She thinks that the school has a good library and she has access to a computer. With a GPA of 94 in the 12th grade (Coopersmith school subscore = NA), Marva feels she has exceeded her own expectations of success. Marva attends a computer class at a local college. She has been accepted by several colleges and looks forward to attending college, preferably away from home.

What if any patterns are suggested by the above two groups of low achieving and

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high achieving girls? It appears that the low achieving girls tend to be younger than their high achieving counterparts, a median age of 16 versus a median age of 17.75. Not surprisingly they are also in lower grades at school. There is not much difference in the length of time the two groups have been in the United States, a median of 2.75 for the low achievers and a median of 3 for the high achievers.

The average of each group's Coopersmith subscores,[3] however, are quite significant. The low achievers had a range of scores from 1.5 to 6 with an average of 3.4. While the high achievers had a range of 4.5 to 8, with an average of 6.1. These differences in subscores seem consistent with the students' perception of their school experience. For example a low scoring student such as Grace (GPA of 73) had a Cooper Smith subscore of 6. Grace's involvement with the track team, and the high regard she receives from her track accomplishment, seem to have washed out some of the other struggles she has with her academic subjects.

In contrasting the characteristics of the two groups, the much higher level of education completed by the fathers of the high achievers seems to stand out. Although there are two fathers' unknown educational levels for this group, four out of six fathers had a college degree as compared to only one amongst the low achievers,. As regards the mothers, there is little difference in their educational attainment.

Parental education and social status, both in the nation of origin and here, has been associated with higher school performance (Honan 1996). Social status of the family also impacts on place of residence. Two of the girls in the low achieving group attended one of the worst inner city schools in New York City. However, so did Marva who was a high

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achiever. It is interesting to note that Marva came from Guyana, one of the nations which DeWind (1994) found had both, achieved higher scores and made significant more progress over time than other recent immigrant students and others students (DeWind 1994:Table 2) While both the low and the high achieving groups are similar in their immigration status, there are some real differences between the groups regarding the process of migration and the current household in which the girls live. It seems striking that all the high achievers live with two parents, in the case of Marva, a stepmother. Amongst the low achievers, only Alexis lives with both parents. Other low achievers Amie, Patrice, Noelle, and Natasha all live with their mothers. Grace who initially moved here to live with a much older sister, currently lives with her sister's daughter (also a teenager) and her niece's father. Grace's parents continue to live in Barbados. For Noelle and Natasha, both low achievers, there was a ten year gap between the mother's migration and the girls' migration to New York. In contrast, for two of the high achievers, Teresa and Kristina, while they were separated for two years from their father, they lived with their mother in Yugoslavia before migrating with their mother to rejoin the father in New York.

Does migration pattern, especially ones in which parents and children are separated for long periods of time, impact on school performance? Do family/household characteristics including parental education, household structure and/or socio-economic status and experiences pre and post migration contribute to school success? Does the parent-daughter relationship influence school performance? I believe with such a small sample these variables and their interaction are too complex to fully tease out causation.

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However, several of the above variables appear to suggest some association with school success.

Three of the low achievers were African-Caribbean (2 Haitian and 1 English speaking Caribbean), but only one of the high achievers (English Caribbean). Was this an artifact of the non-random selection of girls interviewed? Does it reflect yet another example of a self-fulfilling prophecy - different teacher expectations resulting in different school performances (New Voices Project 1988:48), and/or the impact of students attending schools in poor and minority neighborhoods which are resource scarce? Or, as suggested by Ogbu and Gibson, did the girls' discontinuous household life result in their being less "incubated" from the messages of a more racialized society, in which many minority youth turn away from schools and formalized education? Or, are we observing the convergence of nation of origin socio-economic status and socio-economic and minority status in the United States?

Age at arrival seems to be one of the characteristics that most separates the two groups. The low achievers, coming at younger ages, had almost all articulated into high school from a US junior high school. What socialization occurred on the junior high level that may have contributed to less interest in school? Coming to the United States at a younger age may also suggest that the girls were less "socialized" to the standards and behaviors of the school systems in their nations of origin. The developmental or maturational process must be considered. The younger girls came at ages when their personalities were less formed, possibly more malleable. The younger girls may thus have been more responsive to the influence of peers they met at school who presented new

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alternative (to the girls' cultural background) values and behaviors with which to experiment and/or adopt. In contrast, the older migrating girls may have had a more developed sense of their own identity and more established and integrated value system (see further discussion in Chapter VII, **"The Web of Identity"**).

Without a greater number of cases, the above search for associations between the different characteristics and variables can only be speculative. Further research is needed to move the suggestive patterns in my findings towards more definitive associations and conclusions.

Before ending this section, it is important to recognize that some of the girls' grades shifted over time, shifts in school performance - in their nation of origin and here - and shifts in performance between their first year in a US school and when I interviewed them. As previously mentioned, a number of girls felt that they were earning much higher grades here, because the work was "so much easier." Antonia, however, felt that she had done better in her native Prague than she was doing here. For her, school in the United States was more difficult despite her rapid acquisition of English proficiency. Li, who had attended a highly competitive elite school in China, believed that her grades improved because there was far less competition here. In China, everyone was a top student, in her NYC neighborhood school only a few are "even good students."

Frequently the girls reported that they had done better during their first year in the United States than they were doing currently. Alexis's (former Soviet Union)change in GPA from 95 to 59 was the most dramatic change. Alexis believed the change in school and class size contributed to her poorer grades. Rosita's (Dominican Republic) GPA

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dropped from 89 in the 10th grade to 83 in the 12th. Jewel's (Barbados) GPA dropped from 85 to 78 during her two years here. When asked about what happened, some girls said the work got harder. Several girls stated that a single subject contributed to a significant drop in their GPA. For example, Michelle's (France) GPA dropped from 90 to 83 after two semesters. Michelle said it was her math class. Jewel said that absences here count against you but hadn't in her native Barbados. Only Maria (Dominican Republic) mentioned that moving from a bilingual program to the mainstream made the work harder for her. I would not be surprised that this happened for many more of the students.

The most frequently mentioned reason for lowered grades, however, was the need to work after school. Asma stated that her grades dropped from the 80s to the 70s because she had to work 20-25 hours a week at Kentucky Fried Chicken, and there wasn't enough time to do everything. In reaction to her slipping grades, Asma was trying to reduce her hours to 15 hours per week. Raquel had experienced the same slip in grades when she began to work at a local Burger King. Raquel's GPA went from 89 to 80. When I interviewed Raquel, she was very worried about her school grades and was, like Asma, contemplating cutting her hours. Gabriella, who was working 20 hours a week, also felt that her grades had suffered from her hours working in a hotel in midtown Manhattan. But, as an undocumented immigrant with few educational opportunities and limited employment options, and with an aging and ill mother, Gabriella had decided to take the GED and return to her native Brazil. Thus, despite her slipping grades, she was planning to continue to work.

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**Bilingual and ESL Classes, and Other Linguistic and Cultural Programs**

I now shift focus to other aspects of the girls' school experience. For many girls, their US school career began and continues in the bilingual programs of their respective schools.

All students who enter the New York City school system and speak at home a language other than English are tested through the Language Assessment Battery or LAB (personal communication, Board of Education, Office of Bilingual Education). This test identifies students who are judged in need of English language services. As of October 1994, 41,997 (14%) high school students were classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) (Board of Education 1995). In 1995, 17.6% of NYC public school students were deemed LEP.

LEP students are assigned to ESL and/or bilingual programs based on the number of students on grade and/or in a subject who speak the same language. The current NYC Board of Education's policy stipulates that a bilingual class is formed, if there is a minimum of 20 LEP students speaking the same language on a grade or in any subject (personal communication, Board of Education Office of Bilingual Education). This policy, however, does not seem to be universally implemented. At Blackwell, an ESL teacher stated bilingual classes were formed when there were 40 students sharing a common language on the same grade. While I was unable to clarify how much autonomy schools actually had in the development of bilingual or ESL programs, I was told that scarcity of teachers speaking a variety of languages, e.g. Bengali, resulted in students being placed in ESL rather than bilingual classes. Separate from staff resources, do other more

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philosophical considerations prompt differences amongst schools? For instance, some schools were very proud that they had bilingual programs, others wanted more bilingual classes and yet others, like Antin High School, seemed very proud to have only ESL programs. No doubt, the difference in a school's provision of bilingual and ESL programs also reflects the rapidly changing demographics of each school's community.

**TABLE 6-2**

**Bilingual and ESL Programs**

| | Spanish | Russian | Chinese | Creole | Korean | ESL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Antin | | | | | | X |
| Lazarus | X | | X | | | X |
| Goldman | | | | X | | X |
| Marshall | X | | | X | | X |
| Yezierska | | X | | | | X |
| Jones | X | | X | | | X |
| Blackwell | X | | X | | X | X |
| Wald | X | | | | | X |

With the exception of Mary Antin High School, each school in which I interviewed had at least one bilingual program including programs in Korean, Russian, Spanish, Chinese and Haitian Creole. ESL classes were available in all the schools.

There is an on-going debate about the merits of ESL versus bilingual versus immersion classes for Limited English Proficient students. Yet, as I interviewed immigrant girls from these programs, the debate, if it surfaced at all, was very muted. While many girls expressed concern about their English skills, relatively few made comments about

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their placement in a bilingual or ESL class and/or their sense of the clear advantage or disadvantage of one over the other. I, however, observed some real differences, even when I took into account that some girls had had English language instruction in their nation of origin, and that the length of their residence in the United States varied. Girls placed in ESL classes seemed to me to have learned English faster, and to have progressed more rapidly into mainstream classes, than students in bilingual programs.[4] My observation, however, must be placed in the context that different linguistic groups have very different experiences in New York City. The pervasiveness of a linguistic community beyond the school classroom may stimulate or neutralize a need to learn English, e.g. the ubiquity of Spanish in New York versus the more limited use of Polish. In addition, social class and status in the nation of origin, and parents' education were quite different amongst the linguistic groups, possibly creating a co-factor in the level of encouragement and support to learn English. In addition, some of the girls' parents were already fluent in English, or knew little or no English. The access of parents to English classes here or exposure to English was also contingent on type of employment and the linguistic isolation of many of their jobs.

The debate about bilingual versus ESL education is complex and beyond the scope of this study. However, regardless of the actual or perceived capacities of either program to teach English, placement in an ESL or a bilingual class seemed to have a significant impact on a girl's school experience. ESL-placed students expressed their enjoyment in meeting students from so many different nations. They repeatedly told me that having English as the common language in their classes and amongst their new friends forced

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them to help one another to learn English. In contrast, bilingual class students acknowledged that having everyone in their class speak the same language didn't encourage them to try out their new English skills. It was far easier to fall back on their shared common language.

Evelyne who had been placed in a bilingual Creole class, shared that she very much wanted to speak English with her friends:

> I talk Creole too much with my friends, they always talk Creole, sometimes I say talk English because we already know Creole and they prefer to talk Creole, they say okay, okay but then stop and talk Creole. That's why I like talking with others, with non-Haitians.

Maria, however, felt that bilingual education enabled her to learn more. Yes, she admitted, it would be easier to learn English in an ESL class but she preferred to be in a bilingual class:

> ...bilingual it is better. It is not kind of (sic) school to just learn English, you have to learn all those other things. It is hard for example to take history class in English, and you don't understand anything.

Yet, Maria also noted, that as most of her classes were with other Spanish speakers, it was hard to make new friends cross language and national groups. Even when Maria was in a class with students from other places, she felt "we are more comfortable staying with our own." When asked why, she thought the Asians are too shy and it's just "easier to speak Spanish with my friends."

Lisa's experience illustrates how ethnic and national identities may be reinforced and national/linguistic groups isolated from one another as a result of bilingual programs (see also clubs below). When Lisa entered the 10th grade, she spoke Cantonese and also

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basic Spanish. She was placed in a Chinese bilingual program where she felt she belonged, but she observed that being in the Chinese bilingual program made it very hard for her to befriend other Spanish speaking students. "You mostly get to know people who are in your class," she said.

Yet, other girls shared that they had met other students through their extra-curricular and after-school activities. Some girls tutored classmates after school. Others worked as interns at local hospitals. A group of English Caribbean girls ran track for their school. The majority of girls, however, did not formally participate in any activity or club. This is consistent with what others have noted about immigrant students (Bach 1993:53). Family responsibilities, employment, parental and adolescent fears about neighborhood violence often result in a rapid exodus from school as soon as classes end. Although not articulated, no doubt for some girls participation in after-school activities was regarded by their families as a potential source of threat to their values. Activities might expose the girls to peers, both immigrant and native born, whose values may differ from the family's, and activities possibly deemed not suitable for their daughters.

The structures and programs which the schools offered to their students must also be understood as part of the equation regarding immigrant youth participating in extra-curricular activities.

My knowledge of any school's activities was determined by: 1) the availability and/or receptiveness of the liaison staff, 2) what I learned from the girls and faculty during my interviews, 3) the amount of time I was at the school,, and 4) the serendipity of the time of year I was on site at any school. The following comments must therefore be

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understood as incomplete snapshots of each school.

Faculty and students told me about the activities in which they were engaged and/or which were important to them. Within the period of my involvement with the school, I participated in several of these after school activities. My lack of knowledge of other concurrent activities or activities which may have occurred or were planned for a future date may therefore bias my impressions as to the nature of student activities in respect to ethnic and national identities, and my impressions about student participation.

Nevertheless, I believe it is important in this chapter to identify some of the structures I observed which appeared to promote and/or celebrate diversity and foster integration amongst students from very different backgrounds and those structures which appeared to emphasize and/or promote student pride about, and identity with, students' native cultures.

In some schools there seemed to be a clear attempt to create structured opportunities for students from similar backgrounds to find and support one another in their transition into a new society and culture. In these schools there were student clubs based on either language, world region or nationality. Thus one school had a Latin American Club, another a South Asian club, another an Arabic club.

Emma Lazarus High School was one school which had a very active Latin American club which sponsored trips and a special music and dance festival. The festival was a well attended evening in which students performed and were then honored by the Latin American community, including representatives from various New York -based consulates. However, in the audience there were very few non-Spanish speaking students

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or staff and thus the evening did not seem to me to bridge either the school's and/or the community's diversity.

Several students described how helpful their respective language or ethnic-specific clubs and programs had been for them, but also how these same programs, at times, frustrated their attempts to move beyond their own group. When Fatima arrived from Palestine, she "didn't think that there would be so many foreigners, and that there would be so many Arabs." She thought that everyone would be "American." Initially, she found life here hard. Everyone seemed to speak English. Belonging to the Arab club was very supportive. Speaking a shared language "made things easier." In the beginning she thus only had Arabic friends. However, after a year Fatima felt somewhat torn. She wanted to be with students who were like her, but also wanted to move beyond her network of Arabic speaking friends. "I didn't want to just stick with Arabs." She thus actively pursued new friendships through her ESL classes and through a variety of other school-related activities - honor society, Liberty partnership. She now has friends from other nations and also United States-born. She says she likes that, "I learn about other cultures."

Other students, however, reported that membership in their respective ethnic club provided a sense of safety beyond a period of initial school adjustment. Several students from South Asia observed how important it was to them to have easy access to other students from their background. These students reported that they were the target of a great deal of prejudice and were frequently taunted by students who were either native born or were immigrant students from other world regions Their club thus provided an in-school safe haven for them. I will discuss the girls' experiences with racism and prejudice

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in"**The Web of Identity.**"

But students didn't necessarily need clubs in order to stick together. As previously mentioned, schools with large bilingual programs also provided a "natural" supportive network for many students.

On the other end of the continuum were schools and students who actively tried to bridge their schools' diverse student populations. Mary Antin High School specifically prohibited the formation of any club which would reflect a specific national, ethnic or linguistic group. The faculty of Mary Antin commented that they were doing their best to help students bridge their differences and, therefore, to allow such clubs would send the opposite message. Interestingly, as mentioned above, Mary Antin was the only school which did not have any bilingual programs but had many ESL classes.

Blackwell, which had several ethnic national clubs, was a school which also seemed to actively promote cross cultural fertilization and integration of students. During the period of my fieldwork, Blackwell's PTA held a student night in which students from both, bilingual and ESL, classes participated. The students prepared talks which described their migration experiences. The evening was very poignant. As the students presented their life stories, the diverse audience of parents and fellow students cheered and literally wept with the students. The sense of loss of homeland permeated some of the talks. A girl from India was so overcome by tears that she ran from the room followed by friends who ran after her. I saw her later being comforted in a stairwell. I subsequently introduced myself to this student, but she did not keep her interview appointment with me. A number of the girl's friends whom I did interview, told me, how they, too, had intense feelings. It

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was sometimes really hard to talk about their coming here. Several teachers at Blackwell and also at other schools told me the reason they did not ask students too much about their migration experiences was the possibility of "opening a pandoras box." One ESL teacher said that there was just not enough time to listen when the flood gates opened. One guidance counselor said he was responsible for 200 students, another said that she was responsible for 450 students. With that number of students - it was best to let the students initiate discussions about the migration and settlement. I was still surprised how few students were asked to write their stories, for I believe that such assignment could also provide opportunity for sharing and healing.

Returning to the Blackwell PTA meeting, another student who talked that evening was Nancie born in China raised in Columbia who began to speak in English but then switched to Spanish. A fellow student, seemingly without any prompting, who had been born in Korea, but who had also spent considerable time in South America, came up to the front and proceeded to translate Nancie's Spanish into English. His act of support brought a wave of comments amongst the Korean parents in the audience and a short burst of applause from fellow students and faculty.

In other schools, students found a variety of ways to cross linguistic and national differences, interacting and becoming friends with "students from so many places." Ironically, some of these students commented that, despite their attempts, they really were not meeting any "real" Americans in their schools. While there were native born students in their diverse schools, many of these students were the children of immigrants and thus did not seem to count as "real Americans." When probed, the students clarified that they

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did meet African American students, but that the real American - "the blond blue-eyed" student whom they had anticipated meeting, eluded them.

**Inter-Group Relations**

What were the relations between the immigrant girls and the students they did find in their respective schools. A number of the girls commented that they were very surprised to find so many other immigrant students in their schools, so many others who were also " new to America." Nancie was amazed to find at least ten other Blackwell students who were Chinese-born but, like her, had grown up in South America. Lisa, who had been born in China and lived for seven years in Panama, shared Nancie's tri-national experience. However, in contrast to Nancie, who felt more at ease spending time with her Spanish classmates, Lisa preferred her Chinese friends to her Spanish friends. She commented: "I will always be Chinese."

Curious how the girls perceived attending school with such a diverse student body, I asked the girls what it was like going to a school with students from so many different countries. Patrice from Barbados articulated what many other girls told me:

P: It is very interesting.
I: What makes it interesting?
P: The different cultures. The way they talk. Just having friends from everywhere

.

Some girls had best friends from other countries and world regions. Some girls like Eva who was involved with a Pakistani student, had boyfriends cross nationality and religion (see **"The Web of Identity"**). Fatima and several of her Arab friends had become friendly with Russian Jewish students. The girls were amazed that they could be friends

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with Jews and vice versa. They just knew "not to discuss Israel." (See "**Web of Identity**" and "**Identity and Gender**" for further discussion of peer relationships and friendships.)

While many girls did find themselves crossing national and ethnic boundaries in their friendships, many also stated that they preferred having friends from their own background. Some of these same girls described tense inter-group relations at their school, at times, based on race and, at times, based on ethnicity.

Emma Goldman High School's student population is overwhelmingly of English and Haitian Caribbean nativity or descent. In this school of many immigrants, tensions are often high between the students from English speaking islands and their counterparts from Haiti. Despite some friendships that bridge the students cultural backgrounds, Marva and several other girls from the English Caribbean and from Haiti described how being Haitian placed students at risk of verbal and physical abuse from other students. These girls reported that, at times, Haitian students are teased and taunted for the fact they did not speak English well, their accent, and/or how they were dressed. Marva, born in Guyana, acknowledged that at first, she "hated people speaking in three (sic ?) languages - I was like "What country are you from? And they would say Haiti, and I was like "oh". Now, Marva feels upset that Haitian students sometimes feel that they must deny their Haitian nativity or descent. "They say I am American, or something other than Haitian, because they want to avoid trouble." At Emma Goldman High School, although there were some other cross island tensions, Marva seemed to feel that the biggest problems were between the Haitian and the Jamaican students. But she didn't know why. Marva also observed, that the small number of South Asian students who attended Emma Goldman High School

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were very quiet, stayed to themselves and seemed to have few friends. However, she had begun to talk with a Pakistani boy in her lab. "I talk with him cause they play cricket and the West Indies and Guyana play cricket so we usually speak about cricket and stuff."

At other schools, South Asian girls described how they were often called "Hindu" regardless of their religious background. Salma, a Muslim girl from Bangladesh, said she had been taunted by other students, and her nose ring had been pulled. Salma also had had her bookbag stolen. Salma shared that she was most scared of the "black" kids who went to her school. ("**Web of Identity**" will further discuss race and ethnic relationships.) Girls from China and Korea also described being taunted at times. A few Korean girls said that others mistook them for Chinese. A misidentification which they didn't like. Several Chinese girls said that it was unfair and rude to be teased for their poor English or their accents. But, several of these girls also acknowledged that their own actions may at times foster bad will towards them. For example, one girl told me that, when her bookbag inadvertently hit another student in a crowded hallway, she suddenly forgot all her English. Unable to find the words for "I'm sorry," she walked away , but heard behind her angry shouts which she could not understand. Many girls, self-consciousness about their English and their accent, kept very quiet, put their head in a book when other non-Chinese students were around, or stayed close to others from their own background. The girls felt that non-Asian students perhaps read these actions to mean that they were stuck up, but the girls said they were really just feeling nervous..

At Emma Lazarus High School, where there were also many Chinese immigrant students, Carmen observed that in general the Chinese and Latin students didn't mix

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much, but that she didn't think there was much tension between the groups. In contrast, she observed that there was a great deal of animosity between the Dominican and the Puerto Rican students, "same language and culture, no difference, it's bad we can't get along." Carmen spoke of fights between groups of Puerto Rican and Dominican students, both in school and outside school.

For many girls, violence was a constant presence in their communities, spilling into school and also spilling out of their schools. Many girls felt issues related to ethnic or racial identities were the cause of the school-based violence. But, many girls also articulated school fights had to do with other factors, such as problems between boys and girls, jealousies over boyfriends and girlfriends, clothes such as wearing "cross colors" (African yellow, green and red), or wearing "status clothes" (particular brand clothes or those with designer labels,). Noelle described how her brother had been stripped naked of his Gap jeans and had to walk home naked. Noelle also described how she often became involved in physical fights at school. Other students gang up on her and she feels that she must fight back. A sense of maintaining ones' honor, and also proving that one is not afraid, seemed like a subtext to Noelle's story. Girls at Emma Goldman High School and Paule Marshall High School more frequently raised the issue of school fights. They also observed that despite the school having metal detectors, students were able to bring knives into the school. "... they sneak it in, put it in their shoe, inside their shoe, they don't check in there." Noelle and other students also complained that the school security guards, or "school safety officers," were never around when one needed them. And when there was an incident, they were, at best, unresponsive and frequently overtly hostile when students

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asked for assistance.

In my visits to the eight high schools, I was acutely aware of the presence and absence of school safety officers which foretold, in most cases, the sense of the calm or tension in the school. The greater the number of officers, it seemed the more tense was the atmosphere I sensed in the school - and the more frequently students spoke of school-based violence. I was told by one safety officer, that safety officers are assigned to schools based on the number of "incidents" reported, thus a school with more violence has more officers. The one seeming exception was Emma Goldman High School, which had one of the worst reputations for violence, and in which a student had been killed in the cafeteria the year before I did my field interviews. On my multiple visits to this school, the only safety officers visible to me were those who sat by the front door.

At Noelle's school, which I visited in the dead of winter on a day that never topped 5 degrees, I waited outside with over 50 students until a uniformed safety officer came to unlock an exterior door to admit me. However, none of the students who waited with me were admitted. When I later asked the assistant principal why the students couldn't wait inside out of the cold, he responded the students were late and needed to know that "lateness was not acceptable. If they got cold today they would come on time tomorrow." This school required me not only to go through a stationary metal detector at the door, but also to be scanned by a security officer with a hand held detector. While in most schools the security officers seemed to "hang out" near the front door, and had limited presence in other parts of the school building, in this school there was a security officer with a walkie talkie almost every 10 feet. I was most uncomfortable, if not scared,

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about my own safety in this school. And it was the guards that gave me the creeps, not the students. This school made me feel like I had walked into a prison, an armed camp (although the safety officers are not allowed to carry weapons). I wondered how much the officers were contributing to calm and how much of their presence contributed to heightened tensions in the school.

In Noelle's school all my observations of interactions between the administrative staff and faculty (overwhelmingly white), the safety officers (mostly black), and the students (also mostly black), seemed insensitive if not hostile. Directions were shouted and not spoken. There seemed to be no attempt to create privacy in the guidance office when students shared their problems, ranging from poor relations with parents, problems with immigration, to pregnancy and/or problems with the law. The one staff member I met, who was a significant exception to the above observations, was the social worker attached to a school-based health clinic. This woman seemed extremely connected to and concerned about the students with whom she interacted. When I shared with her my observation about the incipient sense of violence in the school, she said that, in fact, there had been less violence this year than in years past. She had seen fewer students hit by chairs, beaten or stabbed. She believed that the new chief of security and better trained safety officers contributed to the decrease in violent incidents. It is all relative, I suppose, for despite this social worker's comments, my field notes for the school expressed my feelings: the "school is a barricaded landscape set for war and not educating." (Field notes 2/4/93), and "everything feels removed, distilled and impersonal tinged with tension as if awaiting some major blow up" (2/9/93).

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At only three schools did I have to pass through a stationary metal detector. At these schools I also met seemingly disinterested safety officers, some who made me nervous with their unfriendliness. On my several visits to these schools, I actually felt there was active belligerence as they asked me: "what are you doing here?" However, at most schools, I was met by very friendly safety officers who were very helpful (e.g. helping me gain access to a staff bathroom, a real necessity during field visits). The girls I interviewed at these schools did talk about the occasional fight, harassment and racial tensions, such as Salma above, but in general, the girls' sense of personal safety and the threat of school-site violence did not seem to be a significant issue in their lives.

**College Plans, Challenges and Prospects**

The importance of education and educational credentials has shifted markedly from the turn of the century. In previous periods of heavy immigration, the economy was expanding. Employment opportunities and, through employment, upward mobility, were not necessarily connected to school attendance or to the completion (Gans, 1992) of high school or the earning of a college degree. Manual and/or low skilled work was widely available and did not require English proficiency or, in many cases, even literacy. In fact, students would often drop out of school in order to help their families survive - "income was the factor often as who would stay in school the longest." Berrol, 1995). In the 1920 and 1930s only 40% of students graduated high school. Today, the economy and the job market have shrunk, and the world of work has been transformed into a highly technical one in which literacy, English proficiency and substantial credentials are demanded. Increasingly, even entry level positions which once only required a high school diploma,

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now require some college, if not a college or post-graduate degree. In New York City and across the nation there is great concern about the numbers of immigrant students who drop out of school before graduating high school (New Voices 1988). One study stated that, nationally, as many as 70% of foreign-born youth drop out (New Voices 1988:65). The region of the nation and the specific history of an immigrant community result in wide differences in the school success and drop-out rates among immigrant youth. In New York City the dropout rate of foreign-born students is unavailable, although it is known that poor and minority students have much higher drop out rates than non-minority and middle class students. The factors contributing to immigrant student drop out were not explored during my study. The girls I interviewed were in school and, in general, doing fairly well academically, not only planning to graduate from high school, but regardless of their current GPAs, were also actively thinking about going on to college.

For some of these girls, the decision to migrate had been partially or fully predicated on a perception that admission into a US college was far easier than entrance into a college or university in their native country. It was, therefore, ironic when we spoke about college, that many girls voiced concerns about the quality of education they would receive at a US college. The girls' concerns echoed their discovery on the high school level, that their own national education system had frequently demanded and provided a higher standard for excellence. Would attendance at a US college be any different? As they looked towards college, they wondered if their parents had "sacrificed" too much for an education that was less good than that which they left behind?

At the same time, the girls asserted that even if "deficient" in comparison to the

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rigor and standard of their own countries, an American degree held status and promise, and would open doors that a degree from one of their own nation's colleges or universities would never open. Consistent with this assessment, students who wanted very much to return to their nations of origin to live and work, embraced the ironic "advantage of status," and planned to complete college here before returning home.

In my interviews, a number of girls expressed anxiety about the process of choosing the right college and getting their applications all together. In some cases, the girls felt supported and encouraged by their school guidance staff. However, often even the "nice" guidance staff did not have enough time to counsel them about different options and/or to help them complete their applications with all the needed materials. For example, one girl was told too late about the application process for the TOFEL exam. As a result of this oversight, the girl thought her entrance into college would be delayed by at least one semester.

Girls who did not have an older sibling already in college felt at a real disadvantage. While mostly supported and encouraged by their parents, the girls' parents often were ignorant about the differences between colleges and/or were unfamiliar with the application process itself. This was the situation with Li. She felt encouraged by her parents, but knew that their experience going to college in China was very different. "I know more about American colleges than they do, how can they help me?" Many parents did not read English, further complicating their efforts to help their daughters negotiate college catalogues and applications.

Where families and parents seemed to play a more active role in college planning

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was in the decision to attend school in New York City or to go away. Some parents approved their daughters going away. Li, who had been accepted by Syracuse, was one of these girls. However, Li as an only child, worried if her non-English speaking parents would be okay without her. Other girls believed, by being away from home they could really concentrate on their studies and not be distracted by their families or the city. Christina decided to go to Stoney Brook because: "the place is so quiet and you can understand. I don't think that college is good in the city, so I decided to go away from my family and study." Raquel also wanted to go away.

> When you are away from any problem that you have in your house, you can concentrate in school better. That is what I want to do. I don't want to work while I am college. Maybe part-time, but I want to be away. I don't want to come and go to school.

Some girls like Aisha wanted to go away but had parents who wanted them to stay home while they went to college. "I applied to the colleges of the City University of New York and also St Johns. I couldn't have applied to the State University of New York because I couldn't go far away, my parents won't let me. So I didn't apply there." Aisha believed that part of the reason her parents wanted her to go to college locally was, that they were very busy seeking out a prospective husband for her and thus they needed her close by. Marva wanted very badly to go away to school, because she felt that she had a greater chance of staying out of trouble and she was so unhappy in her father's household. But Marva' father said he would refuse to pay the higher costs of a residential college.

In contrast to Marva, was Carmen who wanted to stay home, she had had "enough of starting over:"

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> Well, first of all I wanted to go upstate, but I don't know, I think I was really really late for the admission list, because my financial aid form I got so many problems, I had so many (garbled) and I also was thinking about like (garbled) missing my neighborhood my old crowd, and I was thinking I was starting all over again, I don't know why I am so lazy, I will have to start again, meeting all the people, and missing the people here and that I know here I live, if I go up state I would have to learn everything, you know, and that was what I was thinking about, I don't want to do that, and I also was thinking about my mother, and my family, and I don't know I really like to live with my family, I am not the kind of person that don't like sharing with their family, I know some people they don't want to know about their family, I'm not like that, I like to be with my parents, my brother and sister, so when I think about all that I say I'm staying here.

Some girls were making a decision about college based on the fact that a friend or relative attended the school. Thus, Marina was set on St Francis College because her friends went there, and Meena was hoping to go to Virginia Tech because her male cousin was going there. Fatima stated that her choice of college was based on what she had heard about the academic reputation of the college. She had heard that both Harvard and Yale had good law schools and so she planned to apply to both of them for her undergraduate studies.

Kristina, on the other hand, was thinking that one's choice of college needed to be based on tuition costs, because she had heard that an employer would not hire someone who had only paid $1500 for college, they would choose someone who paid $18,000 per year. To Kristina tuition costs equaled quality education. Yet, Kristina like many other girls I interviewed, were facing the contradiction between the dream of an American college education and the reality that, without appropriate INS documentation, financing their college education was probably going to be very difficult, if not impossible, for them.

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In 1982 the Supreme Court decided in Plyer v Doe that under the 14th Amendment undocumented children had a right to attend public school, and that to register they did not have to submit any identification including social security card. While the Supreme Court decision enables the free education of undocumented immigrant children, through high school, high school graduation presents a dilemma for these children, their families and their communities. High school degree in hand, many students, even those who have distinguished themselves academically, are blocked in their pursuit of higher education. They can be admitted into both the City and State Universities of New York, which do not require proof of immigration status, but to attend they must have the resources to pay for the ever increasing tuition, now over $3,200 a year for the City University of New York, plus the cost of books, transportation and basic living expenses. Without appropriate INS documentation, and generally without a social security card, these high school graduates have a hard time finding employment in the primary labor market and can not secure educational and/or bank loans. They thus are blocked, both from getting further education and blocked in terms of making a decent living.

Lisa, who was here by herself and was working over 20 hours a week off the books in a laundry, said that even if she worked 40 hours a week she would not be able to pay for college. In 11th grade and getting A's she has no idea what will happen to her after she graduates. Grace, whose track record would have helped her to get an athletic scholarship believed that without a green card she was ineligible for most scholarships and thus doubted she would be able to go to college. Kristina who had expressed her belief that one needed to go to an expensive college said:

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> I don't have a green card, and I don't have a social security number and employment authorization and it is really hard for me to go to college. How am I going to get the money to go to college. You want to go to a good college and it will cost $15-18,000 per year.

The same story was repeated by many other girls, and their schools' administrators echoed the girls worries.

> I have come across so many young females who are immigrants who do not have Green Cards who, once they graduate, they are in deep trouble, because they have nowhere to go. They cannot work. They can't attend school because they can't afford it. They can't apply for grants, that whole deal. So they are basically lost souls.

At two different times school administrators candidly shared that they thought the current policy, allowing undocumented students to attend public school, should be changed. Too many students believed that everything was okay. Then, in their senior year, they come to realize that many doors are closed to them because they lack appropriate INS documentation. One school principal said, that he allowed some undocumented students to stay in school an extra year. This principal believed he was providing a safe haven, another year of protecting them from un- and under-employment. He hoped that, during the extra year, somehow their situation would improve, perhaps their INS status would be adjusted. But for many students, turning 18 made status adjustment even more difficult as they were no longer considered minor children.

Some students considered returning to their nation of origin as a solution. As mentioned previously, Gabriella had decided to return to her native Brazil. Despite her success in finding employment without a green card, college would be virtually impossible for her. But many other girls did not have Gabriella's option. For many girls it would be

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difficult, if not impossible, to return to their nations of origin. For some the political unrest prohibited early return. For others, the socio-economic climate in their native countries would have made university study very difficult to undertake. For still others, the reason they were here was that there were few spaces in their nation's universities, and they doubted they would be able to compete with their counterparts who had remained behind. And for still others, there was no longer any family or social network which could support them while they were in school.

Michelle's situation reflected the many dimensions of the dilemma. Michelle was, in a sense, an unintended immigrant. Her single mother (Haitian born) had sent Michelle to the United States so she could learn English. Here, undocumented, and living with her uncle's family, Michelle learned almost flawless English within 10 months. However, in comparing the education she was receiving in one of Brooklyn's notorious inner city schools to what she had received in Paris, Michelle concluded that French schools were vastly superior. With this realization, and very much missing her mother Michelle wanted to return home. Except, now she feared, that she was probably too far behind her French peers to successfully catch up and complete the lycee and go on to medical school. She felt, in a year she had lost too much precious time. And yet, Michelle had very limited prospects of attending college in the United States. She did not have a green card, her uncle's family was not well off and her mother made meager wages in Paris as a housekeeper. Without an adjusted INS status, even public college was going to be impossible for her economically. Michelle was thus stuck between two educational systems, with a potentially very difficult future educationally, here and/or in France.

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As I was unable to follow up with or keep track of the girls I interviewed, I unfortunately do not know how Michelle resolved her dilemma, nor do I know the success of other girls in realizing their plans and dreams for college. The two exceptions are Carmen (Dominican Republic) and Natalia (Haiti) whom I have seen in the hallways of Hunter College where I now work. In the concluding chapter, "**Past, Present, Future and the American Dream**," however, I will pick up the thread of the educational and career ambitions of these girls and explore them within the context of the American Dream.

## ENDNOTES

1. All children, regardless of nationality or immigration status, have a right to attend public school. Parents and other relatives, however, are often fearful to reveal a child's nativity or documentation status. They do not fully understand the child's rights and are afraid that there may be consequences for their child and/or themselves if it becomes known the child is undocumented or not a citizen. Board personnel try to be sensitive to these fears and thus may not press a parent during registration about place or birth or citizenship. Given this reality, I am unsure how the Board engages in its "Immigrant Student Census," and why they maintain they can rely on that census but can not rely on general registration data.

2. The girls' generally satisfactory grades must be understood in the context, discussed in "**Methods**," that my sample was not random but was developed from those students identified by school staff and who kept their appointments with me. Thus the sample may incompletely represent girls from a specific school and/or from a specific nationality.

3. Given that a number of girls never returned their Cooper Smith surveys, the means were calculated from only returned surveys and, thus, do not reflect the mean of the cluster as a whole.

4. In October 1994 the New York Times reported on a New York City Board of Education study, which compared the rates at which students tested out of ESL and bilingual programs (Dillon 1994). The findings separated students by the type of class and by the grade in which they entered the class. Study findings seem to reflect what I observed amongst the students I interviewed. The Board of Education found that 79% of students who entered ESL classes in kindergarten tested out of them within

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three years as compared to only 51% of those students who had been placed in bilingual classes. For the higher grades the pattern was even more dramatic. Only 7% of students placed in bilingual classes tested out within three years, as compared to 33% of students who had been placed in ESL classes. While differences in the linguistic groups socio-economic status and degree of community isolation or integration and the students level of literacy in their native language are significant factors which must be considered, these findings suggest that there may be important differences in the success of ESL and bilingual programs to move students into the mainstream classes.

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# CHAPTER VII

## THE WEB OF IDENTITY: IMMIGRATION STATUS, NATIONALITY, ETHNICITY AND RACE

Identity is an individual's self knowledge of coherence and authenticity (Hoare 1991:47). The self and one's identity, however, are not static or completed products developed during adolescence, the period between childhood and adulthood. Rather identity is a dynamic process of being in the world, responding to the world, and being responded to by the world (Field 1993). The individual has both a personal identity or a self-definition of his/her's physical, social and spiritual being; and a social identity which consists largely of those "attributions and identifications made by others attempting to situate the individual as a social object" in the world (Field 1993). As such, identity is both self created and imposed from without. An individual's identity may be slightly or radically altered or transformed at any point in the life cycle as a result of either and/or both internal changes, and changes in the individual's social environment.

In the West, personal identity is enmeshed within a sense of "self" as an individuated coherence or as ego-centric. In other cultures, particularly Eastern cultures, personal identity is embedded in a social context, and thus may be less about "self" and more socio-centric (Hoare 1991). Regardless of the defining centrality of self or social network, each individual has a web of identities. This web is comprised of an array of identities. These identities can be likened to colored threads in a fabric which, woven together, forms a whole pattern or lattice. Single threads, however, may have different properties of color and/or texture. As such, in different light, different threads will

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dominate while others will recede. And the spaces between the threads? These spaces allow for new threads to be woven through, enhancing or creating tension in the already existing woven design.

As I met and interviewed girls from diverse backgrounds, I wondered what was the design of their web of identity. What threads dominated? Had the design or pattern of their identity changed post-migration? What new threads of identity had been introduced post-migration? Had these new threads or elements of identity altered or transformed the girls' sense of who they were? And, if they had, to what effect?

The girls I interviewed were developing and integrating identities as they experienced a multiplicity of disconnections, connections and transitions: 1) the transition from childhood to adulthood; 2) the disconnection from social and personal worlds pre-migration; 3) the transition into new social and personal worlds in the United States; 4) the changing definitions of gender in both, their native countries and in the United States; and 5) the changing landscape of ethnic and racial identities and relations in the United States. Which, if any, of these domains of experience were most significant in their lives? Which created the greatest challenges for them? And how did the synergy or the tension of these experiences get played out in their developing sense of self, in their self images and in their defining who they were, who they wanted to be and who they thought they could become?

This chapter, and the next chapter which focuses on gender, will try to address the above issues. As I explore and analyze the data from my interviews with the girls, and from their responses from the "This Is Me Survey" (TIM), I will, in effect, need to

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separate out various attributes or identities. In a sense, I will be pulling apart that which is already woven together, albeit in some cases loosely or incompletely. Nevertheless, as I turn to different aspects of the girls' self image and personal and social identities, it is important to remember that none of their identities are separate or independent. Rather, they are often interdependent, vibrating, and resonating with one another, thereby changing both the significance and the hue of their more individual characteristics.

From the beginning of my field research, I tried very consciously not to superimpose my own sense of significant domains onto the girls' life narratives and observations. While most of my understanding about the girls' sense of identity emerged from my interviews with them, the girls' responses to the "This Is Me Survey" provided me with a a snapshot, a condensation of what they felt was most important about them. I will thus begin my discussion of identities from the data gathered from the TIM. I will then explore specific aspects of identity.

## DESCRIPTIONS AND PROJECTIONS OF SELF

### Descriptions of Self

The first question on the "This Is Me Survey" asked either[1] to **"describe who you are now"** or **"what is the most important thing about you."**

Despite my best intentions, I found myself truly surprised by the girls' answers. I had expected more of them to use ethnic and national identifiers, and/or to refer to their immigration status. But I quickly realized that those identifiers were, for me as the researcher, the salient characteristics. They were not either the principal referents or even secondary self-identifiers for the young women, or at least not in the context of writing a

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response to a survey. Out of 52 returned TIM surveys,[2] not one girl included her national or ethnic origin or "race." Later in this chapter, I will explore the significance of ethnicity, nationality and/or "race" in the girls' lives. Here, however, I feel it is important to comment how neither ethnicity, race nor nationality seemed in and of themselves significant in how the girls self-defined. The "absence"[3] of these social identifiers suggests ethnicity and/or race had not emerged as conscious aspects of the girls' images of themselves. As Gordon remarks, "fish never discover water" (1964) The girls' sense of self did not include that which was self-evident, or "to give voice to something that is so 'natural' (it) is beyond words" (Ben Jelloun, 1991:119), at least in the former contexts of their lives. Later, however, we will see that within their new social contexts many girls were acutely aware of these social markers and struggled with the significance of " difference" in their daily interactions with OTHERs.[4]

In reviewing the girls' responses, I was additionally struck that only two girls had included "immigrant" in their description of themselves. While being an immigrant was very significant in many arenas of their life, it did not seem to be a salient aspect of their self-description. The two girls who did include "immigrant" both came from China. I am not sure if this was a serendipitous occurrence or portends of some significance in relation to their origins. Only a larger sample could clarify the meaning or lack of meaning of this coincidence.

Of further note, however, is that Ting, one of the two girls who used immigrant, also included two other social categories or statuses in her description, "student" and "daughter." The other student, Tracy, from Hong Kong, also included "student" in her

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self-description. Although, the word "daughter" was not included in any other girl's response, two girls implied this status. Victoria from the former Soviet Union wrote: "The most important thing about me is my perfect relationship between me and my parents and I want it to stay that way for the rest of my life." And, Jyoti from India wrote: "The most important thing about me is I am the older (sic) girl in whole family and it's (sic) meant to respect older." Both these responses reflected an identity framed by the girls' status within their respective families. A total of nine girls (includes the previously cited girls) made some mention of family in their self-descriptions. In the majority of cases, the inclusion referred to their identity as members of a specific family. For instance, both Kosov sisters included their family as a self-reference. The older sister wrote: "The most important thing about me is my personality and where I come from (family)." And the younger sister, Teresa wrote: "The most important thing about me is, that I come from a very good (intelligent, respected) family." For these sisters, not only was their family an anchor for them, but the memory of their family's, particularly their father's, prior stature in Yugoslavia, sustained them as they lived a very transformed life here in the United States. In reflecting on the Kosov sisters, I wondered given the importance of family status in many cultures, that family was not more frequently included in the girls' responses. I was also perplexed because, as I discussed in **"Family and Household,"** family was very important to many girls linking past and present and providing stability in their lives. Was the absence of their reference to family, a result of the girls' sense of the naturalness, if not the obviousness, of their status as daughters? Or did it have to do with the loss of a wider familial or social network?

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While family was not used as often as I had expected, I was not surprised by the frequency of references to social relations in their self definitions. Chodorow, Miller and Gilligan have all written about adolescent female development as being different from male development. In contrast to Erikson's and Freud's concepts of male development, in which adult identity formation requires the individual to separate and gain autonomy: female development emerges within and not apart from relationship (Davenport 1991:65; Goodenow 1993:178; Josselson 1993). The female self emerges in terms of connections and interactions. Relationships ground her very identity (Gilligan 1990). In this very ethnically diverse group, the most commonly used word in this was "responsible." It surfaced in eight out of 52 surveys. "Dependable," "loyal," "respectful" and "friendly" also appeared several times. Many girls also described themselves in relation to others using such words as "cooperative," and "understanding." The "ethic of caring" that Gilligan (cited in Sidel 1990:148) describes was clearly suggested in the above words but more explicitly in several of the girls' responses.

Lisa (China/Panama) wrote: "I like to take care of older person." Marina (Yugoslavia) wrote: "I think the most important thing about me is that, no matter what happens, I always try to help my family and other people." Alisha (Russia) wrote: "I have a dream and I'm sure that I would achieve my dream. I care about other people, I want to help sick people."

A number of girls wrote that they wanted to improve some aspect of themselves. One Chinese girl wrote "shy want to be independent." Alexis from the former Soviet Union wrote: "I am trying to do my best to study." Isis from Egypt introduced another

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dimension to self improvement, simultaneous to employing an interactive definition of self.

> I think that the most important thing about me is that I care too much about what people think of me than what I think of myself. I also worry a lot about saying something that might offend someone else, so I just keep my opinions to myself.

Isis's response reflects a common adolescent struggle, at least in the West, to develop a sense of personhood that connects the self to others but also establishes a sense of individuality in which the self can assert its own perspective and is able to establish a sense of well-being from within. Several other girls elaborated a different aspect of their interactions with others. Anya from the former USSR wrote: "I can't lie to a person and look in his eyes. I can't lie to myself." Leela from India echoed Anya: "The important thing about me is that I am an introspective natured person. I do not like to be lied or cheated. If I am cheated, I will never like to go into that environment again."

Isis's (Egypt) positive response, cited above, also surfaced aspects of self-judgement and self-esteem. Many girls included single adjectives such as smart, intelligent, honest, determined. A few girls described themselves in terms of negative or undesired characteristics, such as "lazy," or "spoiled," or "jealous." Maria from the Dominican Republic wrote: "Very nice to talk to, sometimes aggressive (ex) yelling at people." Lina, also from the Dominican Republic, wrote: "Jealous, popular, creative, shy (sometimes), don't forgive people easily." A few girls made statements of self-approval. Antonia from Czechoslovakia wrote: "I am unique and the fact that I know it." Anya (Russia) wrote: I like being myself." and her co-national Natasha wrote: "I guess the most important thing about me is that I'm a good person." Grace from Barbados wrote: "The most important

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thing about me is my personality."

**Projections of Self Identity**

The second TIM question moved from self definers, or what the girls perceived to be important characteristics, to a more interactive or social question **Write down all the words which you would use to describe yourself to someone you have never met.** This question, in a sense, asks them to present themselves to the OTHER, an unknown OTHER. Here I was hoping to surface if there were differences between self or personal identity and social identity, i.e. were there aspects of who they were that they believed were important to, in a sense, project or report to the world, and thereby help shape how the world would view them?

The girls' responses to the second question were in many ways quite similar to their answers to the first question. Again, I was surprised by some of their answers. For this question, not one girl included "immigrant" in her response. But two girls, one Haitian, and one Indian, identified themselves by their national origins. One of these girls, Jyoti, also mentioned her skin color "Long hair, I wear glasses, I'm kind of tall, I am Indian (Asia), I dark brown eyes, I am skinny, my skin color is brown." Skin color was also mentioned by another girl who was born in Haiti.

> My name is Amie, I'm 17 years old, I am a very sensitive girl. I really like myself. First of all for my color, for the way I look and the way I show people my education, *** me sometimes I can even help myself because I love the way I am. Thank you."

As briefly discussed above, the "absence" of identifier relating to nationality, ethnicity or race/color suggests that when there was the suggestion of an audience or an

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OTHER, the girls did not employ social categories to describe themselves. The absence of ethnic/racial/national categories in the girls' projection of self suggest: 1) the categories were so obvious or natural they did not merit comment; 2) the generalized OTHER was still perceived within the pre-migration context; 3) the girls had not yet acculturated to the United States' pre-occupation with racial and ethnic categories; and/or 4) impression management, the girls' selectivity reflected their attempt to reduce difference rather than to assert it. This last possibility may be a response to the importance national origins, ethnicity and race did have in their actual post-migration social interactions.

While the girls did not use social categories in their responses to the second question, in contrast to their responses to the first question, a number of girls described their looks. The words "pretty," "beautiful," "tall," "short," "over-weighted (sic)," "skinny," and "cute" were used across all the national and regional clusters. A desire to make themselves more visible may explain the incidence of these physical characteristics in their responses to the second question - when an OTHER was the audience. It may also reflect gender socialization in which girls are taught to see themselves in terms of their physical attractiveness. But, again, given the popular attention to looks both in the United States and overseas, and the physical changes that adolescent girls experience in their bodies, I was surprised that many more girls did not include a physical description of themselves. Nevertheless, I was refreshingly surprised, given both American attention to looks and a tendency for hyper-critical self-assessment of physical attributes, that very few of the girls on the TIM or, later, during my interviews, indicated intense preoccupation or dissatisfaction with how they looked.

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As I compared the girls' answers to the first and second question, I discovered that many of their responses to the second question were elaborations or explanations of the first. Thus, a series of words which described their attributes, were in their second response further explained or defined. In a few cases I had the definite feeling that the girl had in her mind's eye an OTHER, although perhaps minimally defined, to whom she was directly addressing, and whom she wanted to really understand her and to know what to expect from her.

For instance, Zenobia's (Ecuador) response to the first question had little sense of interaction, but her second was almost physical in its eagerness to reach out.

> **First.** Person, enthusiastic challenging myself all the time, aggressive, decided on what I want, pretty happy (so far) friendly, understanding.
>
> **Second.** Nice person, friendly, always ready to share my friendship, with my ears open to listen carefully and my hands extend to offer any help at any moment. I'm honest.

Lisa's first response mentions her ease in meeting a friend, but her second response actually explains to the OTHER, how she goes about being friendly.

> **First.** Happy, sad, outgoing, responsibility (sic), poor, intelligence, easier to meet a friend, more worldly, more experiences, I feel older than other students my age. I like to take care of older person.
>
> **Second.** 1) I never be shy, 2) I will try to talk with them, 3) I will want he or she to be my friend (if they are good persons), 4) If he or she doesn't want to be my friend, then I will try to ask why, 5) after we are friends I will try to go out with them.

Like Zenobia and Lisa, Teresa's second response is also much more specific and elaborates on her first. In comparing Teresa's two answers, I am also struck how her first answer situated her in a social context, her family, while the second focused on explaining

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who she is - an explanation or impression management which seems to strive to prevent the OTHER from developing a negative perception of her.

> **First.** The most important thing about me is, that I come from a very good (intelligent, respect) family.
>
> **Second**. I'm a very friendly person, carying (sic) I have respect for people. I don't like making people feel bad. I get nervous very fast. I don't like to gossip. I hardly can keep my own secrets. I am a great student and I was in top 100. I like to talk only that is right. People tell me that I look stuck up concided (sic)) but that is not true at all maybe it is nature how I look. I'm a simple person, I have a great personality.

A number of other girls, also either implicitly or explicitly, included in their answers some concern about how they were perceived by others.

Literature on immigrants and immigration often makes some reference to depression and low self-esteem as consequences of migration and the post-arrival adjustment immigrants experience, i.e. sorting out their values, behaviors and identities as they struggle to make a new life. Few girls in my study, however, included descriptors which could be classified as negative[5] and/or indicated dissatisfaction with aspects of their personality. Remarkably across ages (13-21) and clusters, the girls used generally positive adjectives to describe themselves. In fact, in contrast to assumptions about alienation and depression amongst immigrants, I found amongst the girls a sense of personal strength and generally good self-esteem. Even the girls whom I identified as being depressed, such as Maria, and girls who had had low scores on the Cooper Smith, wrote about themselves in generally positive terms. Was impression management operating here? No doubt some impression management was taking place. However, the specificity of descriptions and the girls' willingness to share with me negative things about themselves and their lives,

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suggest that impression management was not that significant in shaping their answers. For example, Maria wrote:

> **First**. "egocentric/selfish, sensible, critical responsible, dreamer, shy (sometimes) nice, talkative, confidential (sic), intelligent capable.
>
> **Second**. Sensible, responsible, dreamer, shy, nice capable, intelligent, confident, human.

Salma and Aisha who had some of the lowest Cooper Smith scores[6] described themselves positively: "I'm a serious person and can handle problems" and "Serious, ambitious, respectful, kind, happy careful (Salma); or "I'm a very understanding person. I can help people. I'm very easy and can make friends. I like to dream" and "Serious, ambitious, respectful, kind, happy careful" (Aisha).

Out of the 52 respondents to the TIM, Tracy from Hong Kong, was the only girl who wrote candidly, almost painfully, about her inner struggle to make sense of herself and the changes within her body and between her and boys. In "**Family and Household,**" I described Tracy's belief that her parents had been neglecting her since her family's arrival in the United States. Without parental help or support to solve the problems she faced, Tracy's loneliness and confusion are clearly evident in her two answers.

> **First.** I am a student. I don't really understand myself. Sometimes my body did (sic) something that my mind never thought about. Sometimes I will mess up my work. I know I can do better at school, but I never try to do better. I always have problems with guys. Because they always want me to go out with them. The things that happen to me make me feel unhappy and lonely.
>
> **Second**. Special, don't understand myself. Stupid (sometimes) smart (sometimes) quiet (sometimes)

In sum, when asked to describe themselves the 52 girls who completed the TIM

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survey provided me with an image of themselves which principally relied on personality characteristics, evidenced the importance of connection and relationship to others, but very infrequently situated them in a context such as family, gave indication of status such as immigrant, or defined themselves in terms of social categories. Nevertheless, even without social categories framing the girls self-portraiture, categories related to skin color and immigrant status were a very significant part of in the girls' experience and were very significant in their daily lives. I will now explore how these, markers, characteristics and/or superimposed identities, were given meaning, understood and played out in the girls' lives.

## BEING AN IMMIGRANT

### Identifications: "Being an Immigrant"

To be included in my study, a girl had to be an immigrant. In thus defining inclusion or exclusion in my study by this fact of experience, I was, in a sense, superimposing a dominant identity for the girls even before I met them. My imposition of this identity, in part mirrored their experience since arrival. Immigration had set into motion a process of amplification and transformation of both their personal and social identities. However, many factors, including: gender, national origins, ethnicity, the histories of their families, the histories of their immigrant community, and the socio-political and economic landscape into which they arrived, have informed, if not structured, the ensuing construction and reconstruction of the girls' identities.

The identity of "being an immigrant," is not independent from other identities, especially national origin and ethnicity/race. Immigration and "being an immigrant," however, present a useful condensation of psychological and social processes (Knafo,

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1994) and thereby can illuminate identity formation. I will thus begin my exploration of specific aspects of identity with an exploration of the meaning and the significance, of "being an immigrant."

**TABLE 7-1**

**"Being an Immigrant" - Responses by Clusters**

| Cluster | Positive | Mixed | Negative | Neutral | Don't Know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chinese | 1 | 5 | 3 | - | - |
| South Asian | - | 4 | 2 | | |
| European | - | 1 | 4 | 1 | |
| Russian | - | - | 4 | 1 | |
| English Caribbean | 2 | - | 2 | | 1 |
| Haitian | - | - | 3 | | 3 Blank |
| Centrl/SA/DR | 2 | 2 | 4 | | |
| North Africa | 1 | | | | 2 Blank |
| West Africa | 1 | | | | |
| Korean | | 1 | | | |
| SE Asian | | 2 | | | |
| Mid-Eastern | | 1 | | | |
| **TOTAL** | 7 | 16 | 22 | 2 | 6 |

Without any expectations or hypotheses, I asked the girls on the "This Is Me Survey" to: **"list all the words that describe how you feel about 'being an immigrant."** My first level of analysis was to classify the girls' answers into positive, negative, mixed or neutral[7]. Four girls did not answer the question and one stated "I don't

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know." Out of the 47 completed responses, 47% (22) of the girls wrote negatively about being an immigrant; 34% (16) of the girls had mixed feelings/experiences; 15% (7) had positive feelings/experiences; and 4% (2) indicated neutrality about being an immigrant. Looking more closely at the girls' answers by national/regional cluster, I was surprised and somewhat puzzled by the pattern of almost totally negative responses for girls from Russia and Europe, and the more positive responses of the girls from China/Hong Kong. I had somehow assumed that girls from the Russian and European clusters would be more mixed, if not positive in their responses. My assumption had been based on the fact that in the late twentieth century, immigrants from European nations have experienced an easier reception than immigrants who are people of color; and that a number of the Russian girls had entered as refugees and thus benefitted from an array of social and financial supports unavailable to non-refugee immigrants. I next hypothesized that undocumented girls probably experienced more stress and anxiety post-arrival than those with appropriate papers. I, therefore reviewed the responses to determine if there was any association between INS status and valence of response. I found that of the 7 positive responses all but one, Lisa, were documented, and only one, Raquel, was a designated refugee. Of the other two known refugees, both from Russia, Anya had answered negatively. Victoria's answer I had classified as neutral although it connotes some negative imaging of immigrants. "I don't feel like I am an immigrant in this country, because I'm treated equally with other people." As hypothesized, with Lisa as the single exception, all other undocumented girls had either negative or mixed responses. The girls who were documented included the full range of valences - positive, negative, mixed and "don't

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know." Variation in INS status by cluster did not seem to really explain the patterns. I also found that race and consequent experiences with prejudice didn't really seem to explain the patterns.. In fact, as will be discussed later in this chapter, girls from the Caribbean Basin, both Haitian and English Caribbean, seemed to have experienced the least amount of direct racism amongst all clusters; while the Chinese girls, who seemed most positive in their answers, expressed significant concerns about racism in the United States.

I then decided to invert the focus, instead of looking at the experience of reception, I decided to see if there was any correlation between impetus for departure, the reason for immigration and the girls' and their families becoming immigrants, sojourners or exiles. Independent of the day to day realities found here, being "forced" to leave one's home creates a very different conception of one's life situation than if one voluntarily decides to make a new beginning. Although not legally designated as refugees, three out of the six European girls, had left their nations in large measure because of civil strife in Yugoslavia, i.e. the Kosov sisters, Teresa and Kristina, and also Marina. All the Russian girls had left the Soviet Union because of anti-Semitism. The majority of these girls were actively nostalgic for their country. With the addition of South Asian girls, who also experienced the loss of their former higher socio-economic status, girls who were either designated refugees[8] or essentially "involuntary" migrants or exiles seemed to express more profound loss for those left behind than those who were "voluntary"[9] immigrants. "Missing friends and relatives that left in my country (Anya designated refugee from Russia). "Miss my brother and sisters and relatives (Lan Bi designated refugee from Vietnam).

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Raquel was a singular exception amongst the designated refugees. Raquel was a designated refugee who planned to return to Eritrea once she had earned professional credentials and the war in Eritrea was over. She missed her parents terribly. However, her very positive response about being an immigrant perhaps indicates the importance of reception and INS status, i.e. how the benefits of refugee status may counter or balance out other more negative experiences of loss, and dislocation evidenced in the responses of other "exiles." Raquel told me:

> I am very happy that I have green card, because a lot of people without the card have problems, they can't go to school, or to have some loans from government, but I have everything I want, and I am happy about it.

The importance of social networks in the migration process, both enabling legal chain migration and in the post-migration period, was revealed by Janet, a documented immigrant.

> I feel fortunate to be an immigrant. I feel this way because there are a lot of people in Jamaica who wants (sic) to be in America, but doesn't (sic) have a chance to because they do not have family living here.

Immigration had brought the girls into contact with "more freedom and choices, opportunity" (Grace from Barbados), "a new life" (Lisa from China via Panama). For many girls cross nationality and geographic regions, contact with new cultures and learning English, while challenging, were also sources of real pleasure - "happy of experience and (to) share new culture" (Zenobia from Ecuador) and, "nice, having more than one language" (Fatima from Palestine).

Carmen (Dominican Republic) perhaps best captures the spirit of hope, pride and personal power that a number of the girls associated with immigrating and "being an

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immigrant."

> Proud, double responsibilities, work hard, get along with different people and cultures, representing my country, culture customs and people, show others that I have the power in my hands to change the world to a better one. Very happy.

Carmen's double responsibility - the need and willingness to work hard, learn a new language, do well at school and/or at one's job, and through these accomplishments, to honorably represent one's country resulted - in a sense of real pride and personal satisfaction. Gabriella, undocumented from Brazil, felt immense personal pride, even though she also acknowledged at times feeling lost. Not only had she been able to find a range of jobs and support herself, but she told me with pride, "people tell me that I can communicate well (in English) considering being here for only three years."

As the girls reflected on successfully meeting new challenges and overcoming adversities, many revealed how "being an immigrant," resulted in an increased level of self-esteem, an increased awareness of their own potential, as well as activated their sense of national pride. These positive experiences of "being an immigrant" became threatened, however, when others did not recognize or acknowledge the efforts of immigrants, and their sizeable accomplishments. Teresa observed:

> The word immigrant I think is a bad one. When people meet you here if you say that your (sic) one, they thing (sic) that we're not educated, we have low self-esteem. And immigrant don't (sic) have a nice job. People in US don't care how immigrants feel, immigrants wouldn't leave their birthplace just to come in America they came here for freedom, better life status (money).

Teresa's father, once a respected professional, and now a pizza man and janitor, worked very hard as did all the other members of her family. Why didn't others appreciate what being an immigrant was all about? Teresa's concerns were echoed by Eva (Poland).

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She too felt very proud of herself. Since her arrival at age 15 three years ago, Eva had continually worked, often 30 plus hours per week. She had managed to maintain a 91 GPA, and, like Gabriella, had become almost fluent in English. Yet, Eva wrote "being an immigrant is being: "lost, unneeded" an immigrant was being like "someone who is not welcome, worst then others and blamed." Eva's and Teresa's frustrations reflect the dissonance between how the girls saw themselves as immigrants, and how others saw immigrants. This dissonance between personal and social identity was a theme that emerged again and again throughout my interviews. It is a theme I will return to again.

**Immigrant Identity and INS Status**

In the above analysis of the TIM survey responses I briefly raised the question about the association, if any, between INS status and the girls' experience of "being an immigrant." I would like now to more fully explore the interplay between the girls' INS status and the girls' experiences.

While only a few girls had used the words "afraid," and "scared" on the TIM, these words surfaced frequently during my interviews with both, documented or undocumented, girls. Finding themselves in a strange and different place and uncertain about their future made some girls nervous and scared about both the present and the future. Were undocumented girls more intensely worried than the documented? I assumed they would be. But amongst the 15 girls I knew were undocumented, I found different levels of concern. Some, like Marisol (Mexico), seemed to take their status in stride, "can't go to college or get a job because no papers, but here I have everything I want, clothes and material things." Some, like Maria (Dominican Republic), seemed more pre-

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occupied with immediate problems in their lives, such as where and with whom to live. These girls, therefore, appeared to be less worried about the "future" or their INS status. Some girls had solutions to the dilemma of having "no papers." For instance, Lynne (Barbados), worried that without papers she could be "blackmailed." However, having decided to marry her Puerto Rican boyfriend, Lynne thought she would be "just fine." Nevertheless, some girls were clearly worried about their futures. Josette had not heard from her mother in over two years. But she still dreamed of getting her mother out of Haiti, that is if she could find her. Not having her own papers, Josette feared that she would never see her dream come true.

Lisa alluded to the potential consequences of being undocumented, " I (sic) afraid of INS, I keep quiet, but I trust you, I don't have mother or father and I'm illegal, don't tell most people." The potential of being deported was, to my great surprise, raised explicitly only once, and that was by a girl who was documented. "If I didn't have my card (I) can be threatened. Know that without green card INS can ship you back."

I am unsure why the fear of discovery or actual deportation was not more present. Was it denial, a strategy which enabled the girls to handle their anxieties and go about the business of daily life? Perhaps. Was it part of the "invincibility" of adolescents? Perhaps. But, perhaps, it had to do with the actual realities of living here in which their undocumented status existed but could be pushed aside or worked around. Immigration, or "La Migros" was not a presence in their everyday lives. As high school students, they felt safe because they knew, by law, school personnel could not ask about their INS status. Perhaps, knowing that even for a job at MacDonalds they would need proof of their legal

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status, many had not tried to find work. Not seeking or having a job made them less visible and thus less vulnerable to discovery.

And yet, Eva, Gabriella, and Lisa, all without work authorization, had been successful in finding jobs. While employed, however, they all knew the limitations of working without a green card. None was making much more than minimum wage. And, as discussed in Chapter V, "**Family and Household,**" some like Gabriella adjusted their employment ambitions to reduce the potential of discovery.

Nonetheless, other undocumented girls did express fears about their economic and educational futures. As a trilingual student with an A average, Lisa thought, she would be able to get a scholarship to attend a CUNY school. However, without a green card, she thought she would be unable to get a school loan or earn enough money to support herself through college. Yet, unlike Gabriella, Lisa didn't believe returning to either Panama or China were viable alternatives to escape her present predicament. Chong-Suk, born in Korea and raised in Paraguay, was also trilingual. Chong-Suk hoped to pursue a career in medicine. In 11$^{th}$ grade Chong-Suk was already working on a project for the Westinghouse College scholarship, and was planning to take summer classes at St. Johns University. But Chong-Suk was worried. Even if it was possible for her family to come up with tuition money, without a green card her plans and hopes for the future were in jeopardy. And lastly, as discussed in "**Family and Household,**" Julie worried that the failure of her mother to adjust her INS status would prevent her from achieving her many ambitious plans.

While the girls I interviewed did not seem to live in daily fear about their INS

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status, this did not seem to be the perception of school staff who worked with undocumented students. At three different schools, school administrators and support personnel discussed with me their concerns about undocumented students. One of these staff members estimated, that in his school 1/4 to 1/3 of the students were undocumented. Another staff member, who frequently worked with undocumented Caribbean students, observed that many of these students live with relatives and/or with family friends. As the students await the adjustment of their INS status, many of them are "treated as slaves" in their households. And many live in fear that they will be turned in, possibly even by their relatives. An administrator at one school told me, that some students purposely fail their subjects so that they can remain in school which they perceive as a zone of safety in which they are protected. School staff often referred to undocumented students as "lost souls without a future."

A senior administrator at yet another school explained that he and his colleagues have attempted to intervene on behalf of students, most of whom had no part in the decision which landed them here without papers and therefore, without futures. He said that Washington, D.C. was not interested in the students, or what will happen to them when they leave school. Washington's answer to school and family inquiries is: "send them back where they from, they should never have come here in the first place." But the administrator went on to say, that such official replies reflect a real lack of understanding that many of the students cannot go back. A school support team member at one high school shared the story of a top ranking student, the second in her class. The student had come to the United States from the Caribbean after her mother died. She has lived here

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with her father and his new wife and their ten year old child. But her father plans to throw her out when she reaches 18 years. No other family member is willing to take her in and she has aged out of the foster care system. The girl has no real options for a job. She can't get an academic scholarship because she lacks a social security card. This girl has become a "lost youth," stuck here with nowhere to go or go back to. "She is a displaced person, created by both a family network and the immigration system."

School personnel shared with me their awareness that, while some students held onto the hope that they would somehow be able to adjust their status - perhaps like Lynne marrying someone who was a citizen or had papers - many other students lived with far less hope. School staff knew of any number of students who, on the eve of their graduation, recognized that their efforts and achievements would be canceled out because they didn't possess a green card. In some cases the result was depression. In some cases the undocumented began to play a sort of Russian roulette with their lives. Feeling abandoned, they acted out, taking drugs and becoming sexually promiscuous, placing themselves at risk for pregnancy, STDs and HIV. I did not observe or hear from the girls I interviewed this level of frustration and hopelessness. However, I can well imagine that, for some of the undocumented girls I interviewed, the reality after high school of living without their papers would increasingly take its toll on them, and would increasingly shape their identities, both as to how they were perceived and how they saw themselves. I also wondered, as did school staff, if some of their students, and some of my undocumented girls would, as "lost souls" unable to go backwards or forwards, become new recruits for the "underclass."

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**Being an Immigrant and Becoming the Stranger**

The words "birth" or "re-birth" were used by a number of girls to describe their experience migrating to the United States. Such words connote their sense that they had both, taken on and been cloaked by, new identities upon their arrival in the United States.

Leela, an immigrant from India, painted her image of immigrants. "You see us at the airport, looking confused, wearing traditional clothing, with many children and with many packages and suitcases." The image has historic poignancy. As in the photographs of immigrants arriving at Ellis Island a century ago, the multiple suitcases and packages tightly wrapped and bursting at their seams, the faces of confusion and of wonder are very much the same. And yet, there are also important differences. Meena, also from India, had visited Ellis Island on a school trip the week before I interviewed her. She had observed some similarities between past and present. But in comparison to the mostly European immigrants passing through Ellis Island, Meena recognized that coming from India she was much more conspicuous. If you came from Europe, "you look similar to the people here, the other people look like you." But, for Meena and members of her family and community, "you (sic) walking down the streets, you look different." Becoming aware of difference was a constant thread throughout my interviews. Difference in both, how the girls saw themselves and how they believed others saw them.

Immigrants suddenly become aware of personal characteristics, especially physical characteristics of which they were never particulary conscious. One Chinese-born guidance counselor told me, that when she went to apply for her driver's license she was asked the color of her eyes and her hair. She knew her hair was black, but she had to turn

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to her sister and ask about the color of her eyes. With a sense of retrospective amusement, she told me that in China everyone else had brown-black eyes. Never before had she paid any attention to the color of her own or anyone else's eyes. Now suddenly, she realized that she had brown-black eyes, but others did not. This story of realizing differences is benign. But that was not the case for many other stories.

The girls related how they often felt strange walking down their streets. People would stare at them - or "just look at you different." A number of the South Asian girls purposefully didn't wear their more traditional clothes to school. It wasn't that they were not proud to be from India or Bangladesh or wanted to give up their traditions, or for that matter their self-identity as Indian or Bangladeshi. But they wanted to protect themselves from the possibility of taunts from others on the street or at school. Thus, not to "draw attention" to themselves, they wore Western clothes to school and changed when they got home. Marina (Yugoslavia) felt self-conscious and thus tried "not to be different in anything." Leela (India) thought she didn't look like a new immigrant, but found quickly that her heavily accented English " gave me away." Other students said, at times, they were afraid to open their mouths for fear that people would make fun of their poor English.

Looking, sounding and, at times dressing, differently than the people they saw on the street, on television, on billboards, many girls felt acutely aware of "being out of place." The frequency and the intensity of this feeling depended to a large extent on where the girl came from, where she lived, and where she went to school. The more homogenous the neighborhood, reflecting a significant degree of ethnic/racial segregation, the less

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acute. Yet, the more heterogeneous the neighborhood, where there are many others who also look "different,[10] the more acute the feeling.

Meena (India) and Kristina (ethnic Albanian from Yugoslavia) both explained to me that, if one is not born here, "one is not accepted." Kristina said she "didn't feel as high as other people who are born here." Other girls said that their individuality had somehow become obfuscated. Their identity, at least as others saw them, was dominated by the fact they were immigrants. Zenobia, who had emigrated from Ecuador, remarked that while she was happy about the experience of immigration and enjoyed sharing in a new culture, she was "a little disappointed when others interpret that I am an immigrant and they do not realize that more than being an immigrant I am a person." Whenever Anya (Russia) heard anti-immigrant rhetoric on the radio or read something in the newspaper that is anti-immigrant, she took it very personally. But she said she doesn't feel scared "they can't throw me out. I am almost a citizen." As a documented refugee, she" **only has three more years** (my emphasis) to wait," before she becomes an American citizen. Carmen (Dominican Republic) was also very concerned how immigrants were perceived. She believed that the media present a stereotype of "us" immigrants as "prostitutes, drug addicts." She observed that too often it is the negative side[11] that is shown, not the positive side. Carmen wants to change this image and saw it as part of her "double responsibility," i.e. to work hard and to favorably represent her country.

In contrast to Anya (Russia) and Carmen (Dominican Republic), Doretha (Ghana), seemed un-bothered by what was said about immigrants. Raquel, however, inverted the discussion about being an immigrant, from "low down" as one girl wrote on her TIM

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survey, to a sense of real pride. Raquel observed, that while other teen-agers "do what they want to do, they forget about important things." Immigrants "don't act like teen-agers, even though they are teen-agers, they are more responsible for many things." She explained to me that immigrant students are more mature than other students. Raquel had taken pride in this fact, but was perplexed that other US-born students seemed to object to the ways of the immigrant students. Non-immigrant students made comments that she was "acting superior." Raquel's experience was echoed by comments made by both English-speaking Caribbean and Haitian immigrant girls who felt that their maturity, their politeness and respect were not accepted by their US-born peers (see Waters 1993, 1996, 1997; Rumbaut 1995; Portes and Zhou 1993). Raquel's experience of being challenged to lose her immigrant identity and acculturate, but to a basically non-middle class and "non-white" culture, was an experience that seemed more frequent amongst the West Indian girls, and less frequent for girls from other nations and/or regions. Portes and Zhou (1993) have argued that the experience of acculturation has shifted from a straight-line towards the dominant "Anglo" culture to segmented acculturation in which new immigrants acculturate to a variety of sectors or segments within the social landscape, dependent on their class origins, degree of residential segregation and their perceived and real access to educational, social and economic resources. While most studies (Portes and Zhou 1993; Waters 1993, 1996; Rumbaut 1995; Gibson and Ogbu 1991; Gibson 1988) of segmented assimilation (or acculturation) focus on the second generation - the children of immigrants or the 1.5 generation - the processes illuminated in the studies were also lived by some of the girls - first generation immigrants, I interviewed. In contrast to second and most 1.5

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generation youth who more or less are faced with the verbal messages of their parents, their ancestral culture being imported, my girls had first hand memories of living their cultures pre-migration. For them, a tension existed as they sorted out who they wanted to be and become "while getting messages from two sides, saying this is how you were raised (in one's native country) and this is how you should be (US born peers)" (Arrendondo 1984:984). The importance of lived experiences seem to better arm most of the girls against the pressures of new, and often, dissonant cultural messages in their current lives. But there were other important influences.

**Being an Immigrant in the Context of Peer Relations**

In her study of Irish immigrants, Field (1993:ii) writes that "the experience of immigration disconnects the self from former others." With the loss of the prior social world, the immigrant seeks out new ways to construct a meaningful existence. In "**Family and Household**", I discussed the critical role the family played in helping to anchor the girls as they made their transition into a new life. I learned that for many of the girls, their choice of peers also provided an important fulcrum for clarifying and constructing their identity and its meaning. I found that for many girls their initial choice of friends followed linguistic and national patterns, but what dominated their long term choices, was finding other girls like themselves who were immigrants. For some, their pre-migration, generalized OTHER, was replicated, post-migration, in terms of their finding peers who came from similar linguistic or cultural backgrounds, or who shared the experience of "being immigrant." The pattern of finding others like oneself was reflected in a speech given by a Korean-born immigrant student to an audience of parents, fellow students and

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school staff at an evening PTA meeting. He said:

> Those who became teenagers before immigration tend to hang out with kids in the same situation. Teenagers who immigrated into US when they were infants tend to hang out with their group. Those in between often have a hard time being accepted into either group.

The girls' experiences in school shaped, to a large extent, their acquaintances and with whom they bonded as friends. Girls who were placed in bilingual programs tended to both, begin and stay, with others from the same linguistic background. But girls who participated in ESL programs more often than not seemed to move beyond the initial sense of safety of being with their own kind, and developed friendships with other immigrants, frequently crossing boundaries of language, nationality, and often gender. Raquel remarked that she felt more understood by other students who had immigrated. "They understand me more, you tell them your problems and they just pick up." Other, non-immigrant students, they just say, "oh, well," which left Raquel feeling discounted by them. Aisha (Bangladesh) echoed Raquel's experience. In response to my asking about the commonality of being with other immigrants versus being with US born students, both "White" and Black," she responded:

> We don't feel right with them. I actually don't feel right with them. They have a lot of people but I don't feel right with them. I can't talk with them. When I am with other people, like me, immigrants, I feel right with them because I have the same problems they have so the things that I say, they will understand.

The sharing of identity with other students who were immigrants, and recent immigrants, did not always include the active sharing of one's past experiences in one's nation of origin or even about the migration experience itself. Two refugee girls, Lan Bi from Vietnam and Anya from Russia, told me that they did not discuss their past. Lan Bi

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told me that she has nightmares of her father's jail term and torture. In the previously cited autobiographical essay Lan Bi had written for a class assignment, she graphically described her family's horrific experiences under the Vietcong before they emigrated to the US in 1991 as part of "Humanity Operation," a voluntary departure program. However, Lan Bi told me that in school with immigrant friends from China Russia and Poland, even with fellow Vietnamese students, she rarely talked about her prior life. Nor did most other girls. Instead most girls would talk about current problems and/or hopes for the future, such as going to college. Anya had friends, who like her, had emigrated from the former Soviet Union and also "acquaintances" from her ESL class who had come from China and Turkey. When I asked Anya if she compared stories about coming to the United States with other students, she said no, "they want to forget."

In Tomorrow's Tomorrow (1971/1995:108), Joyce Ladner wrote that individuals are often drawn together into peer groups by their similarities, but then find that the group takes on a life and shapes its members. In speaking with girls from diverse backgrounds, I was struck by how the girls were often drawn to peers because of their shared identity as immigrants, but then had their immigrant identities further defined and developed by their peers. The girls did not mirror Coleman's youth in which "cut off from the rest of society, they were forced inward toward their own age group, to carry out their whole social life with others of (her) age." (Coleman 1961:3 cited in Matza 1987:592). And yet, the girls' immigrant peer group created a decompression chamber for them. Within the group, their sense of being a stranger was somewhat ameliorated. When they found their tongues and fumbled English words, they were less likely to be teased and more likely to be supported

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by others who were also struggling to learn a new language. They could share their surprise and concerns about other students' behaviors which seemed to them strange, if not frightening; e.g. the forwardness of boys, and the open display of affection, even sex, in school. In their peer group the girls found affirmation. Others shared their feelings and confirmed that their sensitivities were not "so weird." In some cases, immigrant peers also provided a testing ground for new behaviors, if not new identities. As the girls were exposed to different cultural traditions of their fellow immigrants, and also to the other youth cultures they found at school, they sorted through elements - behaviors and values - which they tried on like new clothes. Some fit them and others didn't. Matters related to gender roles and identity, were amongst the figurative clothes they tried on. (Gender issues, boyfriends and sex will be addressed more specifically in the next chapter.) In reflecting on their peer group experiences, I was struck, again and again, how the girls seemed to take in much of the support of their peers, but did not feel compelled to respond to general peer pressure. A number of girls were very explicit in telling me that they didn't follow what others did. Natasha explained to me, as she had earlier to her worried mother, that even if the kids at school were into "drugs, sex, everything" that "I think it is up to me, they can't make me do anything I don't want to do." Eva, one of the most philosophical of all the girls I interviewed, repeated and expanded on Natasha's statement.

I: You were talking about how people were thinking about you that you are not perfect and that you cut and you learned.

E: Yes If I really want something, I will do it, if I don't want to something, I won't, See like friends I used to have a year ago when I used to cut, they say come with us, cut, and I say no, I just don't want to cut, no more I

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> don't feel like cutting, You know then they say "you don't cut," and I said what is wrong with it, I say I want to go to school, and not cut, am going to school for myself, I won't cut, like I do what I want to do - I am doing it - I am not doing for the pressure of someone and some people hate me for this because I do not like when someone likes someone else and *** (unintelligible on tape) You see some people they are very intelligent and very smart, and other people have a very low image of themself (sic), a very low image about themselves, some people have a very low image and they think they are gods, whatever, this is what I don't like, and they put down the really smart people, and the smart people are getting confused, they don't know what to do any more. That is why, that is what I don't like about life, it is a jungle, like one of my friends said, you have to fight.

Some girls reported that within their immigrant peer group, their ethnic or national identity receded and their being immigrant gained more importance. For Lynne, being Bajan was less part of her current identity. The fact that she was an "immigrant," defined much better who she now was (or had become). Lynne's experiences illuminate some of the findings of Waters (1993; 1996; 1997) and Portes and Zhou's (1993) who found second generation immigrant children, either deliberately distancing themselves from their parents' cultural origins and "buy (ing) into stereotypes of lower class blacks," or, the opposite, working to maintain a distance from those stereotypes by devising ways to telegraph their identities" - as ethnic or hyphenated Americans (Waters 1993: 26). In Lynne's case, while she was maintaining her distance from her non-immigrant, native-born and second generation black peers, she was giving up the specificity of her origins. The shared experience of being an immigrant from the West Indies was more important to her than the fact she came from Barbados. But, even as Lynne and other girls chose to identify themselves first as "being an immigrant," other girls chose to identify themselves principally by the national identity that pre-dated their migration (see below and also

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Rumbuat 1995). Both groups, however, discovered that regardless of how they self-identified there would be others who would see them through other lenses, categorizing them in terms of ethnicity and race, giving them new social identities of which they tried to make sense. The next section will discuss the girls' experiences becoming ethnic, and becoming black, white or "other."

## BECOMING ETHNIC

> The way in which one identifies and locates oneself (who and what am I) is closely related to how one is identified and located in the larger community (who, what he is)[ Gordon 1964:29]

Despite some important exceptions,[12] the majority of girls I interviewed had not given much thought to their ethnic or national identity prior to their emigration to the United States. But post-migration, as they lived in New York with memories and with the customs of their home countries, the girls were challenged to sort out who they were ethnically. What did it mean to be Indian, or Bajan, or Korean or from France with a Haitian mother and an Arab father? What was the essence of their cultural past, and how could they interpret that ethnicity in America (Goldstein 1987:2)? The process of identification and negotiation was both an internal and external dialogue. In part they and their families could assert definitions from their own perspectives. But to a large extent, who they were and who they were to become was defined by who they encountered, their reception, and their ongoing interactions.

Identity thus becomes dynamic, social and contextual. In the analysis above, I noted that on the TIM only two girls, one from India and one from Haiti, had identified themselves by nation or origin. In contrast, as I discussed the girls' school and community

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experiences, issues relating to their identifications by nationality and ethnicity surfaced over and over again. At times their identifications were articulation of what they felt they had in common with other students whom they had met here. At other times, their identifications emerged as they shared experiences of bias, prejudice and discrimination. The range of experience was wide and varied within and between different national and regional groups. But race, color, ethnicity and language appeared to dominate the development and experiencing of definitions, choices and interactions. I will begin with the more benign issue of language.

**Ethnicity and Its Interface with Language**

One of the first signifiers of difference or commonality for the girls was their ability to speak English. Leela, the Indian girl, who previously so vividly described the arriving immigrant at the airport, told me that for her, speaking English with a heavy accent had given her away as not "being from here." Struggling to learn English, the majority of girls found themselves self-identifying and being identified by what language(s) they did speak. School placement in bilingual programs heightened the girls' identifications by language. As noted in "**Passing Through the School House Door**," students in bilingual classes tended to hang out with other others who spoke their language, Creole with Creole, Spanish with Spanish, Russian with Russian. At times, these linguistic identifications crossed national boundaries. Thus, many girls in Spanish bilingual classes met and became friends with their counterparts from other Central and South American countries, and from the Spanish Caribbean; girls from the former Soviet Union met girls from other republics; and Arabic speakers befriended girls from other Mid-Eastern nations. But, while

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language provided a source of both social and personal identifications, and the basis for many friendships, the commonality of language did not disguise or diminish important national, ethnic even regional differences. Ting, who had been born in China, but who had lived in Hong Kong prior to emigrating to the US, told me that even though she speaks Cantonese with other Chinese students, she doesn't feel close to them. China is so large, she told me, and they come from such different parts they really have little in common beyond language. The animosities amongst different Spanish speaking nationalities was of considerable concern to many of the Spanish speaking students. Some felt that their common language, and a few even inserted common culture, should make them get along better. Yet, as Maria commented as she talked about Dominicans and Mexicans, "we are the same but different." The difference, however described, resulted in real tensions between "national" groups, e.g. Dominicans and the Puerto Ricans; and in the construction of hierarchy of status based on your national origin. Language thus acted for some girls as an anchor, bridge and/or identification. For other girls, language was perceived to be more neutral. And yet for still other girls, language and non-proficiency in English were perceived as negative attributes limiting their achievement in school.

**Ethnicity: Physical Traits and Images**

What does a Chinese person or a Korean person look like? What does a person from Africa look like? Stereotypes about national phenotypes, and resultant mis-identifications about national origin, caused much distress for some girls, and little anxiety for others. Raquel's experience seemed to be filled with ironies given how race, at times, supersedes ethnicity within the Spanish community and how many young people are pre-

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occupied with Africa, and things African. Raquel came from Eritrea. She was a tall, slender girl with dark, honey-colored skin and curly hair.

R: ...black people they don't accept me as black as from Africa, They don't know. They don't really see what African looks like. African people are different. Black, light, maybe like you in color,

I: And people think that I am African-American, West Indian or Latino or whatever, and my parents are German...

Raquel went on, people have an image of Africans,

> They think that everybody is black color. They don't see. They don't see East, they don't see the Arabs, what do they say about Morocco, Egypt, Algeria. They don't care** (undecipherable)

Although Raquel was often taken to be Spanish, she did not care what others thought or that she was mistaken for something she was not. In contrast, two Korean girls were very upset that others, including Korean and Chinese students, thought they were Chinese. Hye-Sook thought perhaps she did look more Chinese than Korean, and wondered if the mistake was in part because people assumed that Korea was part of China. Chong-Suk hated to be called Chinese. Her explanation was, that it was "because of my look, my color, and my eyes." But for Chong-Suk, it was not just mistaken identity but that she believed that:

C-S: The way they call us Chinese is because to insult us. It is like saying a curse word.

I: So if they knew that you were Korean, do you think they would do the same thing or do you think it is more that they don't like the Chinese, or all Asians?

C-S: Yes. It is all Asians. They don't really care about Chinese, Japanese or Korean, whatever. But then when you say Chinese, you can put the accent on the first word like when you curse the accent makes the word more stronger. I think that is because when you say Korean the accent goes to the end of the word and the Japanese but when you say Chinese the accent goes to the front.

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While I did not follow Chong-Suk's explanation as to the significance of placement of the accent, Chong-Suk's explanation did highlight that others just saw "Asian" and did not make important distinctions within that pan-ethnic label. Amelia from the Philippines said that frequently she is taken for Chinese - "the guys call me 'China,' as if all Asians were in fact from China!" While Amelia did not like being mistaken for Chinese, she "did not hate" it either. The South Asian girls, one of the groups most assaulted by racism, also were concerned about being mistaken for another nationality, and/or religion. Here intra-national ethnic distinctions based on religion - distinctions which have resulted in historic conflicts - were the Achilles heel for the girls' sense of who they were. Out of the 7 girls I interviewed who were South Asian (4 Indian, 1 Pakistan and 2 Bangladeshi) only two were actually Hindu. Yet, all the girls complained that they had been taunted with the word "Hindu."

**Ethnicity: Ascribed and Acquired**

Two girls, Nancie and Lisa, had been born in China but had spent part of their pre-teen and teen years in Latin America, Nancie in Columbia, and Lisa in Panama. While living in Columbia and Panama, both girls had spoken Cantonese at home, but learned and spoke Spanish at school and in the street. Each shared what it was like, being Chinese in a Spanish community and having both a Chinese and a Spanish name. Nevertheless, their experiences and subsequent identifications were very different. In part, I believe, their very different reactions reflected the developmental age at which they initially migrated, Nancie at age six and Lisa at age 11.[13]

Lisa used her Spanish to survive on the Lower Eastside and at her first job. But

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when I interviewed her, she was enrolled in the Chinese bilingual program of her local high school. Lisa had both Spanish and Chinese friends. However, she felt that Spanish girls are "too sexy" and she really "belonged with the Chinese students." "I feel like a Chinese girl, always a Chinese girl." And yet, as I spoke with Lisa, I noticed that her body language lacked the reserve I had observed amongst the Chinese girls, especially the newcomers. And, in the photos Lisa shared with me of her friends in Panama and here, Lisa's clothes, her antics reminded me much less of a Chinese girl than of a girl from Latin America. "Lisa" was the name the teachers in Panama gave her. But Lisa much preferred her Chinese name, "Yau Hu Huan," which means "Little Red" in Cantonese. It is a traditional name which is given to children with a lucky future. Alone, an orphan, Lisa privately holds on to the name her parents gave her. Its symbolic meaning acting as a link between her Chinese past and her American future.

Nancie, provided an almost inverted image to that of Lisa. Nancie seemed quiet and reserved. Her Chinese name "Xiuhua"(pronounced Ziwah) means "sensitive" or "beautiful." Her parents, call her "Wah" at home. But she prefers the name she and a cousin came up with in Columbia. Nancie feels that she speaks Spanish better than Cantonese and is in a Spanish bilingual program. She has both Spanish and Chinese friends and has discovered at her high school a number of other students who, like herself, were born in China or Korea and have lived in Latin America. Nancie told me that when she arrived in New York, she was surprised to find both Spanish and Chinese towns in America. But, she feels better when she goes to Spanish town along Junction Boulevard than Chinatown to which she goes with her parents. For her, Chinese are "too pushy,

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always yelling at you trying to sell you something, everything always feels like it is being done quickly." She prefers Spanish people whom she sees as "much kinder." When asked where she comes from, Nancie will more often say Columbia than China. Nancie summed up who she was in saying: "my parents are Chinese but I am Columbian."

Michelle's ethnicity developed out of the migrant histories of her parents and her own sensitivities about context. Michelle was born in Paris. She knows that her father was Arabic, but she only saw him once, when she was six months old, and "doesn't remember that." Her mother was born in Haiti and emigrated to Paris as a young woman. I asked Michelle, how would she answer the question who she was, if asked in Paris? Michelle said that, before she came here, she "felt French" and would say French if someone asked her. But, she added, it would depend on what they were asking. In France almost everyone Michelle knew was born in France, thus the question probably meant that they wanted to know her background. And for her that meant Haitian! When probed, she told me that she doesn't tell people that her father was Arabic.

> I don't know why, but I feel ashamed. Because I don't know my father so sometimes I am a little bit sad because everybody got a father and I don't. So I don't tell them that.

I asked about the status of Arabs in France. "They are discriminated more because they consider them like thieves." She then said that it was better to be black than to be Arabic. But she maintained that her reluctance to include her father's ancestry had only to do with her being fatherless. I wondered. I then asked her about how she identifies here in New York.

M: I say that I am Haitian. I never say that I am French or Arabic.

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I: Why wouldn't you say that you are French since you were born in France?
M: Because they are going to say that I don't like Haitian people and I don't want them to think that cause, I like Haitian. That is part of my blood and I don't hear me say I am French cause they are going to say "Oh yes, she is saying that she is French and she speaks Creole and she doesn't want to say that she is Haitian cause she is black or something.

In France, Michelle had enjoyed a group of friends who came from many different backgrounds. And while discrimination against blacks had increased, Michelle had not personally experienced much prejudice. She explained that she didn't think most people were prejudiced against the Haitians. But in the United States, "Haitians are discriminated against a lot. Americans when they want to curse you they say "You are Haitian." Michelle was very upset about the discrimination she had experienced here. She wondered about the reasons for the bias against Haitians, then she acknowledged she is often uncomfortable with and embarrassed by the rowdy behavior of some Haitian students. In New York, Michelle's friends are mostly Haitians. When I asked why, she said that there are mostly Haitians in her ESL classes, and because, "I don't know how to speak real good English."

**Developing and Interpreting an Ethnic Self**

Other girls also shared how, post-migration, their consciousness had been heightened and/or their attitudes had shifted about ethnic and national identities. In her analysis of the post-migration construction of Irish identity, Field (1993) captures the process of this experience.

> The experience of immigration disconnects the self from former others; immigrants confront the loss of their previous social world and the need to construct a meaningful existence and valued identity within new environments and social relationships. (Field 1993:ii)

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Post-migration, my girls had to"interpret to themselves the meaning of their own ethnicity" (Goodenow l993) and determine how they wanted to project or present it to the new worlds in which they now lived. The first question which needed to be answered was, what was the "essence" of their ethnicity/nationality? At the previously mentioned PTA meeting, a Chinese student asked rhetorically, "How do we define Chinese: by yellow skin, by using chopsticks, by speaking Chinese?" In an article in "Little India," a periodical of the overseas Indian community, Lavina Melwani (1995) asked: "What is real Indian? How does one define oneself as being Indian?" She then observed that, post-migration, some Indians are:

> Like lost wanderers in a desert storm, they cringe and pull their shawl of ethnic identity ever so tightly around themselves. That's all they have to protect themselves.

The nature of the "shawl varied." For some it involved going to the temple more frequently than they had back home. For others, such as Asma, it meant becoming more traditional.

A: I rarely used to wear Indian clothes in India but after coming here I want to wear them because no one else wears them.
I: And what do you mean, no one else wears them?
A: It's like some people they just have the real feeling that they don't want to look Indian because they get discriminated. But I feel that being Indian it is something really good. And I am proud of being an Indian, so I want to wear Indian clothes so I can show everyone I am Indian.[14]

Asma reminisced how exciting it had been in India to go and eat Western food, like burgers and pizza. But now, living in the West she has found that she much preferred to eat traditional Indian food. Like Asma, Leela wanted very much to maintain her ties to the Indian community. Leela, therefore, belonged to her school's Indian club and sought out

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opportunities to socialize with other Indians. Aisha (Bangladesh) was also pre-occupied with holding onto her culture.[15] She was distressed that several Bangladeshi friends and her young niece were unable to speak or understand Bengali. Aisha thought it was very important that her community maintained its language. She was, thus, determined to establish a "small school for people from Bangladesh who can't speak or write my language."

Girls from other countries, also articulated how important it was for them, even in the face of discrimination, to publically project or assert their national and/or ethnic identity. For instance Josette commented:

J: Some Haitians in my program were talking to me in Creole and when they were standing with a different crowd they asked where I come from and they don't say from Haiti, they say they come from Jamaica and other countries. And so I just walk by them. Me, I always say I come from Haiti. I am proud to come from Haiti and I don't care what people say.

I: So some people actually make believe they don't come from Haiti. You are proud of being Haitian because of what?

J: I don't know. Some people don't act too proud. And they say another country like Dominican or other place but when they ask I always say "Yes, I come from Haiti and I am proud to be Haitian". That is where I grew up. That is where I am born and where I first learned my alphabet.

Birth place, remembered childhood, these were the anchors of identity that most girls were not interested in letting go. Yes, they would, at times, try on some of the behaviors and values they were exposed to here. Yes, they would befriend teens who were different from themselves. Some would, as will be discussed in the next chapter, "**Identity and Gender**," even date boys from another nationality, ethnicity and/or religion. However, when it came down to how they identified who they were, my girls paralleled the subjects of Rumbaut's 1995 study of the 1.5 generation.[16] The majority were neither

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ready to relinquish their ethnic and national identities, nor to become hyphenated Americans, nor to melt into some "American" identity, no matter how defined. Instead, the girls' intentions, regardless of where they ultimately planned to live - in the US, in their native country or elsewhere - were to remain Indian, Jamaican, Chinese, Haitian, etc. Thus, Marisol said that she wants to stay close to the Mexican community and marry a fellow Mexican. Julie asserted, "I'm Bajan, I will never forget that." And Janet told me, that she wanted to remain Jamaican, she was not interested in "becoming American." This desire to retain ethnic or national identity, contrasts sharply with a historic attitude that immigrants coming to America need to "shed their (foreign) skin" (John Quincey Adams cited in Gordon 1964:6); and work towards forging a purely American identity. The process of forging an American identity, the giving up of old habits and identities, has been long viewed as critical to economic and social survival in the new land (Steinberg 1981; Kraut 1986), and as a first step down the path of realizing the American Dream. In the concluding chapter I will return to the girls' attitudes towards acculturation and assimilation in the context of the American Dream. But here I would like to shift attention from the girls' ethnic and national identities to how, in their coming to America, race and color "exploded to swallow up (most) other distinctions" (Glazer 1969:viii). I thus turn to the girls' experiences seeing black, white or other; and becoming black, white or other.

## IDENTITY: COLOR AND RACE

### The Emergence of Race and Racism

Several girls told me that, even before they came to the United States, they had heard negative things about blacks. Natasha related that in Russia, "they heard many bad

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things about blacks." When asked to recall her first reaction to the United States she said:

> There wasn't much reaction because I got out of the airport, I saw a parking lot. That was about it. Then there was the person who stands to let out the cars. He was black. My Dad said "Did you ever see blacks like that man in Russia?" "Don't mess with them because they are going to get you and you might get into trouble." They were saying "Don't say 'Yo, black man or anything like that." I didn't even know how to say that. They didn't want me to say that to his face.

Subsequently Natasha was warned by a teenage female cousin. "Don't look at them, don't talk to them, don't make fun of them, don't start up anything with them, then you won't get killed." Despite having only heard about the "bad" black people and not about the "good," Natasha has, through her own experiences at school and in her neighborhood, "changed (her) mind with time." "Since, I met some people like that and they were nice to me but I also met somebody who wasn't. I know that there are people you should be friends with and people who you shouldn't even bother them." While Natasha acknowledges that her family would not accept her going out with someone who was black, she now says: "I have American friends, I have Russian friends, I have Puerto Rican friends, I have Italian friends, I have black friends."

Mei (China) echoed Natasha's observations that many immigrants arrive in the United States with racist attitudes.

> I think prejudice is a reality in the whole world. It is just the way they think. If they had the concept before that they did not like blacks or they have the concept that African Americans are very violent or something, they have already built up a wall, a fence against it.

Mei, however, continued that often pre-conceptions are reinforced by experiences here. She thinks that Chinese are robbed because others know that they "probably wont go to the police and will let it go." And then, once attacked by "some ethnic group they

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(the Chinese immigrant) will feel in the following years that they (the ethnic group) are no good."

Other girls also articulated concern about how their own ethnic/national group held racist attitudes or had racist tendencies. When I asked Hye-Sook, a Korean, about her experiences with racism, she responded by talking with me about the Los Angeles Riots. I asked her what she thought had happened.

> I think black people against the white people saying a white cop kicked a black person. Then the white people did a lie and the black people did it to the Korean people. Because the Korean people treat the blacks very badly, I know, but it is like we are between the black people and the white people because we are like a minor group.

Hye-Sook's analysis of the situation in Los Angeles and her sense of Koreans being "between the black and the white" reflects Bonacich's theory (1973) of middle man minorities. But Hye-Sook also acknowledged that Koreans can be racists, particularly the older ones: "Because they were raised in Korea and they are very proud of themselves and they don't like colored." This double edge of racism surfaced often as the girls acknowledged their own prejudices as well as what it was like being the target of discrimination. In this context, it is interesting to note that Young-Ok, also born in Korea, but who was raised in Liberia, spoke to me about her comfort and friendships with blacks and her surprise that others were so uncomfortable, if not fearful.

Julie described the experience of being a light skinned Barbadian. Julie linked her own light skin to her maternal grandfather who had been Scottish. She had been called "honky" and "Red Woman" by other blacks in Barbados. She said, that in Barbados she "couldn't stand the white people" and when she ended up at a basically white Catholic

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school she got into many fights with the white kids. Eventually, she befriended a half Portugese half black girl who also looked white and whose name was also Julie. For Julie, "that was the first really white person" with whom she became friendly. I found it very interesting that Julie considered the half black half Portugese girl, "white rather than of mixed parentage or black.[17] Yet, Julie acknowledged that she, too, often passed as white, others "don't realize she is black," such as when someone overlooks a black person to serve Julie first. Julie believes that these experiences, observing racism from both sides, have provided her with a unique perspective on race. Within this context she is committed to "just set (sic) them straight" that she is, indeed, a black. It comes down to a matter of pride.

> Some people do care and some people don't, it's all a matter of how you feel about yourself, and how much, how much, pride you have, you know, how much, what you know, what's the word for it, when it doesn't matter to you what is told to you.

Evelyne was not as sanguine as Julie. Evelyne was the most explicit of all the African- Caribbean girls I interviewed about her feelings and experiences with racism. Evelyne told me that, at times, she wants to leave the US and go back to Haiti, "because of prejudice and everything, can't find job, blacks can't go anywhere you want, that's why." Evelyne pointed out differences between Haitians and other Caribbean students, e.g. the Jamaicans and other students wear short skirts and dress more sexy in contrast to the Haitians whom, she thinks, are more "modest." However, Evelyne believed that whites didn't separate out US-born from Caribbean born, or from which country a black person came. Whites were prejudiced against: "all the blacks doesn't matter where the person

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comes from." But then Evelyne asked me, if I knew Lorraine Hansberry's play Raisin in the Sun. In reading it, she had discovered that things used to be much worse than what she now sees on television. I asked her in what ways things are better now.

> You can sit in the bus, for a long time black people couldn't sit in the bus and then, now you can stand and can sit when you see a white person come once you had to stand... some black people can share an office with the white people I don't know, that's it.

Evelyne felt things were "getting better," but could not think of anything she would like to see improve. I asked Evelyne, if she had any friends who were white. She answered: "I have white friends, but not "American" - they are Spanish and Puerto Rican, I know some white kids say hello in the hall." I observed that Evelyne referred to her Latina friends as being white where others might refer to them as black or not even use a racial classification. I was then struck by how Evelyne proceeded to describe her neighborhood and by her reflections on being black or "white."

E: I don't like where I live (apartment building of four floors) because it smells, and they throw condoms, at 9 o'clock if I am coming home, afraid black people, black people all over, they are there standing, doing a lot of things (killing??) playing cards, smoking, you don't find white people like that, you might find some, but not all, you find a private house, you won't see a lot of people standing around even when it is midnight.

I: What do you think is going on, is it culture, money, just because the black behave that way?

E: No they have no money, the culture and its their behavior.

I: Do you think white people would be similar if they didn't have any money?

E: Some but not all, its how blacks behave, I saw a white doing the same as the black and was surprised.

While Evelyne previously objected to the failure of others to make national distinctions, in her own negative perception of blacks, she did not discriminate between immigrant and native born. Nor did she seem to separate out issues of class. Instead, she

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identified the behaviors she had observed as attributable to the people "being black." Although Evelyne personally distanced herself, Evelyne's comments reflect her, at least partial, acceptance of the negative stereotypes of blacks she had heard in the media, and as such, encapsulated what Waters (1993, 1996, 1997) has discussed, the confusions and tensions amongst media images, black immigrant behaviors and values, and those of some members of the black underclass with whom they often share inner city neighborhoods.

I was disturbed by Evelyne's acceptance of negative black stereotypes, but I was equally disturbed to hear that many girls from the English-speaking islands and from Haiti rarely left their largely segregated communities to explore and/or utilize other parts of New York City. What prevented the girls from leaving their principally poor and segregated black neighborhoods composed of Caribbean and US born blacks - Crown Heights, Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville East Flatbush? Was it a fear of racism? Was it lack of money, or was it some sense of discrepancy between their lives and the lives they imagined on the other side of the river? The few girls who had visited Manhattan told me that they felt out of place, and "thought" that the whites there looked at them "strangely" or "funny." When asked, not one of these girls had personally experienced a "racialized" incident or encounter. At the same time, the majority of the girls told me that they knew few whites. Most of the whites they did know, or with whom they had contact, were teachers at school. In general they said that their interactions with their white teachers were "okay."In fact, as we talked about their teachers and their school experiences, the girls expressed far more concern about their difficult, if not volatile, interactions with other black students (principally students who were second generation immigrants) than

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with their white teachers. What was going on?

**Experiences with Racism**

I thought about the English speaking Caribbean girls I interviewed who attended an "out-of-zone" high school. Each of these girls had decided not to attend their neighborhood school because each of their respective zoned or local school had a reputation for violence and/or low academic standards. Most of the girls told me that they felt they had been able to gain entry to their current school as a result of their excelling on their junior high schools' track team. Now track and their commutes, in some cases more than two hours each way, absorbed most of their time. When I asked the girls about their friendships in their multi-ethnic school, they replied that while they did have some non-West Indian friends, most of their time was spent with their team mates who were almost all West Indian. I asked the girls about racism at their school. A few girls acknowledged that they felt that there was more racism in the U.S. than in their islands, but to date none had personally experienced racism in her current mixed race high school.

In more racially homogenous schools, I found that West Indian girls tended to develop friendships with students from their own country. This was especially the case for the Haitian students who felt ostracized by the English speaking West Indians, and who were often taunted because of their inability to speak English, or how they were dressed, i.e. English speaking students commented that Haitian students did not know how to dress. They wore loud colors and mis-matched prints.

While these tensions did exist, some girls, including several Haitian girls, told me that they had made friends cross-nationalities. A few even had made friends with a number

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of the non-Caribbean students who attended their schools. Language problems and perceived shyness of some of these students, particularly those from Pakistan and China, were cited as the reason that there were not more cross-national or cross-race friendships.

In contrast to the general absence of personal experiences with racism, a number of West Indian girls talked about the racism they saw on television and in the newspaper. But when probed, few mentioned any specific racial conflict or incident having to do with race. I found this very interesting, given that many of these girls lived within or close to the Brooklyn communities which had witnessed the Korean grocery boycott in 1990 and the Crown Heights clashes of 1991. Instead, the girls told me about the television programs they watched, all of which showed lives they felt they would probably never have, because they were "white worlds." Even when there were black people, or black shows, they told me, the lives on TV were not like theirs. For example, a number of girls mentioned the Cosby family, but said, we don't have families like that, or "our parents don't ask about our problems and help us with our problems."

As I listened to the girls, I thought that they were as much talking about race as they were talking about class. The world that they saw on TV was largely middle class. And middle class for them was equated with being white. Was it, therefore, beyond their reach because they were black? An irony, if not, contradiction seemed to emerge. While the girls had not had much personal experience with racism here, the specter of racism was so powerful that they neither felt comfortable leaving their segregated neighborhoods nor anticipated that they would enjoy the worlds portrayed on TV. And yet, despite these feelings, many of the girls seemed quite confident that they would be able to achieve their

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life goals, which were largely middle class. Could they reconcile the inconsistencies between perceived and lived limitations and possibilities? Could their identities as immigrants, fortified by their island births and childhood experiences, provide them with hope that they could escape the black underclass life they saw around them (see Waters 1993, 1996)? Or, had they somehow consciously or unconsciously, recognized that, unlike in the islands where one could change one's "color" by taking on certain cultural attributes (Stafford 1987:44), one could not change color here? And that, given structural racism in the United States, their "blackness" could, in the end, define their futures? Unfortunately, as I only recognized some of these contradictions after my interviews with the girls. I can only conjecture what lay beneath the girls' experiences, behaviors, visions and conclusions.

In stark contrast to the lack of experience with personal racism of the West Indian girls, were the incidents that Chinese, South Asian and some Spanish speaking girls shared with me. In most cases, these girls lived in more diverse, less segregated neighborhoods than their West Indian counterparts. In their neighborhoods and in their schools were immigrants from many nations, US born children of immigrants, and also third and fourth generation US born. The diversity of the streets and schools created the context for much more cross-national and cross race interactions. South Asian girls seemed most profoundly affected by the prejudice they encountered here. As indicated above, the girls reported being taunted by other students, e.g. called "Hindu," regardless of their religious affiliation. Salma from Bangladesh told me that her nose ring had been pulled in the school cafeteria. Asma complained that students were against Indians: "because we are small

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and eat spicy food and they think ...we smell and don't take baths." While a number of South Asian girls said that they had difficulties with Spanish speaking students, most of the girls felt treated particularly poorly, bullied and scape-goated by blacks (they didn't know if they were immigrant or US born).[18] I wondered if the prejudice and scape-goating they experienced from blacks was black anger diverted from whites, or was a consequence, often fanned by politicians and the media, that immigrants such as South Asians were taking their jobs and were more likely to succeed.

Girls from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong also reported multiple personal experiences with racism. Some of these Chinese girls lived in communities like the Lower East Side, which had a mix of Chinese and Latinos, others lived in more diverse neighborhoods like Elmhurst and Jackson Heights. But, regardless of their neighborhoods, the Chinese girls felt discriminated against by other students. Sung-Hee Suh wrote in a New York Times Letter to the Editor (1986): "Every Asian student I know recounts incidents of being called "chink," "gook," "Jap" or "slant eyes" and many admit they are still extremely vulnerable to such racial slurs." The girls I interviewed recounted similar experiences. Hui-Wen shared her realization that "we are not the master here." She went on to to tell me that other students push Chinese and call them names at Blackwell like stupid Chinese "phobies." But she said she didn't know what that means, maybe "coolies." I asked her what she and her friends do when taunted. She said they do nothing, but she "feels upset inside and thinks about leaving and going back to Hong Kong." Hui-Wen felt that the Chinese students were discriminated against by blacks and "Americans," which she defined as white, who don't like Chinese. She also said that the "Spanish don't

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like Chinese." Hui-Wen felt that she couldn't go and complain to her teachers because "they too are white and they can't do anything to their own." While the girls recognized their own negative feelings and prejudices against blacks, and also some Latinos, most of the South Asian and Chinese girls were genuinely surprised by the discrimination and racism they experienced here. Wang Amah thought there was even more prejudice vented against the Chinese than against blacks. While the Korean girls did not seem to feel the assault of racism as much as their Chinese counterparts, they were upset when taken for Chinese. Hye-Sook speculated why students might develop antipathy for the Asian students. When Hye-Sook first arrived from Korea she knew little English. She thus didn't know what to say when she "brushed against someone"[19] in the halls. "How does one say "excuse me?" She said it was scary. When she didn't know what to say, she would say "sorry, your welcome." At times, she would say things like "thank you, it's okay," because no other phrases came to mind. But, Hye-Sook and her friends were worried that if they didn't say something appropriate or froze and scurried away because suddenly all their English disappeared, other students would think them rude. If they were perceived as being rude, weren't they setting themselves up for trouble?

In Egypt, Isis had felt the brunt of discrimination as a Coptic Christian in a Muslim nation. Here Isis felt less discrimination, but at times felt that people mistook her for a Muslim. In Jerusalem, Fatima had been harassed and insulted because she was a Palestinian. Here she felt less discrimination, yet felt, like her friend Lubra from Morocco, that there was a lot of prejudice against Arabs. Lubra, in particular, mentioned that during the Gulf War things were really tense at school, with both students and teachers openly

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hostile, actually harassing the Arab students. For example, one of her friend's had her head shawl pulled off in the cafeteria. At times, Lubra believed that the Jewish teachers were blaming her and other Arab students "for everything." In fact while I was interviewing Lubra, one of her friends came by to tell her that a teacher was accusing the two of them of cheating on a test. Lubra denied the cheating but felt that no matter what she said, "they won't listen." Lubra and Fatima both belonged to an Arab club at school. Lubra continues to spend most of her time with other Arab students, both male and female. However, Fatima has widened her circle of friends. The Arab Club gave Fatima much needed support when she first came to the school. But, after a while, through the ESL class she met and befriended students from all over - Chinese, Polish, even Jewish friends from the former Soviet Union. Fatima says she enjoys her international friends, but commented that she and her Jewish friends just know they can not discuss Israel without fighting about who is responsible for the situation there.

A number of girls from Latin America also described feeling hostility from other students and, at times, teachers. Despite clear differences in skin color and facial features from very white, European looking to medium dark with more Negroid features, the Spanish speaking girls tended to use the words "racism" and "prejudice" interchangeably as they described the discrimination they felt from blacks and whites, and also from the Chinese. "Racism," thus seemed to be less an issue of one's coloration, and more an issue of being Spanish or Latino. And yet, race in terms of phenotypic presentation did surface within the Latina group.

The peculiarity of racial and ethnic consciousness was evident in the comments of

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two girls from the Dominican Republic. Carmen explained that in the Dominican Republic it did not really matter that her sister looked black. But here it does. In fact, Carmen feels here it is a real issue because "blacks don't like us because we are Hispanic." In contrast, Maria, who also said she was not race-conscious in the Dominican Republic, finds herself feeling closer to blacks because they share the experience of being discriminated against. Interestingly, both girls reported that they had been discriminated against by "Americans" both white and black, because they were Spanish.

Nancy Lopez writing in the student newspaper, Youth Connections ( 1989) echoes Carmen's and Maria's observations.

> I didn't have problems with race in El Salvador, "My mother told me that a person's race or skin color doesn't matter. What matters is who the person is - her feelings, her manner." No one discriminated against me. But (here) I saw fights in high school between Hispanics and Blacks, Dominicans and P.Rs. Each group said, 'We are the best." I didn't know the word racism in Spanish. When I learned it I didn't like it.

**Intra-Group Tensions**

> The hostile attitudes of outsiders are such that immigrant youth is often compelled to withdraw from participation in outside groups and to identify himself with his own.(Young 1936:422)

In the face of their minority status and anti-Spanish sentiment, I anticipated that there would be a good deal of cohesion amongst the Spanish speaking girls, a certain pan-ethnic consciousness. In fact, in comparison to the girls from other geographic or linguistic groups, I did find a stronger pan-ethnic consciousness amongst Spanish speakers. In part, I believe this consciousness reflects the sheer size of the Spanish-speaking immigrant and migrant communities in New York. In part, it probably is the

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result of the tendency to place immigrant and migrant non-English speakers in Spanish bilingual programs and not in more heterogenous ESL programs. In these programs national differences and regionalism of language are melded into a Spanish supra-group. In part, it reflects a response to anti-Spanish sentiment. However, I also found intra-group animosities. The girls described to me a hierarchy that mirrored the hierarchy described by girls from the English speaking Caribbean. Each Latin American nation had a certain status vis a vis other Latin American nations. The hierarchy was not absolute but reflected, to some extent, the origin of the speaker. Thus Carmen, a Dominican, asserted that it was better to be Dominican than from Columbia or Ecuador. But other non-Dominican Spanish speaking girls felt that Dominicans were the bottom of the Latin American hierarchy.[20]

I was told during a number of my interviews with Spanish speaking girls, that the Dominicans and the Puerto Ricans just didn't get along. I asked why? Some girls like Carmen didn't understand why. "They come from the same culture." While I did not expect the girls to explain the tensions in terms of their very different migration histories, island politics or class, I was surprised that not a single girl mentioned the difference in their citizenship status. Instead, the girls shrugged in answer to my question, "well that's just how things are." However, it was not just Puerto Ricans and the Dominicans who did not get along, it also was the Mexicans and the Dominicans. Maria told me "we are the same but different."

In this context I found it interesting that for a number of girls, shared language and Latin culture were not all that important in developing friendships. For these girls

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crossing national boundaries meant choosing friends from very different cultural and linguistic traditions, and not girls from other Latin American countries. For instance, Mercedes and Marisol, both Mexican, had other Mexicans as friends, but also friends from China, the Philippines, and Poland. Neither, reported friends from the Dominican Republic or Puerto Rico, even when students from these islands lived in their communities and attended their respective schools.

And finally, there were the experiences of two north African girls, Raquel and Christina. Both of the girls had assumed that they would, as Africans, be accepted by African-American students at their schools. However, as discussed above, these girls with honey colored skin were often taken to be Latina. To their surprise, the girls felt unaccepted by and had found few friends amongst African-Americans. Christina told me that the black students didn't come and talk with her, and she was afraid to go to them because of her limited English. The girls, instead, had found friends among other immigrant students, especially those from other African nations - Nigeria, Ghana and the Ivory Coast. With these students, their Africaness and their identity as black women, seemed to be both recognized and accepted. For these girls their pan-ethnic identity as Africans, and their shared identities as immigrants, were far more salient than their "race" or color. Interestingly, the language of these new friendships, perhaps not always fluent, was English.

In this chapter I have explored how various identities, often competing with one another for dominance, helped to shape the girls' sense of self and their social identities and relations. However, amongst this very diverse group of girls, perhaps gender identity

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and identifications emerged as having singular power in shaping how the girls saw themselves and their options, and how their families and communities responded to them. The next chapter will thus continue the discussion of the web of identities by focusing on gender.

## ENDNOTES

1. Reviewing the girls' responses from the first two high schools, I wondered if I could surface even more specificity in their self-description, thereby accessing their most salient characteristics. For six out of eight schools, I therefore replaced the first question with the second.

2. Includes surveys from the core sample of 64 girls plus surveys completed by other girls I interviewed.

3. Generally, the use of "absence" assumes that "presence" is the more normative occurrence. I do not want to imply this. However, the fact that the girls did not include ethnicity, race or nationality in their self descriptions contrasts starkly with the more common American tendency to describe self in terms of these social categories, e.g. Jewish, West Indian.

4. I am using the OTHER in terms of the external world and George Herbert Mead's "generalized other."

5. Some examples: "lazy," "spoiled," "egocentric," "sometimes aggressive yelling at people" big mouth, "sarcastic" temperamental.

6. In these two cases the Cooper Smith did not seem to accurately reflect the girls' level of self-esteem. Both girls were doing relatively well in school. And while Aisha had problems with her parents, she appeared to be very confident.

7. Positive answers included the use of words such as "proud," "hope," "happy." Negative answers included such words as "scared," "afraid," "discriminated," "lonely." Mixed answers included answers with both positives and negatives "Proud but frightened" or "worry, proud, exciting and sometimes happy." Neutral answers included: " I just feel that I am not home, that's it."

8. Many immigrants see themselves as refugees but may not have refugee status. "Designated refugee" refers to those individuals who have been granted refugee status by the United States' State Department via the Immigration and National Service.

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9. I use "voluntary" immigrant here to distinguish from political or religious refugees (non-legal use of the term). However, for the majority of the girls, whatever the stimulus was for emigration, it was not their decision and thus, in fact, they were "involuntary migrants."

10. Ethnicity and "race" and "being immigrant" form a dynamic and complex relationship. It is therefore both difficult and somewhat artificial to separate them. In this section, however, I am trying to focus more on being an immigrant, i.e., not born here. Identity, in terms of ethnicity and racism, will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

11. It should be noted, however, that in her comments Carmen quickly moved on to talk about how Hispanics, Puerto Ricans and Dominicans are portrayed, so it is somewhat unclear to what extent she was speaking about immigrants and to what extent she was referring to non-mainland-born Latinos.

12. Having lived with discrimination and civil war, ethnic and religious consciousness were very pronounced for Kristina and Teresa (ethnic Albanians in Yugoslavia), for Jewish girls from Russia, and for several Muslim girls from India. Ethnic and national consciousness had also been raised in the multiple migrations of Young-Ok (Korea to Liberia to the US), Chong-Suk (Korea to Paraguay to the US), Nancie (Chinese to Columbia to the US) and Lisa (China to Panama to the US).

13. Nancie also mentioned but didn't elaborate that her family had suffered under the Communists. This may also contribute to her distancing herself from China.

14. In contrast to Asma's desire to wear traditional Indian clothes, Kraut writes about immigrants during the period of 1880 and 1921: "Traditional clothing was quickly abandoned, especially by young women anxious to appear as attractive and stylish as their American sisters....many young women changed their fashion to conform to American style that their husbands found so alluring (Kraut 1986:124).

15. Aisha, like other immigrants, wanted to hold on to some aspects of her culture and reject others.

16. Rumbaut's (1995) study of assimilation focused on identity choices amongst adolescents who arrived here before age 12 (1.5 generation), or were US born of immigrant parents. The teens were asked to self identify into one of the following categories: 1) national origin, 2) hyphenated, 3) American, or 4) pan-ethnic. A significant majority of the 1.5, all of whom were foreign-born, chose to identify by the nationality of their birth country.

17. Julie's use of "white"in this situation is the inverse of the historic classification of race or "blackness" in the United States, such that an individual was classified as "black" even with 1/32nd of black blood.

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18. Given residential patterns, I believe most of the blacks with whom the girls interacted were either Black Hispanics or US born African-Americans.

19. A number of girls referred to incidents in which they, or someone else inadvertently "brushed against" another person with their body or a book bag in a school hallway or on the bus. Many girls seemed surprised of the volatility of the "victim" who reacted with great hostility to this "invasion of personal space." Such incidents often became racialized, escalating verbally and, at times, resulting in physical altercations.

20. It is interesting to note that, despite very different national and migration histories, the placement of the Dominicans on the bottom paralleled the placements of their fellow islanders, the Haitians in the West Indian hierarchy.

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# CHAPTER VIII

## IDENTITY AND GENDER

> Whether she has accepted the norms or defied them, a woman's life can never be written taking gender for granted. (Interpreting Women's Lives 1989:5)

What were the girls' images of being female, and how did they define themselves in terms of gender? How did gender structure their experiences in their families and in their communities? Did they accept, resist or reject familial or traditional gendered roles and norms? And, if yes, how? And lastly, how did immigration impact on the construction and experience of their gendered identities?

Gender, like ethnicity, is a fluid and dynamic concept, socially constructed by both tradition and context. And like ethnicity (see Phinney 1990), gender identifications involve developmental processes with shifts of focus and exploration. However, while they may or may not be a sentinel event stimulating attention to ethnic identity, puberty asserts an unequivocal milestone in the development of gender identity. Puberty, in some cultures marked by a specific rite of passage, results in significant shifts in how a girl senses her own body, and how her family and community define and relate to her. The process of self re-definition and social re-negotiation varies by chronological age, personality and also by socio-economic and cultural context. But cultural context is also dynamic. Thus, while worldwide women have tended to have lower status and fewer opportunities than men (Loo and Ong 1987; Tyler 1995), many of the cultural traditions which have provided the context and guided the development of gender identities, are in themselves undergoing transformations. Traditional gender-based divisions of labor, roles and norms are being

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challenged, revised, discarded, and/or replaced. Thus, even in so-called "third world" or developing countries such as Ghana and the Philippines, women are contributing at least one third of the family's income. Men are no longer perceived to be the sole or primary economic provider and women the emotional care-givers (Lewin 1995). In these and other nations there are increasing inconsistencies between cultural traditions and actual realities. For example, Bangladesh, the Philippines, India and Pakistan, all generally considered to be traditional societies, have had women heads of state.[1] In contrast, despite rhetoric about feminism and progressivism, and the 1984 vice presidential candidacy of Geraldine Ferraro, no major political party in the United States has ever seriously considered having a woman as its presidential candidate.

In my interviews I therefore tried to be mindful of the intersection of four changing contexts: 1) the realities, contradictions and transformations of gender roles and norms in the girls' nations of origin; 2) the realities, contradictions transformations in the United States; 3) the degree of contrast between the gender norms and realities of their native cultures and those encountered here in the aftermath of migration; and 4) the specific age and stage of a girl's biological development at the time of my interview with her.

I was not sure what I would find, nor did I think I had any specific expectations or assumptions. I quickly discovered that, in fact, I had expectations and assumptions! I realized, as I listened to the girls speak positively about being female, and the strengths they attributed to being female, that I had anticipated hearing much more negativity about being female.

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"Being Female"

In their responses to the TIM question, **describe what it is like being female**, several girls wrote: "wonderful," "great," and "fun." Other girls wrote that they felt "proud," "happy," "powerful,"and "strong." The experience or essence of being a girl or woman, was also described in terms of: "adventurous," "emotional," "sensitive," "benevolent," "kind," "charming" and "responsible." "Loveable" and being special, were also mentioned in the TIM and during my interviews with the girls. Thus, Lubra (Morocco) told me that in her family, being the only girl amongst four boys meant that she gets "the best things." And, Lisa reflected that when her parents were alive she also had felt specially loved as the only daughter. A few girls equated being intelligent with being female. For example, Jyoti stated that women are "not stronger than men, but (they) are smarter than men." Several other girls did not go as far as asserting that girls had superior intelligence, but claimed that girls were as smart and intelligent as boys. Leela (India) summed up the superiority of girls by their capacity to engage in a wide array of activities. Women are "superior to men, can do everything, study, educated (sic) cook, grow flowers, learn everything and give birth."

Being a girl, was not, however, always that easy. Both, for the girls who had used positive descriptors, and the relatively few who had used such words as "weak" and "inferior," the experience of being a female was proving to be complicated, challenging, if not problematic. Three intertwined themes began to emerge. 1) Girls have to work harder than boys and men, both in terms of multiple responsibilities but also in terms of getting what they want out of life. 2) Girls have less freedom than boys to do what they want. 3)

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Girls are often the "second sex." They get discriminated against, get blamed, and even get beaten. My exploration of these themes begins with how the girls "understood" the differences between boys/men and girls/women in their own cultures and in the United States. I use "understood" here to signify 1) how the girls perceived "difference" in their familial or community culture, as well as 2) how they made sense of cultural norms in their own lives.

**Female Roles and the Division of Labor**

The perception that women and men have different functions and different status in the world reverberated across nationality and ethnicity. In many societies, women are less valued culturally, socially and economically than men. (Loo and Ong 1987). The birth of a son calls for rejoicing, but not the birth of a daughter (Burton 1990:36; WuDunn 1994). In rural areas, and/or when resources are scarce, boys often get the food and the education (Tyler 1995). In talking about life in rural Korea and amongst the poor, Yoon told me, "Boys get what they need first and if there is money left over, then the girls get." Li echoed Yoon's observation. She stated that even with the long history of communist rule, boys continued to be preferred in China. However, using herself as an example, she went on to say that in urban areas boys and girls now have equal chances for a good education, and jobs. Mei, however, disagreed. She thought, even in China's urban areas women can only get "women's jobs like accounting and secretarial." The girls' perceptions of opportunities seem to reflect their own family histories. Both girls' mothers had college degrees, however, in China, Li's mother had worked as a mechanical engineer, and Mei's had "worked in an office."

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Many girls spoke about the separation between male and female worlds. The Spanish concepts of "machismo" and "mariasanismo" perhaps best encapsulate the viewpoint that the domains of men and women are different. In this cultural tradition, men's place is in the street (la calle) or in the world, and women's place is in the house (la casa) or with the family (Gil and Vasquez 1996:6; Georges 1992). Aisha said that in Bangladesh women usually stay home. Salma said that Muslim girls can't go to the mosque although they may be schooled at home in the Koran. Sherie from Haiti observed that in Haiti "boys get involved in politics and thus get jailed or killed," but "women don't get involved in politics, although they can." Gabriella commented that Brazilian men think women are stupid and should stay at home and cook for them. And Lina told me that in the Dominican Republic women stay home to take care of the house. In fact, girls from many different countries told me that they had been taught to cook and were expected to cook, even when they had servants. Many of these girls, however, confessed they didn't like to cook, and cooked only under protest and/or if their mothers worked out of the home. Marisol observed that among most Mexicans, women do all the housework and care for the children. However, in Marisol's family, her father did most of the cooking. In telling me about her father Marisol acknowledged traditional Mexican gender roles and her family's violation of them. Marisol's father cooked because he had had a "difficult childhood (in which) he was poor and without parents. He had thus been taught how to cook and how to be independent."Marisol liked this alteration of household roles and told me that she would only marry a Mexican, who would, like her father, "help her at home."

Most girls felt that in their nations of origin, the prescription of roles and the

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division of labor based on gender were more prevalent than in the United States. Women seemed to be more independent in the United States, frequently working outside the home. However, despite outside employment, most girls acknowledged that women continued to be responsible for cooking and housework. For example, Natalia told me that she often had to help her mother to cook and clean. Her brothers who have jobs at a local fast food restaurant never have to help out. As the girl, Natalia knew she was expected to do housework, even if she had a job. It was a "Haitian thing" she told me. It "will always be that way." While Natalia told me she thought her brothers were spoiled, she didn't seem to actively protest the difference in responsibilities. I am not sure to what extent Natalia really agreed and accepted things as they were, and how much her lack of active protest reflected her sense of resignation.

In reflecting on her experiences in Guyana and here, Marva was much clearer about her thoughts about gender roles, work opportunities and the division of household labor.

> It is harder to be a woman in the United States. Cause some people discriminate, you can't do this because you are a woman and you can't have certain jobs because you are a woman. They have some **** "A woman's place is in the house". They think that way. If you have a husband and every time he comes home there is supposed to be dinner ready cause that is the woman's job. But no, that isn't it cause in Guyana a woman can do everything. Everything and the man does everything too. They share. They don't have certain things a woman has to do, laundry and stuff. Everybody does everything.

Marva was very concerned that boys in her school and community were now saying that "women should stay at home," even when they "know very well that in Guyana we don't have such things." I asked her what she thought was going on. She

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responded: "they just like to speak to be accepted. They just talk trash." I wondered, however, if the boys' bravado also reflected their awareness of girls' competitive edge. Did they somehow understand the irony of the double negative of racism and sexism (Epstein 1973, Davenport and Yurich 1991) by which minority girls often overcome barriers of sex and race, thereby escaping the inner-city? Were the boys' taunts their attempt to push the girls back or down to clear the field for their own hopes and dreams? Or to re-assert their sense of male superiority? The evidence is most suggestive.

**Gender Roles and Expectations**

The majority of the girls believed that: 1) girls had less freedom than boys; 2) parents expected far more from daughters than from sons; and 3) girls had more responsibility placed on them than boys did.

Over and over again, the girls complained to me that their brothers could come and go, often without a curfew, but it was often difficult for them to get permission even to go out.

Many girls revealed that their parents did not want them to be seen socializing with boys, because the girls' reputation, and that of the family's, might be tarnished. To avoid the potential of an indiscretion, parents thus severely limited when and with whom their daughters went out. One high school counselor told me that Arabic girls who attended his school were rarely allowed to go out even with female friends. He then injected his own thoughts, "as if they came off the boat yesterday." In "**Family and Household,**" I described how upset Aisha's parents had become when she was observed walking home from her job with a young man. The consequence for Aisha's crossing a

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familial boundary of acceptable behavior was her being forced to quit her after-school job. Aisha was furious. While her brothers could come and go and socialize with whom ever they wanted, including girls, she had lost a job and felt caged at home. Lubra, shared Aisha's frustration. But for Lubra, the restrictions came less from her parents, and more from her older brother, who had become increasingly traditional and strict since arriving in the United States two years earlier. In Morocco, after their parents left for the US, Lubra's brother had helped to look after her. Things had been okay between them. But here, Lubra said, her brother spied on her and embarrassed her when he saw her with male friends. Lubra's brother had girl friends, why couldn't she have male friends? The guys weren't even boyfriends.

Gabriella (Brazil), and several other girls from Latin America, explained that girls back home are expected to have chaperones when they go out. Here, some families still prefer that their daughters go out in groups or have another family member, even if younger, to accompany a couple. In their cultures, a chaperone protects the girl from trouble and thereby maintains the family's honor. Isis told me that she felt that girls had far more freedom here than in Egypt, where girls can not freely move around without being with a male family member.

. Other girls echoed Isis and described increased freedom of movement in the United States. Some girls went out with groups of friends, went to parties and some even went to clubs. In most cases, parents knew about the girls' social activities and consented to them. Antonia's (Czechoslovakia) mother seemed to give her daughter the most freedom. Antonia liked to go to downtown clubs. Her mother knew, and gave her permission, and a

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curfew. Antonia's mother also knew about Antonia having a boyfriend, and even allowed the couple to weekend together in Pennsylvania. Several Latin American, Russian and Caribbean girls also described an active social life either with groups of friends or with a boyfriend. (I will discuss boyfriends and sexuality later in this chapter.) The pattern that thus emerged was that girls coming from South Asian, Mid-Eastern, and to some degree Chinese families faced far more restrictions here than their counterparts from Europe, the Caribbean and Latin America.

However, even when the girls enjoyed freedom to socialize, many girls believed that their families demanded more from them than they demanded from their brothers. As discussed above, these demands often reflected different gender roles related to housework, but also reflected assumptions that a girl's first duty was to her family and their home. On the other hand, boys were permitted, if not encouraged, to escape to spend time with friends.

Two very different moral codes, one for men and one for women, seemed to exist. A Latino guidance counselor, who had been raised in New York and Puerto Rico observed: "Latino girls are frequently treated like second or third class citizens," and continued: "Latino boys are frequently spoiled by their families. But, Latino girls, they are the ones who must always toe the line. Latino girls and women are expected to deal with stressful situations. If there is a problem, regardless of its cause, women are expected to fix it. "According to this guidance counselor, girls are saddled with responsibility not only for their own actions, but also for the actions of boys. In adolescence, a time of experimentation, girls are often the ones held responsible for getting themselves pregnant,

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not the boys with whom they had sex. I do not know to what extent the guidance counselor's observations can be generalized within the Latino community. But, I did find, listening to Latino and non-Latino girls, that many of them felt there was a double standard when it came to acceptance of and/or accountability for actions and behaviors. Girls frequently felt their that parents would come down on them for even minor transgressions. But if their brothers messed up, even seriously, their parents would say, oh, "that's just like boys." An Indian-born young woman summarized the situation "He (her brother) gets away with more than I ever did in a whole life time."(Sengupta, 1996). And Kristina K (Yugoslavia), reiterated the theme in describing Albanian traditions.

K: From a daughter they expect more than from the son. They expect from the son to take care of them after he gets married. To come down and everything. But the daughter they expect from her to be more careful, to have a good personality, not to do bad things. They don't want her to have a boyfriend.
I: So they are stricter with girls and have higher expectations.?
K: If a guy does something they don't take it against him as much as they take it against girls.

The difference in responsibility and culpability was not limited to behaviors within the family of origin. Some girls also reported that in their cultures, it was the girl/woman who was also responsible for the success and "goodness" of the family created by marriage. Aisha explained that in Bangladesh, if a relationship or marriage fails, it is the girl who gets blamed.

"The people always blame the girl. They look at the girl in a bad way. Although the girl didn't do anything and she doesn't have anything to do with that. Everybody just blames the girl...They will say that she cannot handle it. She is not the perfect wife." According

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to Muslim law a man may have up to four wives if he can support them. But Aisha explained to me that nowadays, few men have multiple wives. Divorce, however, is not uncommon.

> Sometimes they have more than one wife, sometimes they divorce one and marry another one. It is all because they can't understand each other sometimes. It doesn't work out. The blame goes to the girls. All the people blame the girls. She did this. She wasn't good and that is why they break up. I think the man and the wife both need to work together to raise a family and if they give the girl to do everything she just can't handle it.

Aisha clearly questioned the burden that was thrust on the wife and on women in general. Of the many girls I interviewed, Aisha seemed to be one of the most questioning of her family's cultural traditions and the one, as described in "**Family and Household,** most active in trying to circumvent more traditional gender roles and expectations. In her resistance Aisha was, like many other girls, acutely conscious of the double standard being applied to her and her brothers in their attempts to define themselves within the post-migration context.

**The Evolution of Gender Roles, Transformations and Conflicts**

Rosenthal (1984) in her study of Italian and Greek immigrant families in Australia found that immigrant daughters had more frequent and more intense conflicts with their immigrant parents than immigrant sons. When girls begin to question more traditional gender roles, and/or seek more autonomy from the family, parents become far more worried than when their sons engage in the same behavior. An immigrant son's quest for independence is seen as far less threatening to a family's traditions, even honor and integrity, than if a daughter seeks some degree of independence. The norms guiding male

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roles seem cross-nationally less variable than those guiding women's roles. For example, in most societies, men/sons are expected to make their way in the world beyond the family. Post-migration this may mean that sons are encouraged to "Americanize" (Goodenow and Espin 1993:177) so to maximize their success in the new country. In contrast, daughters and women are often expected to stay home and within the family. Girls/women are encouraged to maintain the family's cultural traditions and also to pass these traditions to the next generation. An ESL coordinator at one of the high schools observed, "Girls have more struggles with traditional family values. Boys' values and roles change less than girls', thus less of a struggle." In the end, while a son's rebelliousness is often met with latitude and toleration, a daughter's questioning, resistance and/or rebellion is often met with little toleration, or even understanding.

Listening to the girls, I was struck that many of the girls who came from families with strongly defined gender roles and expectations also reported the least amount of conflict with their parents. Further, most of the girls who anticipated having their parents arrange their marriage, accepted if not embraced the idea (see below).

Parents socialize their children to prepare them for their future. If the obligation is to family and not to self, then daughters need to be prepared for whatever is best for their family's well-being. If men are to make choices for them, then the girls are being well prepared for their futures. Isis (Egyptian Coptic Christian) commented, "A guy can do anything he wants, a girl has to obey her husband." I wondered what were the functional and personal rewards of filial obligation which included arranged marriage? And to what extent did immigration thrust the girls into awareness of new ideas and options previously

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never imagined? And to what extent did these new ideas move them to behave differently than expected given earlier patterns of socialization? If Aisha had stayed in Bangladesh, would she have resisted her parents beginning attempts to find her a husband? Somehow I believe she would have. Would Isis have, if she would have stayed in Egypt? I doubt it. Although the study sample was too small to surface definitive patterns, I was nevertheless surprised at the tenacity of some girls, particularly South Asian girls to maintain traditional gender roles, despite their stated awareness of double standards and new alternatives. These girls seemed to be saying, "yes, I know there are other paths, but for me, within my family, the best path is to conform to parental directions and traditional proscriptions." As stated several times before, the maintenance of tradition and the continuity of their family's well-being seemed paramount for many girls' survival and well-being post-migration.

I now turn my attention to the girls' feelings and experiences about other aspects of gender identity, boys, dating, sex, and marriage.

**Boys, Dating and Sex**

The imagery of today's youth culture focuses on youth's apparent pre-occupation with dating, and obsession with sex. Public health experts, social scientists as well as members of the radical right, all deplore the fact that by age 15, 1 out of 3 girls have had sexual intercourse, and by age 18, 1 in 2 girls have had intercourse ("May is National Teen Pregnancy Month" 1997). How similar or dissimilar were the experiences of the girls I interviewed?

I was surprised in my interviews to find interest in boys and sexual activity rather

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low. Salma, and several other girls who attended all girls schools in their native countries told me that even two years after arriving in the United States they felt uncomfortable having classes with boys. Some of these girls, as well as girls who previously attended school with boys, commented that here, the boys were too sexually aggressive. Marisol provided an example of the aggression she had experienced.

> This morning one boy comes to me and he say "Hey, cunt" and I just looked at him because I didn't know him and he say (sic) "What. You don't listen to me I say Hi, what is your name?" I keep walking and he screamed at me and I tell him that "You don't have to know my name." He screamed at me.... And I say "What." I don't like that, the thing he called me. I don't say anything, why he told me that. Why he insult me?

Several of the South Asian and Arabic girls told me about incidents in which boys tried to rip off head shawls, or pulled at a girl's nose ring. Leela complained that boys "reach out to touch you," which she did not like. As the girls complained about the boys, some also shared their observations and dislike of the way some girls dressed and behaved to attract male attention. Amelia (Philippines) told me that she was astounded by how young girls become sexually active in the United States and their sexual brazenness. Michelle observed: "When I came here there are a lot of people (sic) dress too provocative. In France they don't do that like here. I was surprised." Michelle was surprised at how short some girls wore their skirts, and that some girls came to school with their midriff showing.

> I don't like it because they can get raped for that. Sometimes they don't understand. I don't know what they are trying to do, but it is not good. I don't like that. In France they don't do that.

Lisa compared how Chinese and Spanish girls dressed at her school. She thought

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the Spanish speaking girls dressed and acted very sexy. Yet, in speaking to several Spanish speaking girls at Lisa's school, I found that most agreed with Lisa. They too felt that many girls did not dress appropriately for school. While many girls agreed about the inappropriateness of much of the clothing worn by their peers, there was less agreement about wearing make-up. Several girls from Russia and Korea told me that back in their countries, if a young girl wore make-up, including lipstick, she was thought to be a slut. Yoon said that in "Korea good girls don't wear lipstick or hair spray but here it is okay." Some of the girls wore some make-up. Others said they were not interested in wearing any. Some wanted to, but didn't because their parents had said no. Others , like Isis, were able to overcome parental prohibitions, and wear finger-polish or lipstick to school.

For some girls, the ability to wear make-up or dress in a certain way was only a small piece of a larger area of conflict. Some of the girls struggled with their parents about socializing with boys, boys who were friends and not actual or potential romantic partners. In the chapter **"Family and Household"** and earlier in this chapter, I described the problems Aisha encountered when she was seen walking home from work with a boy who was not a family member. Girls told me of their difficulty in convincing their parents that they had friends who just happened to be boys. Carmen's mother did not allow her to date and Carmen had little problem with that. But Carmen's mother constantly worried about Carmen's reputation. A very popular girl, Carmen was frequently surrounded by boys.

> I have many new friends, boyfriends, and she says you should not talk to guys in the street because people start talking, maybe think that they you are fooling around I say mom that doesn't mean anything that I talk to them in the street, I have many friends and they respect me, so I don't know why she is always complaining about that *** she thinks all guys are bad, like my age.

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Isis's widowed father was very traditional. He had told Isis and her younger sister that he did not want them to get calls from boys. But Isis had been able to convince her father that only the boys from their Egyptian Coptic Church were calling her. She told him these boys were like brothers to her. They were not potential suitors. After considerable struggle, Isis's father seemed to accept her explanation and allowed her to receive phone calls and to be picked up by the boys when she went to church.

Like Carmen's, Aisha's and Isis's parents, Kristina and Teresa Kosov's father worried about the reputation of his daughters. He had forbidden them to date, and had also told them that he did not want them to flirt with the guys at school. Kristina was not bothered by either prohibition. She told me that, in fact, she hated flirting,

> ...flirting I hate. I think for Albanians it is not good. My parents don't like that. I cannot stand to stay with people who really flirt, like girls who flirt and talk dirty words. I hate that because my family no one talks in my family cursing and stuff. Nobody does that and I don't want to have that kind of friends, who do bad things and they talk bad in front of me.

I was actually quite surprised that a significant majority (probably 65%) of the girls I interviewed told me that they were either not interested or did not feel ready to begin to date. For some of the girls I felt the weight of their parents' traditions as they shared their lack of interest. But for some other girls, dating was perceived as a precursor for romance and marriage. These girls thus planned not to date until they had graduated from college and had established themselves professionally. These sentiments crossed nationality, and included some of the girls who were anticipating arranged marriage. Other girls said they did not want to date, because they thought "all the guys really wanted is sex," and they were fearful of becoming pregnant, getting an STD or becoming infected with HIV.

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Others feared some of the consequences of getting involved too quickly and/or getting involved with the wrong guy. For example, Rashida (Pakistan) told me that she did not want a boyfriend, "because they are annoying and will try to make you cut classes." And still others acknowledged that they just felt too young and unready. As I listened to these girls I reflected on the paradox of their maturity. Their desire to wait reflected maturity in contrast to the pseudo-maturity of many of their peers who did date and/or have sex. They felt they were unready, there were too many other issues they needed to sort out. They wanted to get to know themselves first.

While a clear majority of girls did not date and were not sexually active, there was a group of girls who were thinking about dating and/or actively dating. These girls represented all geographical clusters and also ages. Yet, a pattern did emerge. Girls from the English Caribbean, Haiti, Latin America, and several from Europe and Russia seemed to be much more socially active than their counterparts from China, Korea, Africa, and South Asia.

In general, the boys with whom these girls became involved were immigrants and shared the girls' national or ethnic background. Thus Evelyne (Haiti) had dated a Haitian man. Patrice's (Barbados) old boyfriend was West Indian, and Maria's current boyfriend was Dominican. Some of the girls, however, were both open to or had already dated boys from other cultural and religious backgrounds. Eva's (Poland) current boyfriend was from Bangladesh. Lisa had briefly dated a boy from Mexico. Antonia (Czechoslovakia) had had a series of boyfriends, including a man from Mexico, a man of Polish and Dominican background who had been raised in the Dominican Republic, and her current boyfriend

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who was born in Ireland. As previously described, Jyoti, a Hindu from Indian, was secretly dating a Muslim from Pakistan. And Alexis (Russia) had a Puerto Rican boyfriend.

I asked the girls who were dating cross cultural and religious boundaries what reaction they had had from their friends and parents. Lisa told me that her brother had been very upset when he found out that she was dating a Mexican. While she still felt somewhat open to cross cultural dating, she now tended to think that it would be better to date and marry someone who was Chinese, because they thought about the future, and she feit Spanish men did not.

> The Spanish, they drink on Friday, don't care of (sic) have wife at home, drink till drunk on Fridays. Chinese they care about the future, will save $5 today to get $250, plan ahead. Spanish spend money today, don't think about tomorrow.

Eva (Poland) had gotten some nasty comments from people in the street, but felt that her friends at school accepted her relationship. Antonia (Czechoslovakia) didn't much care what others thought. She did, however, share that her mother was very upset when she found Antonia and the Mexican man in bed. But Antonia was not sure if it was seeing them in bed or the fact that he was a Mexican. Jyoti (India) knew that her family would be violently upset, if they knew about her relationship with the Muslim man. In fact, if they knew she was dating anyone, they would probably be very upset. Jyoti also knew that she would eventually have to break off with her boyfriend, and accept an arranged marriage. While Aisha (Bangladesh) said she was not ready to date, and also was forbidden to date, she acknowledged there was a Vietnamese student at her school whom she liked. But given her parents' attitudes, Aisha knew that there was no possibility of a relationship with

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him, even just as friends. Natasha (Former Soviet Union), who spent more time with guys because they were more fun than being with girls, said that she had a mix of friends from different backgrounds. But "I haven't gone around with any black guys or Puerto Rican guys yet." Natasha was open to the possibility of dating cross culturally and thought there would not be a problem with her friends or even her parents. Then she added, that while her parents " wouldn't care if he was Jewish or not but they probably would care if he was black or ..." And finally Alexis (Former Soviet Union), shared that her mother both knows, and has had no problem with, her dating, or her having a Puerto Rican boyfriend,

A social worker at one of the high schools observed that many of the West Indian girls at her school dated men who were considerably older, frequently men who were 25 to 40 years old. The social worker had watched these older men come by the school in their fancy cars, flashing jewelry and trying to pick up girls as they exited the school. The social worker doubted that the men were trying to introduce the girls into prostitution. However, she worried about the girls. Many were extremely vulnerable. They had problems at home with their parents, step-parents and other relatives with whom they lived post-migration, and many had low self-esteem. The men might provide a brief escape for the girls. For a time the girls might feel wanted, even needed. "A boyfriend and sex takes them out of a rut." But often these relationships were short-lived. The girls were thus at high risk for disappointment, rejection and worse still, STDs and HIV. The scenario described by this social worker was echoed in a different part of the city by another social worker also working with a student population composed of many West Indian and also Latin American students.

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I was struck by the contrast between what the social worker observed and what I heard from the girls I interviewed, even those who came from similar backgrounds and/or attended the same schools. Yes, a few girls told me that they were dating guys who were older, but usually only by a year or two. And yes, some of the girls were sexually active, but the majority of the girls, even those with steady boyfriends, told me that they were not sexually active. And I believed them.

Girls told me that they knew of other girls at their school who had sex, even had gotten pregnant. Some had gotten abortions and some had kept their babies. But as far as their own experiences, they said that they did not want to have sex yet because they were not ready, did not want to get pregnant, did not want to get an STD or HIV/SIDA. A small number just had not yet found the right guy.

Mila (Latvia) has had several different boyfriends. She thought at age 18 she was ready to have sex. But when she and her boyfriend started to make out, she imagined her mother's presence over her shoulder. She decided, that if she was still feeling her mother's presence over her shoulder, she was probably not yet ready to have sex. Mila and her friend thus stopped fooling around and got dressed. Carmen (Dominican Republic) told me that she didn't trust condoms. "They always break." Lina (Dominican Republic) confessed that she would "touch and kiss but no farther, afraid to use rubbers," because she did not want to end up like her sister who already had a four month old baby. Another girl disclosed that, because she didn't believe in abortions, she did not want to have sex. She felt that once she decided to have sex she needed to be " prepared if I get pregnant that I have a baby because its a life." Christina (Ethiopia) did not want to have sex because

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in her culture if you had an "unmarried pregnancy you would be thrown out of the house by your father, you must stay fit for your husband. One has sex only in marriage." Christina was in agreement with her traditions, "it is much better to wait." Vivianne (Dominican Republic) concurred with Christina, but suggested that there is a double standard operating.

> Better to stay a virgin till marriage. Men don't want wives who have been with someone else, better to be a virgin, but they don't care if they have sex with girls on the street they still feel they should marry a virgin.

Lubra (Morocco) did not want to have sex either. But she maintained it was not because of her religion or traditions. No, she felt that she was too young and did not want to become pregnant. And then she added "just that you will have sex someday and why not just wait."

I asked the girls if amongst their friends they felt peer pressure to engage in sex, or did their boyfriends apply pressure. Again, I was surprised by the number of girls who told me that they didn't feel pressure to have sex, and that even their boyfriends were not putting pressure on them. I was also struck by the lack of conflict and sense of confidence with which the girls spoke about their decisions not to engage in sex. Given the significant difference between the more supervised and restrictive social milieu of their respective countries, and the more individualistic and permissive milieu here, I had anticipated there would have been more anxiety, confusion and/or conflict (see Naditsch and Morrissey 1976). I had also expected that peer pressure would have influenced more girls to abandon, or at least protest, the social and sexual norms and mores of their home cultures. But when I stopped to think about the girls' peer groups, I realized that my expectations had

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been based on an American or acculturated peer group. In fact, the peer groups of most of the girls I interviewed were comprised of girls who were also recent immigrants, and frequently came from the same country as the girls. The girls' peer groups thus probably more often reinforced traditional behaviors and mores than introduced the girls to the behaviors and mores more consistent with the American youth culture.

What about the girls who had had sex? Unfortunately, I have very limited knowledge about the girls' sexual experiences. While the girls seemed to be comfortable acknowledging their sexual activity, they seemed quite uncomfortable actually talking about sex. Some girls asked me to turn off the tape recorder, others asked that I did not take notes. But even then, the girls seemed suddenly shy or otherwise reluctant to discuss their sexual experiences. I did learn, however, that some used condoms, and some did not. A few reported being on the pill. A few confessed that they used nothing to protect themselves. My sense was that pregnancy and not AIDS/SIDA was their greater fear.

Of all the girls who confided that they had been sexually active, only Antonia (Czechoslovakia) communicated the sense that sex was a satisfying experience for her. Marva (Guyana) reported that it had been okay, just "okay." Evelyne (Haiti) told me that when she had sex, there was no foreplay and it had hurt. Julie (Barbados) shared that when she had sex it had also hurt, and she was thus worried that her "insides" had been damaged when her uncle sexually abused her back in Barbados.

My findings both reflect and contrast with the findings of sociologist Ruth Sidel in her study of young women in the United States (1990). Sidel's On Her Own provides a helpful, although not rigid, grouping of young women in terms of their ambitions, values

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and social and economic status and opportunities. Sidel named her groupings: 1) "the new American dreamers," 2) "the Neo-traditionalist," and 3) "the Outsiders." In exploring the sexual experiences within these groups, Sidel found that the girls who were "Neo-traditionalists" tended to postpone sex until marriage. The New American Dreamers were both active and inactive. In contrast "Outsiders", generally poor and minority girls were often sexually active. These girls saw sex as a way to connect to others. With few life options, many of these girls seemed to say "why wait."

The girls I interviewed who were sexually active included girls who were very ambitious, and those who did not seem to have a clear image about their future. They came from former middle class, working class and poor families. They crossed most ethnic boundaries. Many more easily fit Sidel's "American Dreamer" category than any of the her other categories, although, realistically, some probably could be considered potential "Outsiders." Like the girls in Sidel's study, the more traditional girls did not engage in sexual activity, and many of them also did not date. However, I was struck by the number of potential Outsiders (i.e. ethnic minority with limited educational and economic opportunities, and the undocumented) who were far more conservative in their values than Sidel's group of girls. I thus think that Gordon's "ethclass" (1964) considerations would be a helpful addition to the discussion of teen sexual activity. The continuity of familial and community traditions, even within a context of impoverishment and limited options, may alter the nature of choices about sexuality. Studies of sexual behavior, fertility, and infant mortality (see Chavez and Estevan and Lopez-Garcia 1992; LeClere, Jensen and Biddleman 1994 ), all suggest that cultural issues and the lack of acculturation to American

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mores are important variables in decision making and outcome, and may alter, if not, overwhelm the impact of class factors.

**Marriage**

In this concluding section I turn my attention to the girls' ideas about marriage. Interestingly, although some of the girls I interviewed were 20 and 21 years old, and several girls were explicit that they were in love with their boyfriends, only Lynne indicated any plans to get married. For the majority of girls, marriage was not an immediate concern.

Many girls did tell me of their hopes to get marred, but only after they had completed their studies and had secured a good job. In fact, a number of girls told me that in the long run they doubted that they could, or should, depend on men for their welfare. Instead, they believed a woman should have the ability to be self sufficient. It was necessary to bring into a marriage education and a good salary. Carmen (Dominican Republic) was one of the girls who held this view. Carmen believed that she would need to bring resources into her marriage if she wanted to give her children the best, and if she wanted to get out of her current neighborhood. Using her stepmother, a single parent earning a college degree, as her role model of self-sufficiency and independence, Carmen wanted to develop her own capacity to provide for her family.

In addition, to their own education and career goals, several girls stated that they would not marry a man unless he was educated and had a good job. Linda (Belize) commented: I want to be "sure that he loves me, has a job, and that we are not eating from my money." Marva (Guyana) told me:

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> I know I wouldn't marry anybody who is fat. I don't like that. I like fat people but not to marry a big fat person. It must be kind of strange. I mean BIG cause Geraldo had this talk show and he had 1000 lbs and this girl married him. The poor thing, she just married him to be famous. And they had this lady in Jet magazine and she married a man without hands and legs. I wouldn't do such a thing. I would be friends with the person yes, but not to marry him.

Marva had also decided that the litmus test for a good marriage was to know if the "man liked his mother. If yes he's okay, but not (sic), forget it." The issue of respect came up several times. The girls wanted to have husbands who supported them in doing housework (e.g. Marisol) and/or having them pursue their own careers.

Both documented and undocumented girls raised the issue of bogus marriages for the sake of a green card. Gabriella's (Brazil) sister who had married a Puerto Rican whom she later divorced, tried to encourage Gabriella to marry someone in order to adjust her status. But Gabriella said she could not do that. Grace (Jamaica) also had been urged to consider marrying to adjust her status, She too, did not feel she could do that. And while Lynne (Barbados) shared that she would be able to have papers once she married her boyfriend, she asserted that she really loved him. In contrast, Evelyne (Haiti), who had papers, saw marriage in part as a way to escape her horrific living situation, but worried about finding a good man and not one who wanted to marry her for her papers. Marva (Guyana) also wanted to be sure anyone she married already had his green card.

As stated above, I was somewhat surprised by the number of girls who indicated that they were open to date boys who came from other cultural backgrounds. When it came to marriage, however, there seemed to be more caution about crossing these boundaries. Still, Hye-Sook (Korea) told me that she would consider marrying someone

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who was not Korean. She was planning to go with a Spanish boy to the high school prom. In answer to my question about her mother's reaction to cross-cultural dating or marriage, Hye-Sook said, her mother did not care. Patrice (Barbados) was also open to the idea of marrying someone who was not Bajan or even Caribbean, but was not sure about how her mother would feel about it. Marva was much clearer about the reaction of her Guyanese family and community if she married someone who was not black. She told me that while Guyana is a multi-racial society, there were clear norms about endogamy.

M: I prefer to marry someone who isn't white but I would marry someone who is white cause some people object to such things that you should marry someone. . . in Guyana we have Indians and we have Negroes and they say "You should marry a Negro, you don't have no business marrying an Indian" cause their family might work some sort of voodoo stuff on you. They think things like that so you be scared and ***.

I: There isn't very much inter-marriage in Guyana between the Indians and blacks?

M: In Guyana if you see an Indian man and a black woman walking down the street you be like. . . "What is her problem. What is his problem" just like over here. If you see a Jew and a black woman walking down the street, you be like "What is her problem?" But it is okay to marry a white person.

I: When you say seeing a Jew walking down the street, how would you know that the person was Jewish?

M: If they are a religious Jew and have those things. One time I went to church and they had this Jewish man with the *** and the fringe here and the hat and his black woman walking down the street and my Grandmother said "What is her problem? All those *** in this place and she still marrying a Jew? What is his problem, too". I am sure his family doesn't like her. So you would be scared for her.

However, in the final analysis Marva believed it shouldn't be a matter of race: "you should marry who you really love." Josette, who came from a very fractured Haitian family and had had no contact with her mother or her father, echoed Marva, it "doesn't matter man's background, just he loves me and I love him, it's my choice."

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Other girls had decided that it was much better to marry someone from their own cultural background. Yoon thought that by marrying another Korean, they would "share a similar background and (it would be) easier to communicate." Meng said that she could marry someone who was not Cambodian, but that she felt that if she married a Cambodian they would have the same religion. Fatima also mentioned religion as an important factor in partner choice. "Its easier because of religion and ideas about kids." Raquel felt that by marrying someone who was also from Eritrea, "he could understand her." Evelyne also felt that marrying another Haitian would be easier because it would be "familiar."Hye-Sook, however, had decided that she wanted to have both the familiarity of the Korean culture, and the benefits of American experience. She thus wanted to marry a Korean who was born and raised here.

Seven of the girls I interviewed anticipated they would have an arranged marriage. Four other girls shared that, traditionally, their families arranged marriages, but it had been decided that they would probably not have one. I found myself totally fascinated by how the girls discussed the tradition of arranged marriages.

Rashida, a Muslim from Pakistan, told me that she loved to watched the films from Bombay. The storyline of these Indian Hollywood films was always the same.

> Boy meets girl. Boy and girl fall in love. Parents disapprove. The couple run away. Everyone becomes very upset and so the couple returns. And everyone is happy for ever after.

But she went on to to say, the movies were fantasies. "Real life has much more tragedy." In real life it is more often, boy meets girl, they fall in love and then one leaves the other. But, she explained, in an arranged marriage that would not happen.

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Asma (Indian Muslim) observed that in the United States everyone divorces, but in India, only 1% of the people divorce.

> Love marriages that really work are very rare,.... arranged marriages work in the long run. If you enter a marriage with starry and dewy eyes expecting a life-long passion, when the passion subsides there will be little to build on. However, if one enters a marriage prepared to develop a working team, love will follow..

As proof of what she believed, Asma described the marriage of her parents. Asma's father had been very handsome. Her mother had not been very beautiful, but she had come from a wealthy and pious family. People had wondered when her parents married, why a good looking man would marry a plain woman. Now, twenty years later, Asma told me with real pleasure, "they can not live without one another."

Meena (Indian Jain) commented that "love is made a big deal, but she doubted that it always worked out for the best." One enters into an arranged marriage "with very different expectations than a love marriage." Leela (Indian Hindu) added, "you work on your happiness." And the Kosov sisters concurred that in arranged marriages, "one stays together, no matter what."

While Asma, Leela and Meena were prepared to accept an arranged marriage, they all to some degree worried what would happen if love did not develop within an arranged marriage. Meena confessed her "anxiety about a wife being unhappy for her whole life." But despite these anxieties, and their curiosity about love marriages, the girls did not want to break with the traditions of their families. Asma explained.

> I prefer an arranged marriage. Because that I told you I come from a religious family, and I want to be traditional, and my parents. I don't think they would deny someone whom I like, because they know I have my religion, but I don't **, I would prefer an arranged marriage but I don't have any idea what will be in the

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future.

Although the girls anticipated their parents and relatives would actively choose whom they would marry, the girls had some of their own ideas of who they hoped would be found for them.

Asma wanted someone who was Muslim. She did not want him "to be really bad looking, but if he is bad looking and he is qualified and my parents want me to marry him" she would marry him. Asma added that she would also like her husband to be virgin and to be faithful. Asma also wanted a husband who was born in the US of Indian or Pakistani background "who still upholds the Muslim tradition and culture." I asked Asma why she wanted to marry someone born in the United States.

> Because he is more, I feel he more talented than the regular Indian because he has been trained in schools a lot better than the Indian schools, so I figured it out because my cousin, I told you, they were born here, and they are both talented, but they still like in India, and they are more like Indians, but they are very talented.

Asma's preference for someone who was US born mirrored Hye-Sook's desire for a US-born Korean spouse. I believe Asma's use of the word "talented," referred to what Unjong had spoken about, the knowledge and ability to negotiate life in the United States.

Asma's statement of preference, and the preferences articulated by the other girls seemed to reflect their sense that their families would, in fact consider some of their thoughts and feelings as they searched for an appropriate husband. The girls thus left me with the impression that they would abide by their families decisions, but that they would also be consulted during the process. They might even be able to reject one or another of the choices presented. Thus, even within the tradition of arranged marriage, I understood

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that there was a range of choices and levels of participation for the girls. I was unable to learn, however, to what extent the practices of arranged marriages had been transformed prior to migration and to what extent things had changed in face of familial adjustments and accommodations post-migration.

Out of all the many girls I interviewed, only Salma, a Muslim from Bangladesh, spoke to me about the type of arranged marriage portrayed in classical South Asian movies. In this traditional form of marriage, the bride does not see her husband until the wedding ceremony. Salma was uncertain if her father wanted her to marry or to first get an education. But Salma fully trusted her father. He knew what was best for her and thus she did not question his control over her future. Salma added that, once her father identified a husband for her, he would show her a photo of the man, but Salma would not be able to meet him until the actual wedding ceremony. In contrast to my own inner anxiety about such an experience, Salma seemed calm and very acceptant of the life that was about to be chosen for her.

Aisha, also a Muslim from Bangladesh, was far less sanguine than Salma. Aisha knew that ultimately she would be married to someone her family had chosen, but she wanted desperately to have her college education behind her. Aisha feared, if she got married too soon, children would come and interrupt her studies. As described previously, in the face of her upcoming graduation and her fear that she would soon be sent back to Bangladesh, Aisha was doing everything possible to delay the finding of a spouse. Despite Aisha's attempts to control the timing of her marriage, she seemed resigned that, in fact, her marriage would be arranged.

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In contrast to Aisha, Isis (Coptic Christian from Egypt) was not resigned to her family's tradition. Instead, Isis was very clear. She would only accept a love marriage. Her family, they could do what they wanted, but "when it is time for me to get married I just going to say no, I am going to do it on my own way."

> I don't think I am going to spend my entire life with somebody, that they think, with somebody basically some total stranger that they just think he is going to make a good husband for me, I don't like the entire idea...When I meet the right guy and fall in love with him and I think I really want to spend the rest of my life with this guy, I will marry him.

Raquel (Eritrea), Christina (Ethiopia), the Kosov sisters (Yugoslavia), and Fatima (Palestinian), each of these girls described how in their families marriages were traditionally arranged. In most cases the girls' parents' marriages had been arranged, and the girls felt good about these marriages. However, even before these girls had left their native countries their families' traditions had begun to change. While some of the girls had siblings whose marriage had been arranged, they also had siblings who had entered into love matches. The girls now anticipated that they would be allowed to enter into a love marriage. And yet, as I listened to the girls speak of their families' traditions and their own wishes, I was conscious of an underlying hesitation or doubt. They wanted very much to choose their life partner, someone whom they loved and who would love them. But they also seemed to worry if they would make the right choice. Perhaps their parents would make a better choice for them. As the girls talked, I felt that I was witnessing the transition between the old and the new. The girls' anxiety reflected the past and its "rationality" called to them. Arranged marriages might reduce individual choice, but also could provide a sense of continuity and, possibly, also community. A love match on the

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other hand tends to be more dyadic, a culture of spouse versus a culture of family generations joined through matrimony. With the high rate of divorce in the United States, which type of marriage was the best for them?

In an op-ed piece in the New York Times entitled "When Life's Partner Comes Pre-chosen (1995)," a young Indian-born woman, Shoba Nayan wrote about her experience facing the above dilemma. As an overseas Indian, educated in the United States, Narayan had always thought she would meet, fall in love and then marry someone, probably not even Indian. "Falling in love was easy. Sustaining it was the hard part." And so Narayan finally agreed to an arranged marriage. Narayan describes the experience of getting to know the man chosen for her, also an overseas Indian, and then describes the love that has developed in the three years of their marriage. As Narayan reflects on what has worked for her, she contrasts the context of her community with the one she has found here.

> ...our successful relationship has to do with two words - tolerance and trust...in a country that emphasizes individual choice, arranged marriages require a familial web for them to work. for many Americans that web doesn't exist.

I believe Narayan's analysis is only one part of what makes arranged marriage still so acceptable, if not attractive, to some of the girls with whom I met. They had observed in the years they had lived in the United States, that the alternatives to arranged marriages were perhaps not as attractive as others had tried to make them out to be. Yes, there were stories of horrific relations and domestic violence in arranged marriages. But, their cultural traditions and the support of their families had already proven helpful in meeting the challenges of migration and adjustment. An arranged marriage would help to keep them

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linked, if not tied to their past, to their families, and to their community both here and in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. As I listened to the girls, and compared their relative calm, and the surety that often seems to go along with following tradition, I felt that many of these girls had a greater chance to make it in the United States than some of the other girls whose cultural and familial tradition had already either been fractured by family problems, migration and/or by their acculturation to a more individualistic society.

Before concluding this section on marriage, I want to briefly mention the two girls who explicitly stated that, at least for now, marriage was not something they contemplated for their future.

In the chapter on the family, I made reference to a number of girls who came from homes in which there had been parental separation or divorce. Some of the girls who described particularly difficult family situations told me that they looked forward to having their own family in which they would have the love they felt they had missed growing up. Josette (Haiti), who had not seen her mother in many years, and was also estranged from her father was one of these girls. On the other hand, two girls, Wilma (Dominica) and Patrice (Barbados), were not interested in marriage. Wilma's disinterest in marriage was a reaction to her parents' bad marriage. For Patrice, not getting married grew out of recognition of double standards which exist in regard to men's and women's social and sexual relations. Patrice and some other girls complained that if a boy had many girls friends he was considered "cool," but if a girl had many boyfriends she was considered a slut. They also complained that wives often are forced to accept their husbands' unfaithfulness. However, if a wife is unfaithful to her husband, sparks and more will fly. In

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this context, Patrice had decided marriage was not for her. "I don't know if I could be faithful that long." But then she added as an after thought, "I am still young, maybe things will change later."

In this chapter I have examined how gender affected the girls' sense of self, their social identities, their behavior, and their expectations for the future. In the next and concluding chapter I will: 1) re-visit the relative importance of the girls' identities and identifications; 2) explore how the meanings and realities of family, education, marriage, and employment have shifted post-migration, and 3) analyze the potential of each in helping the girls achieve their version of the American Dream.

## ENDNOTES

1. Women have been the head of state in a number of nations. Often the women rose to power after their husbands' or fathers' deaths. These include: Zia Khaleda - prime minister of Bangladesh in 1991; Benigno Aquino - president of the Philippines in 1986; Bihar Bhutto - prime minister of Pakistan in the 1990's. Other women heads of state have included: Indira Gandhi (India); Golda Meir (Israel); and Margaret Thatcher (England).

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# CHAPTER IX

## PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE AND THE "AMERICAN DREAM"

> The world of our experiences seems chaotic, confusing. Experts can explain anything in the objective world to us, yet we understand our own lives less and less. We live in the post-modern world where everything is possible and almost nothing is certain. (Havel 1994:A27)

The preceding chapters have explored the experiences of a group of adolescent immigrant girls: their migration narratives, their post-migration households, their educational experiences, their friends, and lives in New York City. In this chapter I will revisit some of the themes and patterns which surfaced within the context of the above domains of experience. My intention is to both, highlight and weave together, some of the insights learned from this study, and to respond more explicitly to the three interrelated questions which stimulated this study. 1) How is adolescence affected by migration? 2) How is immigration affected by adolescence? 3) What is the experience of adolescent immigrant girls living in New York City at the end of the twentieth century? As I consider these questions, I will also be addressing concerns which permeate public and private discussions about immigration and immigration policy, to what extent are immigrants transformed by migrating to the United States and to what extent do they transform the America they have found here? The final chapter will focus on suggestions for future research.

Immigration and adolescence is the focus of the first section of this chapter. This is followed by a discussion of the girls' visions for their futures in terms of career and residence, and an analysis of these visions within the context of acculturation and the

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"American Dream."

## ADOLESCENCE AND IMMIGRATION

The examination of adolescence and immigration poses a series of analytical problems. The first is the fluidity and diversity of adolescent and immigrant experiences such that in discussing one or the other there is a tendency to idealize or stereotype, thereby losing the multi-dimensionality of each. Second, the nature of each is influenced by the socio-cultural characteristics of the individuals and the societies in which they lived and live. Third, the intersection of being an adolescent immigrant or the inverse, the immigrant adolescent is also influenced by the historical moment, and by socio-economic and political factors. Fourth, adolescence includes the years between 12 and 20. Much transpires during these eight years, including physical and psychological changes within the individual, and externally in terms of familial and non-familial role assignments and opportunities. A general discussion of adolescence may therefore obfuscate important differences which occur in the course of adolescence. Recognizing these analytical issues, and acknowledging the difficulties of separating that which is often transformed by the compounding of elements, I present some observations on the convergence of immigration and adolescence.

### Adolescence and the Immigrant Experience

"Adolescence" is a fairly recent, and to a large extent Western, conceptualization of the period of transition between childhood and adulthood in which the perquisites of childhood are gradually given up and are replaced by new adult roles and responsibilities. It "is a time of connecting and disconnecting, of questioning and believing, of trying out

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new roles and discarding others (Sidel 1990:56)." It is a time in which the individual re-organizes her self concept so that"past, present and future are linked together as a coherent whole (Erikson cited in Sabatelli 1985:623)." "One of the most perilous aspects of these years is the feeling on the part of the adolescent that suddenly she/he is a stranger, a foreigner, an alien ***in once-familiar land*** (emphasis added) (Sidel 1990:56)." Does the immigrant adolescent experience an amplification of this alienation as she physically relocates from a familiar land to one that is unfamiliar? Yes and no.

Alienation or "existential angst" and inter-generational conflicts are frequently associated with adolescence and/or immigration. In my study the girls who seemed to have the most problems were those who had experienced protracted chain migration, extended separations from parents, and/or significant dismemberment of pre- and post-migration households. In addition, there were one or two girls whose difficulties appeared to be unrelated to migration but resulted from other individual and/or family problems, e.g. Lina and her drug addicted father. While girls with these family/household backgrounds did exhibit signs of depression, identity problems and were vague about their futures, I found the majority of girls to be surprisingly grounded and self-possessed, reporting a minimum of inter-generational difficulties. Thus, while the girls' cultural landscape may have changed, their inner one seemed intact, if not, fortified by their migration experiences. And rather than create inter-generational conflicts, immigration seemed to foster a renewed sense of mutual support and integration in many families.

The girls' self-possession and their relatively low level of identity confusion suggests a markedly different profile than teens who emigrated at younger ages, or are the

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children of immigrants. Young children who emigrate tend to emigrate with their immediate social world intact, that is, they migrate within the cocoon of their family/household. Initially, changes in the outside social and cultural world are less apparent for them. However, lacking the reference of another, non-familial social world, as they grow up here, their post-migration social world becomes their principal reference. In contrast, the immigrating adolescent leaves behind a developed world of friendships and school experiences. These pre-migration peer relationships and social and school experiences have played a significant role in the development of the immigrant adolescent's self and world views as well as in her sense of self within the world. Post-arrival, as the girl interacts with peers and negotiates her new social and cultural environment, her previous socio-cultural experiences and self-identifications are thrown into relief. For many of the girls in my study, the experience of external cultural alienation stimulated a renewed awareness of their cultural and linguistic selves, and often resulted in a re-assertion or re-investment in their cultural identities and traditions. As "involuntary" migrants, i.e. their families made the decision about migration, the girls' sense of loss may have also contributed to their desire to hold on to that which was familiar. In this context they may have been less apt to question their own past than to question the unfamiliar worlds into which they have been placed. The current climate of ethnic pluralism and the programmatic structures of bilingual and ESL classes no doubt also helped to re-enforce the girls' maintenance of their cultural pasts. In addition, and as discussed previously, the girls' reliance on their families as their anchor in a sea of changes, resulted in their families reinforcing, if not, insulating their past cultural selves. This is not to say that the girls did

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not, at times, experiment with aspects of the new "American" culture, or question if not resist, parental proscriptions and dictates, e.g. Aisha's problems with her parents. But interestingly, in most cases these tensions seem to revolve around gender roles and behaviors, which, to some extent, were already being contested in the girls' pre-migration households and societies.

The acquisition of new responsibilities and functions are part of the gradual transition from childhood to adulthood. Frequently, the girls reported, post-migration, a very rapid transformation from being taken care of, to becoming the one who has responsibility to care-take. I found this pattern especially amongst the girls from South Asia, but also amongst girls from Korea, China, Russia and Haiti. Post-migration, the girls became more active in household activities substituting for their mothers who now worked outside the home; and/or the girls engaged in after-school jobs to supplement their families' incomes. Most girls did not seem to resent their new responsibilities. To the contrary, many girls seemed happy that they could assist their families. But the girls did acknowledge that they now had much less time to pursue their friendships and/or other interests. The result was a reduction in their ability to experience the social world of adolescents, even within the transplanted milieu of their compatriots. In listening to the girls I thus felt that the experience of migration in some ways truncated their adolescence. They were, as Raquel reflected, forced to mature faster than their peers who were born here, or who had come at earlier ages when family demands could not so easily be placed upon them. The experiences of departure, migration and arrival both physically and socially separated the girls from their childhoods, and speeded them towards their

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adulthoods.

No doubt, for some girls a reduced adolescence and a more abrupt transition into adulthood was not much out of the ordinary in their home cultures. But even for those who would have had more time to be teen-agers back home, I rarely felt that the girls were ruing the loss of opportunity to participate in America's youth culture. Yes, some wanted to wear lipstick or a type of popular clothes, and a few like Antonia from Czechoslovakia and Mila from Latvia were intent on going to downtown clubs. But, more frequently, the girls articulated their shock at what they found around them and their antipathy for the mores and behaviors of America's youth and popular cultures. For many of these girls, the adolescent world outside their families was thus not culturally or socially attractive. Further, fear of violence within their communities also re-enforced a tendency to stay within the cultural and physical confines of their families and households. Lastly, I felt that the girls' relatively acceptant attitude toward their new roles and responsibilities also reflected the girls' cultural traditions, i.e. family needs supersede those of individual interests and desires.

In summary, if one thinks of adolescence as a period of self and world exploration, most of the girls with whom I spoke were in a somewhat paradoxical situation in which significant external geographic and cultural dislocations seemed to stimulate less rather than more cultural exploration and/or experimentation. At the same time, if the principal tasks of adolescence are the achievement of a defined sense of self and an enhanced sense of coherence and movement into more adult roles, then I believe most of the girls with whom I spoke were successfully negotiating their adolescence, and rapidly moving

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towards adulthood.

**Immigration During Adolescence**

In the above section I expanded on the experience of **being an adolescent** who immigrates. As the expectations and tasks of an immigrant differ from those of an adolescent, in this section, I invert the emphasis and discuss **being an immigrant** who is an adolescent .

The task of an immigrant is to find a niche in the new environment and find a means to adapt and survive, if not thrive. Many immigrants leave their past to create a new future. Their orientation is thus towards the future. They often come with the vigor of optimism and the sense that they will be able to overcome the obstacles that are placed in their path. There is a sense of new beginnings and the unlimited possibilities of the future. Only later, over time, does reality inject itself. While this profile is an exaggeration and stereotyping of immigrants' sensibilities, it does contain much of the essence of the immigrant experience. In many ways it also expresses much of the adolescent experience. Many adolescents try to break free of the "shackles" of their childhood to enter a world that seems superior, adulthood. In adolescence there is often an unlimited sense of invincibility and optimism about the future. And, during adolescence the individual plans how she will be a success in the new frontier which is adulthood. How do the essences of being an immigrant interact with those of being an adolescent? Are they mutually amplified, or are they somehow, as double positives, transformed? In thinking about these questions, it is important to separate out being an immigrant from the experience of immigration, i.e. the consequences or the reality of living the immigrant life from the

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underlying motivation and expectations that fuel the migration itself, but also to recognize their interdependence.

In **"Emigration and Migration"** I discussed the girls' TIM responses to the question "How do you feel about being an immigrant?" The majority (47%) of the girls' responses expressed negativity about being an immigrant, and a significant number (34%) of the girls' expressed ambivalence. Only a small number (15%) of the girls wrote positively about being an immigrant. Unlike the adult immigrant who might accept a disruption in her life as a necessary step towards something better, it is significant that many of the girls' reflections focused much more on their losses, and the sense they had been deprived of their qualitatively better pre-migration lives, than on the potential gains of immigration. I found this to be true in the stories and comments of several South Asian girls, whose families had experienced downward mobility post-migration, and also in the comments of several Chinese, European and Russian girls whose parents had experienced post-migration downward shifts in professional/job status. This is not to say that these same girls did not articulate that educational and professional opportunities had increased by their coming to America. However, as the girls talked about feeling un-welcomed and unappreciated as immigrants, I sensed some of the girls did not always share the optimism that had initially stimulated their families' decision to migrate, or which continued to motivate their parents' post-migration. To some degree, the continued intangibility of their parents' objectives made it hard for these girls to overcome their immediate struggles, i.e. the urgency of the present overwhelmed their ability to project a future. Thus, as adolescents, who perhaps, required somewhat more immediate gratification of their needs

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and wishes, the girls were not as convinced as their parents that immigration would enable them to realize the potential opportunities that had brought them here. In addition, I felt that the perception of being and feeling different, difficult even for adult immigrants but particularly difficult for most adolescents, further exacerbated the girls' sense of dissatisfaction.

At the same time I observed that some of the girls, who expressed frustration with their present circumstances and "being an immigrant," also expressed hopes and dreams about the future, and seemed convinced that, in fact, they would benefit from the opportunities which existed here but not in their native countries. Was this yet another dimension of adolescence, an ability to compartmentalize, to be somehow invincible and thus to hope against reality that things would be better? Did the girls' families provide sufficient incubation, if not, reinforcement for the hopes and dreams of these, as yet un-sprung, adolescents? Or was the momentum of immigrant expectation and optimism so strong, that it propelled the girls' hopes despite the problems and contradictions they experienced in their daily lives? I am not sure. My interview material is suggestive, but I feel I lack sufficient documentation to be more conclusive. A more focused study of these issues with a larger randomized sample is needed to move us towards greater clarity and understanding.

In the context of the current study, however, I am convinced that the adolescent experience re-shapes the immigrant experience, as the immigrant experience re-shapes the adolescent. I believe that immigration during adolescence presents new and positive challenges for the adolescent, but often results in the truncation of adolescence. The

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disadvantage for some adolescent immigrants is their continued reliance, if not dependency, on their families and their lack of freedom in making choices about migration and residence, in short the fact that they are "involuntary migrants" and may suffer the restrictions and consequences of that status. On the other side, I believe that immigrants who are adolescents, despite their sense of loss, have unique capacities. They have the anchor of their past which their younger siblings do not have, but have the flexibility and the opportunity of their youth to creatively integrate past and present and thereby define and re-define their lives in ways unavailable to their older siblings and parents. They also have the energy of youth, and the unique potential for optimism and tenacity so needed to move beyond initial adversities in the post-migration period.

## HOPES AND DREAMS, DEFINING FUTURES

In "**Passing through the School House Door,**" "**Family and Household**" and "**Identity and Gender**" I began a discussion of the girls' hopes and plans by describing their thoughts about education and marriage. In this section I will continue this discussion by focusing on the girls' thoughts about employment and careers and their ideas about residence. Using material from the TIM, and from their interviews, I will then contrast the lives the girls now imagined for themselves with the lives they imagined they may have lived if they never emigrated. I will conclude the section with some observations about the potential of the girls to realize their dreams.

### Career Plans

Almost all the girls planned to attend college, although a few planned to work a year prior to attending. The girls seemed well aware that their documentation status would

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not prevent them from attending any of the City University colleges, but a number of the undocumented and documented girls worried if they would be able to afford the $3,200 per year tuition for CUNY schools and also have sufficient funds to cover their living expenses. Some South Asian girls, such as Aisha, worried, if an arranged marriage would interfere with their attendance and/or completion of college. It is in the context then of the girls' recognition of a need for college education and their desire to pursue at least a bachelor's degree that I review their ideas about careers. 31 different career choices were indicated by the 66 girls in the core sample. A number of girls were still undecided about their careers and thus indicated more than one career choice. In Table 9-1 I grouped the girls' choices and have indicated the number of girls interested and the per cent of the total number.

Careers in health and social services were the most frequently cited by the girls. While these careers were represented in each national/regional cluster, across clusters there were some significant variation in terms of the frequency of specific careers. Thus, every girl within the Haitian cluster expressed an interest in a health career, with nursing dominating their choices. Josette stated she would start as a nurse and then become a pediatrician, Evelyne stated she wanted to become a physical therapist and lastly Josie said she wanted to become a doctor. Amongst the girls from the English Caribbean, only nursing and nutritionist were cited. And amongst the Korean girls, two girls indicated an interest in becoming a doctor, while three others indicated interest in pharmacy, physical therapy, and nursing. Four out of five girls from Korea, and four out of five Russian girls also cited nursing, physician or other health/social service professions amongst their career

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**TABLE 9-1**
**CAREER CHOICES**

| CAREER | Girls Interested | Per Cent |
|---|---|---|
| HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES | N=27 | 35% |
| Physician | 7 | |
| Nurse/LPN | 11 | |
| Pharmacist | 4 | |
| Physical Therapist | 2 | |
| Nutritionist | 1 | |
| Dentist | 1 | |
| Social Worker | 1 | |
| Veterinarian | 1 | |
| TEACHER | N= 2 | 3% |
| LAWYER | N= 7 | 9% |
| INTERPRETER | N= 1 | 1% |
| ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE | N= 11 | 14% |
| Engineers | 3 | |
| Architect | 1 | |
| Environmental Science | 1 | |
| Computers | 6 | |
| BUSINESS | N=9 | 12% |
| Management | 3 | |
| Store Owner | 1 | |
| Accounting | 4 | |
| Sports Team Owner | 1 | |
| CREATIVE AND COMMERCIAL ARTS | N= 13 | 17% |
| Journalist | 4 | |
| Author | 2 | |
| Designer | 2 | |
| Painter | 1 | |
| Interior Designer | 1 | |
| Performing Arts | 3 | |
| FASHION INDUSTRY | N= 3 | 4% |
| Buyer | 1 | |
| Model | 2 | |
| TRAVEL INDUSTRY | N= 5 | 6% |
| Pilot | 1 | |
| Flight Attendant | 3 | |
| Travel Agent | 1 | |

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choices. However, few girls in the South Asian, and Latin American clusters expressed an interest in these careers. Within the European cluster Michelle, who wanted to become a physician , was the only girl who cited an interest in a career in a health/social service career. Interestingly, Michelle, born in France, was of Haitian/Arab ancestry.

I believe some of the cluster differences in health profession career choices reflected variations in girls' pre-migration socio-economic status, and the girls' familiarity with and knowledge about specific professions by virtue of the employment of family members and relatives in these professions.

The frequency of the girls' choosing careers in the health/social service professions also suggests the influence of several other factors. 1) While there are national certification processes in every country, these fields have universal utility and are very needed in many of the girls' sending countries. 2) Clearly many of these careers have long been associated as women's work here and elsewhere, this includes the profession of medicine, e.g. in the former Soviet Union and India where a significant proportion of doctors are women. 3) Even though nursing has not enjoyed a very high status in the United States, it has enjoyed high status in many of the sending nations. 4) Nursing has been a profession that is somewhat "color-blind" in the United States and has been accessible to many minorities, particularly in the public hospital sector. Until recently there has even been active recruitment of women from other nations to fill U.S. vacancies, e.g. Jamaica and the Philippines, resulting to some extent in the creation of an employment niche for many Haitian and English Speaking Caribbean women. Thus, many of the girls from Haiti and the English Caribbean have mothers, fathers and other relatives who migrated to the

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United States to fill nursing positions. 5) Many girls saw a career in health and/or social services as a mechanism to "help people in need" and thus realize their familial and community commitments. For example, Michelle and several other girls stated, by becoming doctors they would be able to decrease their families' medical bills and be able to provide care to their families. And a girl from Haiti stated that if she was a doctor she would be able to send money to help people in Haiti or even go to Haiti and be a doctor there.

The girls' interest in other careers such as education and law also seemed predicated on their commitment to service. Even as the girls spoke about such potentially lucrative professions as law, the girls expressed a desire to engage in activities which would assist the poor and the disadvantaged, particularly from their own backgrounds. Interestingly, three out of eight Latin American girls, all Dominican, expressed an interest in law, especially criminal law. But the type of law they wished to practice was not the high profile law practiced by Jimmy Cochran or Harvard lawyer Alan Dershowitz. Rather, their interest in law was predicated on their understanding of the interface between class, race/ethnicity, law and justice. Carmen (Dominican Republic) thus wanted to work with the poor, the homeless and drug abusers because, she told me: "some people don't know their rights and end up in jail even though they are innocent." And Maria (Dominican Republic) wanted to study law and then get into politics so as to give better voice to "her people."

A number of girls told me that they had initially been interested in pursuing a teaching career but had changed their mind after witnessing the lack of decorum in

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American classrooms.

The above career choices, and those of several girls interested in environmental science and engineering reflects the girls' intellectual interests, but also reflects their orientation to service. The constancy of this orientation in the girls' comments and their choices contrasts with the self-indulgence and materialism often associated with American youth culture, e.g. the cultural frame of MTV, shopping mall groupies; the extreme nihilism of the teens in the film "KIDS," and which also Sidel (1990) found amongst her study cohort. This is not to say that the girls never indicated a wish to be financially successful, to own a house and a car, and to have the ability to travel. But even when the girls did express these desires, there was always present a wish to make some kind of lasting contribution, to make a positive difference by helping others. As Lisa reflected. "You are born with nothing, die with nothing, so better to help." There is an irony here. In the midst of a renewed sense that immigrants are threatening the fabric of American society, many of my foreign born adolescents with their "foreign" values, seemed less apathetic and exhibited less sense of entitlement than I and others have heard from many of their native-born contemporaries.

Within my sample there were, however, also girls who indicated an interest in professions that were either more reflective of individual expression, or seemed motivated by a desire for money and/or status. 17% of the girls' choices involved the creative and commercial arts. Four girls expressed an interest in print and television journalism. Three of these girls were Latin American - Carmen from the Dominican Republic, Gabriella from Brazil, and Marisol from Mexico; the fourth girl, Natasha, came from the former

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Soviet Union. Given somewhat limited female professional role models within the Spanish speaking community, I think the Latin American girls' interest in careers in journalism and in the performing arts may reflect the high profile of the Spanish language media in New York, and the visibility and high status of some of the women in TV journalism and in the Spanish soap operas. Of note are the comments of several girls who thought they might have success in Spanish language productions, but doubted that they would ever be successful in Hollywood or in the English language media. The girls thought that they would never be able to speak English well enough or without an accent to be accepted. Did they also think their Latina looks might also keep them out? The girls' recognition of existent or potential barriers was also evident in terms of the surprisingly small number of girls who expressed an interest in modeling, a common adolescent fantasy. Not a single girl of African ancestry - girls from Caribbean and Africa nor any of the Latino girls expressed an interest in a modeling career. As the presence of role models may have suggested career options in Spanish television, the relatively few, although currently growing, models of non-European ancestry may have eliminated modeling from the minds of some unusually attractive young women. The two girls interested in modeling were Teresa from Yugoslavia and Amelia from the Philippines. Amelia radiated a classical Asian beauty that has long been commercialized, if not eroticized. Unlike Marisol's and the Kosov sisters' fathers who discouraged their daughters from considering careers in modeling or acting, Amelia's father encouraged Amelia to pursue a career in modeling. But Amelia, a very pretty girl, had felt she was not pretty enough. After seeing an Asian actress play in "Ms. Saigon," however, the possibility of an acting career emerged. Prior

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to seeing Ms. Saigon Amelia had rarely seen an Asian actor, and had thought Asians could not become actors.

Work as a flight attendant is also a high profile job where, historically, a woman's looks were a premium, if not a necessity. While men now are also flight attendants, the job still has the aura of excitement, fashion and glamour. However, only three girls, indicated an interest in this career: Anya (USSR) who also was considering becoming a doctor or a dress designer; Mila (Latvia) who also wanted to be a model; and Wilma (Dominica). With each of the above high profile professions I wondered to what degree the girls' interests were influenced by exposure or lack of exposure to ethnic role models and/or the positive and/or negative portrayal of each profession in popular culture. The current study is only suggestive, but the association between ethnicity and career goals is an important area of further research.

Business management and accounting were the career goals of girls from Yugoslavia, Pakistan, Guyana, Haiti, and China. Interestingly, none of the girls in this group had parents or family members who had in the past, or were currently, small business owners. And, despite the fact that the Korean and South Asian immigrant communities are particularly known for their success in small business enterprises, not a single girl from these backgrounds indicated interest in business careers.

While many of the above career choices conform to gender role patterns or are considered somewhat gender neutral, such as computer science, there were a number of girls who expressed interest in jobs that more traditionally have been associated with men. The girls who had interest in these careers included two Indian girls, who otherwise

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communicated their acceptance of more traditional gender roles, including the prospect of arranged marriages. Meena wanted to be a commercial pilot. Leela wanted to become an environmental engineer. Mei (China) was also interested in environmental sciences. Zenobia (Ecuador), always interested in electrical engineering, had a special dream to work for NASA. Nicki (Jamaica) was less sure about what career she wanted, but she wanted to do something "different," (she) "wanted to take risks and have challenges." Nicki's career dreams ranged from becoming a nurse on a cruise ship to becoming a long distance truck driver to working as a firefighter. And finally, there was Julie (Barbados) who hoped to become the first female manager of a major sports team.

**A Comparison of Possible Life Trajectories Pre and Post-Migration**

Before I examine the girls' aspirations in terms of socio-economic realities and the potential for them to achieve their goals, I would like to situate their aspirations within the context of perceived life trajectories pre and post migration. In my interviews many girls focused on how their immediate lives had been transformed by migration, however, I was also interested if and how the girls' dreams and their ideas about life opportunities and/or choices were transformed by their migration. To gain insight into the nature of the transformations, I asked on the TIM two related questions. 1) **"Imagine that you never left the country where you were born. List all the things you think you would be doing at age 30."** 2) **"Now that you live here, imagine all the things you might be doing at age 30. List them."** While some girls complained that it was very difficult to imagine themselves at age 30, i.e. ten to fifteen years in the future, most girls completed the questions providing a rich lode of material. As I compared the pre and post life

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descriptions, a number of important patterns surfaced.

First, the majority of girls imagined that they would be married and have children, both in their nation of origin and here.

Second, while a significant number of girls anticipated having a family and would also be working regardless of location, many girls inverted the sequence. In other words, when listing their activities in their native countries, the girls' list sequence was marriage, children and/or family and then work. When listing their activities in the United States, the sequence was inverted with work coming first and then marriage, family and/or children. In addition, the emphasis seemed to switch from family activities to work-related and more individual pursuits post migration. For example Nancie wrote about life in China at age thirty: "married with child maybe work. In contrast she wrote about life in the United States: work, maybe married "have a realized life." Isis' answers was a variation on the same theme.

> **In Egypt**: Rasing children. Housewife because most women in country are, "I would think it would be the most natural thing to do"
>
> **In the United States.** Running a business or manager, have family and enjoy raising children, but don't need to be housewife for that.

Third, a number of girls indicated marriage, children and/or family if they had stayed in their nation of origin, but omitted either marriage, children and/or family in their answer to their lives here. In some cases children, but not marriage were listed in their post-migration life. This perhaps indicated a sense that they might have children without marriage. Or that divorce might be an option here when it was not one back home. For example, Teresa (Yugoslavia) had told me during our interview: "Albanians, when they

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get married, they don't leave their wives. They don't have affairs with someone else. When they marry a wife, they stay with her. They never divorce them." However, as part of her post-migration response she wrote: "if marriage didn't work would get a divorce." Other girls completely omitted marriage and family from their post-migration lives. For these girls life in the United States suggested greater freedom to pursue career interests and be less limited by traditional gender roles. Noelle imagined her life in Haiti would include: "working, taking care of kids, mother and father. But she imagined that her life here would mean: "Business manager or doctor." Several girls used words/phrases such as "independent," and "live by self" to describe their post-migration lives. A number of girls were more explicit what their freedom and independence would mean. Wang Amah (China) wrote: "travel the world and study cultures." And Jyoti (India) wrote she would be able to "hang out with friends, movies (sic), club." Rosita from the Dominican Republic provided one of the most dramatic descriptions of perceived shifts in life opportunities post-migration.

> **In the Dominican Republic**: Maybe, cooking for my children and husband, washing clothes, doing housework, or maybe working in an office or bank.
>
> **In the United States**: Well I imagine myself digging out bone, discovering new things research in Peru, Mexico, Egypt. Well I imagine myself as a successful archeologist. But I would also like to be a singer. I imagine myself on a stage singing and dancing as a very famous singer.

Fourth, in respect to their employment, a number of girls anticipated higher pay and/or more professional jobs living in the United States, in contrast to living in their own nations. Zenobia wrote.

> **In Ecuador**. Working in a company producing electrical things, earning a low

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level wage because I'm a woman with one or two children I would be renting an apartment. And I think I would be happy enough as to handle my life and career in a country where women are not consider good enough.

**In the United States.** I would be working for a good company, probably creating new electrical and mechanical inventions. I would be earning a (good) high level wage because of my knowledge. I would be married or maybe not but if I get marry I would marry someone who understand me and my job.

Fifth, a number of the girls' responses indicated their belief, that they would enjoy a much higher standard of living here than in their own countries. Several girls wrote that in their native countries they and their families would be living with parents or "living in my grandmother's house" or would be renting an apartment. These same girls believed that here they would "have own apartment or house and car."

**Dreams for the Future**

On the TIM I also asked the girls more directly about their dreams for the future. Here many girls reiterated what they had written in response to the above comparative questions, but many were also more explicit in describing both the quality of their future lives and the motivations behind their dreams. Three themes emerged in the girls' answers. The first was becoming a good mother and/or wife and helping to take care of their families. The second was earning money which would enable them to either live well and/or help take care of their own families and their parents. Here the girls were quite specific about their desire to capture some of the American Dream which may have stimulated their family's migration and/or to enjoy the benefits they thought would come with their American education and obtaining professional employment. The third theme was a combination of service, making their parents proud and becoming a person who was

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well respected for her deeds. Leela (India) who wanted to be a an environmental engineer wrote: "To accomplish something that would help to preserve world peace and health (sic) environment." Meena (India) who was not sure if she would become a commercial pilot or a dentist wrote: "Loving and working with people. When I die I want people to say, 'that girl, she made a difference in my life.'" And finally Sherie (Haiti) who hoped to become a medical doctor wrote.

> I've thought to become a medical doctor to help people who are sick and in need of medical attention. I feel by becoming a medical doctor I will be in the position to work in neighborhoods that have children of low social economic standards.

**Thoughts about Future Residential Location**

In thinking about the girls' dreams, aspirations and their sense of transformed opportunities post-migration, it is important to recognize that the girls did not perceive these futures only in the context of residence in the United States. True almost half the girls planned to remain in the United States, although not always in New York. But over half of the girls were thinking about returning to their native countries, going to live in another country or were still unsure where they would live. Migration to the United States had opened up the possibility of a very different future, but once this future was perceived it was not one necessarily predicated on continued residence in the United States.

On the TIM 50% of the girls stated that they wanted to build their lives here. Many of these girls believed that the United States offered opportunities which would not be available at home. In other sections within this study I discussed some of these potentialities in terms of education, and also gender roles. Lisa (China) wrote: "I want to live in USA because here has more exciting things here I can find my real goal. A

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democratic country always better than community (sic) country expressed." Her countrywoman, Mei wrote: "I've adopted the American style of living. I feel comfortable here in such a multi-cultural society. I don't think that I can go back to the life before in my country." Aisha and Salma, both from very traditional Bangladeshi Muslim families wrote respectively: "there's nothing to do back in my country. I can have a career (sic), a job. I see my future brighter here." And, "I have more opportunities and I can become whatever I want to become."

While most girls had not traveled much beyond the five boroughs of New York City, several girls indicated a desire to live elsewhere in the United States because they believed in the other locations they could enjoy better weather (not so cold, no winter), less crime, and a quieter life style. Evelyne (Haiti) wrote that she wanted to live in Puerto Rico because she liked the Spanish. Other girls were less specific about a place, but indicated that they wanted to live in the suburbs and/or a small town. Again, these girls sought a quieter life than what they experienced in New York.

22% of the girls stated on the TIM that they wanted to return to their countries. Some girls missed family and friends. Some wanted to return but were uncertain given the continuation of the political situation which stimulated their emigration. Several girls stated that they intended to go back, because "that is where I was born and where I belong." I wondered how many of these girls would really go back, and how many would become the permanent sojourner, always hoping to return but never actually returning to their respective homelands.

10% of the girls wanted to create a life in which they could spend part of the time

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here and part of the time in their country. Some of these girls commented, that because better employment opportunities existed here, their home base would be here. But these girls planned to return home on a regular basis. For girls who still had parents or other family members living in their country, I felt their plan to live in both places or at least regularly spend time in both places reflected a continuation of the transnational households which had pre-dated their own migration. Attitudes about US and/or dual citizenship were not addressed, but the issues related to citizenship, especially in the context of the 1996 Immigration Reform Act, would be interesting to explore in another study.

6% of the girls stated that they wanted to move to another country. In some cases family members lived in the stated country, but one Chinese girl commented she wanted to live in either Sweden or Singapore because they were "so strange to me. They are both quiet and clean countries. No one knows me there."

12% of the girls were still unsure where they wanted to live. Some were not sure if family or employment would determine where they lived. Others considered if the political crises which led to their emigration would continue. Kristina (ethnic Albanian from Yugoslavia) who had fled the Yugoslavian civil war wrote:

> It doesn't matter where as long it is as I described in the question #8 [Somewhere that is peace and quite (sic).] And that I am around people I love. Because if you are in a place that you are not afraid of anything and you are comfortable that is all that matters to me that is all that matters.

And her sister Teresa wrote with a mix of sadness, realism and fantasy:

> I don't really know yet. I'm too young. But my dream house is in a place where are rich people (Beverly Hills), private house, live with my husband, children. Because I want my life to be peaceful, I think everybody would like to be rich. But still I don't really know because me and my family are poor and never thought that I'm

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going to, live in a dream house.

These were the girls' plans, hopes, and dreams. To what extent were they private wishes and ambitions, and to what extent did they echo a more public sense of the American Dream? And in the context of that American Dream, how realistic were they? Would they as first generation immigrants be able to realize and achieve the happiness they sought through family, education, and employment, or would the dream be delayed, and be the fuel for their children and their childrens' children successes?

## THE AMERICAN DREAM - FUTURE HOPES AND CURRENT REALITIES

The term "the American Dream" was coined in the midst of the depression by historian James Truslow Adams. Writing in a treatise called the "The Epic of America" Truslow wrote:

> "The dream is not of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which every individual shall be able to attain the fullest stature of which they are capable and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of their birth." (Cited in Williams, 1996)

In the eyes and minds of millions of immigrants who have traveled to its shores, America has been imagined as a land of opportunity in which hard work "could move (one) from poverty to riches;" where a person's place in life wasn't irrevocably fixed at the moment of birth (Brownstone, Franck and Brownstone 1986:8)." Immigrants came with a sense of confidence that through hard work they would succeed and move up the ladder of success. In the context of an expanding economy for many immigrants and their children, their dreams were in fact achieved. Their success fed the ideology of the American Dream. While with each generation the content of that dream changed in terms

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of the markers of success, what remained constant was "the feeling that anything is possible in this nation, that opportunities are expanding and that the future will surely be better than the past (Knight 1984:41)." Each generation thus used their parents and their parents' generations as the standard against which to match their own success. For immigrants their past lives in their native countries were added to this comparative calculus. While the ideology of the American Dream continues to feed many of our visions of the future, there is increasing awareness that the Dream may in fact be just that, a dream. In the past, structural, and racial/ethnic impediments to achieve the dream were often rendered invisible by the shadow of Horatio Alger and the ideology of individualism. Today, we are all much more mindful that "as American prospers not everyone will benefit and more will be left out (Robert Reich cited by Herbert 1997:A17)." While there have been remarkable strides in the "democratization" of many opportunities, especially educational ones, there is again growing unevenness in terms of access to educational and economic opportunities, and there is a wider distribution of income and wealth (Reich op. cit.). New immigrants are challenged by the transformation of the labor market. There are fewer manufacturing and entry level jobs and an increasing numbers of part-time non-unionized and service sector jobs. As the post-industrial technological economy further expands, higher levels of literacy, educational achievement, and English proficiency are being required in order to be successful. Within many immigrant communities, ethnic enterprises have provided one path for upward mobility. However, immigrants who live within ethnic enclaves or lower class communities must have access to social capital and also a "multiplexity" of social networks (Fernandez-Kelly 1995:220) in order to move

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more rapidly toward the achievement of their American Dream.

In contrast to the "straight-line" mobility of early twentieth century immigrants in which each succeeding generation was believed to improve the standard of living of their parents, there is increasing attention to the downward mobility of 1.5 and second generation immigrants (Gans 1992; Gibson and Ogbu 1991; Portes and Zhou 1993; Rumbaut 1995; Waters 1993, 1996;). This new literature suggests that many new immigrants are experiencing structural isolation in non-white communities with concurrent downward mobility. In part, this downward mobility relates to the restructuring of global and local economies and employment opportunities. However, immigrants and their children who live in inner city neighborhoods must also deal with the same racism and scarcities as their native born non-immigrant counterparts. Regardless of the cultural, social and human capital with which they come, they are also confronted by negative stereotypes about blacks and other non-white minorities. In their interactions with local institutions including the police and the schools, they frequently experience a lack of respect, devaluation, suspicion, if not outright hostility. In response some youth, especially US born children of immigrants who have spent their entire childhoods in these neighborhoods, adopt the same oppositional stance which inner-city and underclass youth develop in the face of perceived blocked mobility. This "oppositional stance" is a dynamic and complex interaction in which the youth refuse to "buy in" to the more dominant or "Anglo" American society which they feel is hostile to them. In turn their behaviors stimulate further hostility, if not, rejection, by society. The resultant segmentation of acculturation may enable the youth to survive within their own residential communities,

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but does not prepare them for, or facilitate their movement into, the mainstream economy and upward mobility. While the literature discusses racism and the unequal distribution of economic resources as contributing to the development of segmented acculturation, I believe there needs to be clarification and further emphasis in two areas. First, is the danger of re-inventing the "culture of poverty" thesis. It may be true that the inner-city youth culture is an important factor in the acculturating process, however, the tendency to emphasize peer group influences results in our failure to focus on the power and significance of immigrant and second generation youth's own daily experiences with social and institutional racism, especially in their schools. In our discussions about segmented acculturation, we must therefore be careful not to distract ourselves from structural inequalities and racism by focusing too much on the youth culture present in inner-city and minority communities. Second, is the failure to make schools and their reproduction of inequalities, a central focus in any investigation of post-immigration adjustment, segmented acculturation and the potential mobility of different immigrant groups (see **"Passing Through the School House Door"**).

Given the above considerations, and my prior discussions about the girls' school experiences and their ethnic identifications, I now explore the potentiality of the girls achieving their version of the American Dream.

**Education**

The need for educational credentials was acknowledged by almost all the girls with whom I spoke. As mentioned previously, most girls indicated that they planned to attend college in the future. But what was the likelihood that they would either be admitted,

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attend and/or complete their college studies. In **"Passing through the School House Door,"** I reviewed the girls' GPAs. While the median for the core sample was 85 there was significant variability amongst the girls and across geographic /national clusters.

The pattern of GPA achievement suggests two inter-related phenomena. The highest GPA's were reported by girls who were from China, Hong Kong, Korea and from Europe. These girls attended schools in both ethnically mixed and more homogenous communities, but in most cases the schools were educationally and socially more supportive than those I visited in which the students came from other ethnic and national populations, e.g. Caribbean and Latin American. It is therefore very interesting that the pattern of the girls' successes reflect pre-existent patterns which reproduce ethnic and class statuses. In other words, although my sample is very small, the fact that there are general patterns which mirror the social structure, gives me pause to wonder to what extent, separate from the girls' and their families' unique characteristics, the girls' benefit from a range of self-fulfilling prophecies and advantages, e.g. Asian girls benefitting from teacher attitudes about the "model minority?" Not minimizing the girls' achievements, the fact that the girls did earn high grades opened far more potential doors than their counterparts. The corollary suggests that some girls from other ethnic backgrounds, specifically those who were African-Caribbean and Latina, who were no less talented or ambitious were given less resources and encouragement and experienced more implicit and/or explicit racism during their high school experience. The girls I interviewed were still in school, many of them seniors. Unlike peers who had left school, these girls continued to articulate their goal to attend college in the future. And given recent trends

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for public high school students, over half of graduating students do go on to four year colleges and over 21% go on to two year colleges, mostly within the City University and State University systems (Jones 1994). However, despite the trends towards college entrance, I found myself wondering, given some of the familial and social pressures discussed in **"Emigration and Immigration"** and in **"Family and Household"** including undocumented status, what per cent of the girls would be able to complete college and/or complete college within a reasonable time frame. I also wondered about the academic preparation of some of the girls, particularly those girls coming from some of the more chaotic and violent schools I described in **"Passing Through the School House."** In addition to academic performance, the girls would need to have the financial resources to pay either public or private school tuition and also living expenses. Scholarships and loans do exist, but for those girls who were undocumented, and thus ineligible for either bank loans or scholarships, even the cost of attending a CUNY school was going to be prohibitive. Given increasing tuition costs and decreasing financial aid, I also wondered how many of the girls would be able to both complete college and move on to the graduate study required by so many of their selected professions. Thus, what was the future for Maria (Dominican Republic) who dreamed of becoming a criminal lawyer but only had an 80 GPA in her senior year. Or, Josette (Haiti) who had a GPA of 78, would she become a nurse or pediatrician? Would Janet (Jamaica) with a GPA of 80 become a nurse? Or, undocumented Lisa(China/Panama), with an A average would she realize her dream of becoming a nurse?

In contrast to the above girls were those whom I have described as doing very well

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in school, who had both appropriate INS documentation and family support and experienced less institutional racism than some of their peers. These girls, despite their relatively recent immigration, were already moving forward towards achieving the educational and career goals they and their families had hoped to result from their migration. And I believe most of these girls would, in fact, very successfully make the transition into college and would successfully complete both their undergraduate and graduate studies. Only a follow up longitudinal study can transform these observations into data which would give us insight into which and how the multiplicity of factors contributed to the girls' educational successes or limited their ability to realize their educational goals.

**Employment**

Employment during adolescence provides more than money. Teens who have jobs, even low level service sector jobs, often increase their sense of confidence and competence and enhance their social skills. The networking and skill development that are the consequences of employment can facilitate further employment and the opening up of non-economic opportunities. The ability to find a job can also generate optimism about the future and the potential of improving one's life circumstances. In 1993, New York City's youth unemployment rate of 36% was almost twice the national rate (19%) for individuals 16 to 19 (Jones 1994). Yet, as discussed in **"Family and Household,"** 35 of the girls I interviewed were working. This high rate of employment suggests that girls already have an advantage over many of their peers, both foreign and native born including those of the same ethnic/national background. The advantage reflects the previously discussed social

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capital (Fernandez-Kelly 1995), e.g. the desire to collectively work for the family's good; and the transformation of expectation or ambition into action which, it is assumed, despite immediate costs, will enable the realization of future goals, e.g. holding jobs which involved long hours and were often physically demanding such as fast food or waitress jobs. The success rate of the girls' employment also reflected some of their parents' or relatives connections within a specific ethnic economic niche, e.g. a job in a Korean nail polish salon or at a Korean deli. However, the girls' relative success may also reflect, to some extent, the selectivity in hiring that Waters (1993) discusses in which employers favor foreign-born minority workers over native born minority workers.

The girls' early history of employment bodes well for them in terms of the above mentioned work and social skills. However, given the nature of most of the girls' jobs at MacDonalds, Burger King and Woolworth, I believe the girls' early employment will not provide them with job and/or social opportunities which could foster their crossing over into the primary labor market. The exceptions to this observation were those girls who were engaged in school sponsored paid and unpaid internships at a local hospital and, for Julie, at the District Attorney's office. It is unclear to what extent this absence of a bridge would impact the girls' ability to realize their career ambitions. I do believe, however, that those girls, interested in nursing and other health related jobs who had family members already employed in the health care industry, would enjoy an advantage in gaining access to entry level jobs with and without a college degree.

Regardless of the ability of the girls to gain non-monetary advantages from their current jobs, many of the girls felt that the wages they were earning provided them and

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their families a means to meet immediate needs, and also a means to facilitate the achievement of more long-term goals, e.g. save money for college. In addition, some girls already felt that their present jobs were already evidence that they had found the American Dream. Thus, in answer to my questions about the essence or meaning of the American Dream, Janet (Jamaica) answered that her current job at "Bed, Bath and Beyond" during the Christmas rush was an example of living the American Dream. The relativity of the Dream was magnified as I looked at Janet, her very simple and worn clothes, her smile made crooked by untreated decayed teeth, and the knowledge that she was living in a very poor neighborhood. Janet may have been somewhat unusual amongst the girls I interviewed to state that her current job satisfied her current needs and in some ways her ambitions for herself. However, despite my belief that many of the girls I interviewed would successfully complete their studies, I wondered how much control they would really have in achieving their professional dreams. How many of them, despite other goals and despite the possession of educational credentials would, in the changing post-industrial labor market, join their female counterparts in relatively low wage jobs in the service sector, as salespersons, waitresses, computer programmers and lower-level hospital workers (Sidel 1990:179)?

## TO BECOME OR NOT TO BECOME AN "AMERICAN"

Acculturation and assimilation have historically been the assumed course for immigrants coming to the United States. The public school was often perceived as the instrument to make "good Americans" out of immigrant children and the children of immigrants. But, what exactly was and is it to become an "American?" It seems,

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"American," was a more defined entity to 19th century and early 20th century teachers and reformers than it is today. In an atmosphere of cultural and ethnic pluralism, it has become far more difficult for immigrants to "know what we are supposed to be becoming" (Berrol 1995:91).

How does one define what it is to be an "American," and to what extent does one have to "Americanize" in order to pursue and achieve the American Dream? As discussed in **"The Web of Identity,"** many of the girls I interviewed were not impressed with what they observed in terms of American youth and popular culture. For them, what was framed as American lacked the richness of their own cultural traditions. True, some liked the clothes of their peers and some liked the music, but in terms of shifting their cultural identity few seemed interested in discarding their cultural identity and taking on a new one. They embraced the concepts of freedom and equality that have been the cornerstones of American ideology and the associated optimism in the individual's ability to achieve his/her dreams through hard work, but in contrast to immigrants in other periods, the girls seemed to separate being an American and the American Dream. In other words, becoming American was no longer an integral part, or a pre-requisite, for achieving the American Dream. In fact, I believe the opposite seemed to be true. That is, as I listened to the girls I increasingly found myself thinking that they had a greater chance of achieving their version of the American Dream, if they held on to their cultural identities and traditions and did not acculturate either to the dominant culture or the alternative cultures found within their immediate neighborhoods. Their native cultures would help them survive not only the more typical adjustments faced by immigrants, but would also be

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helpful to them as they pursued their more individual goals. I am not talking about symbolic ethnicity, although that could provide some advantage for those girls with more accent-less English, e.g. English speaking Caribbean girls (see Gans 1979; Waters 1996). I am speaking of those traditions and values which emphasize personal responsibility, mutual assistance, family integrity, delayed gratification, and the ethic of caring. These traditions and values are not specific to another culture and are not foreign to American culture. But, outside of the rhetoric of political and religious conservatives, they seem to be less vibrant aspects of today's American youth and popular culture which seems far more animated by a culture of individualism, competition and materialism.

Within a mosaic of different cultural reference points, the girls seem to be developing cultural and identity solutions that enabled them to pursue the dreams that stimulated their and their parents' migration without relinquishing their past cultural identities. For some girls the development of solutions to meet the challenges of alternative identities was more conscious than for others. Girls whose ethnic identifications caused them to flee their homelands seemed to be the most explicit about retaining their native national/ethnic identification. For example, the Kosov sisters seemed to fully embrace being Albanian and were quite reluctant to adopt the ways of their "American" schoolmates. The singular exception to the pattern of cultural maintenance were the girls who came from the former Soviet Union. These girls who had ostensibly left their country because of anti-Semitism seemed, on the whole, less invested in becoming practicing Jews. Instead, many of these girls seemed invested in becoming as "American" as their school mates. To some degree, I believe, the girls' age, the youngest cluster of my study, was a

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factor. In addition, I think that the girls' prior marginality and the long standing juxtaposition of American materialism versus Russian austerity, contributed to their very different response. Girls who came from religious households, however, seemed to re-invest in their native cultures and be disinterested in acculturating. Thus, the South Asian girls who were practicing Muslim and Hindus or Sikhs seemed very intent about retaining their Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi identities.

It is important to recognize that the girls' tendency, not to reject their cultural heritage and replace it with an "American" one, was at times being re-enforced by the emphasis on diversity and pluralism in schools and in the media, and by the increased transnationalism of their households and communities. I believe, this allowed the girls to negotiate the more mainstream culture and its institutions while maintaining their respective cultural identities. Instead of stripping away and replacing cultural characteristics, the literal and metaphoric discarding of one's old garments for new ones, the girls' seemed to be literally and metaphorically adding garments and creating a new couture in the process.

As described in **"Web of Identity,"** some girls made specific decisions about their dress to either create difference and distance or to reduce it. But, the presence or absence of visible cultural identifications did not mirror the inner constancy of the girls' cultural values. The girls thus created bi-cultural selves, the visibility of their native selves largely determined by the situation, predicated more on a pragmatism of survival than a desire to assimilate. For example, teens who want to rebel against their parents' cultural values and proscriptions frequently change their clothes on the way to school, re-dressing in clothes

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that better conform to the fashion trends of their peers. In contrast, the girls in my study seemed more inclined when they came home from school to change out of their jeans and other school clothes into more traditional clothes.

Some of the girls I interviewed clearly were asserting their cultural identity as foreign. For some, this seemed to protect them from interacting in ways they found uncomfortable. Salma told me that she wore a nose ring, a common decorative ring that many South Asian women wear, to school even though she had been teased about it. By placing a ring in her nose this attractive girl was able to get past a group of young men, "hoods," without sexual innuendo. With a ring she became someone who was more "weird" than a possible sexual conquest The ring thus somehow de-eroticized her.

The girls with dark skins who came from the English and French speaking Caribbean and from Latin America and Africa had a somewhat different challenge. I believe these girls had already begun to realize that it was better for them to publically assert their ethnicity than trade their accents and customs for a less defined black identity. For these girls their ethnicity was needed as a tactical strategy to bypass or reduce American racism, enabling them to protect their interests and help them realize the American Dream (Laguerre 1984:157; Waters 1996).

While I lack psychic powers to predict what will happen over time to the girls I interviewed, I believe that the majority will no doubt adapt and incorporate some of the ways we Americans operate in public, but I also believe the majority will continue both publically and privately to assert their native cultures and identities. In contrast to the 1.5 generation of young immigrant children or the children of immigrants who may use the

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hyphen to connect a distant past with their present (Farley 1993), I do not think that most of the girls I interviewed will eventually call themselves hyphenated Americans. The girls will probably more often identify themselves as individuals who were born elsewhere, specifying the nation in which their childhood and school days memories were created. Some girls will also identify themselves as exiles and other sojourners, no matter that the reality of their returns will most likely mirror many others who vowed to go back and never did.

We live in ironic times. In the midst of virulent anti-immigrant sentiment and the growth of "English only" movements, we also have the celebration of diversity, with the academy, business and media embracing difference as a new commodity to be studied and marketed. In this climate, I believe, the girls I interviewed will find that aspects of their cultural and national identities will shift, but will remain principally rooted within the identities formed prior to their migration. I believe, the girls will find there is no contradiction between their holding on to their cultural identities and pursuing the American Dream. Instead, I believe they will find that it is by holding on to these identities that they have a far better chance to realize their American Dream. And paradoxically, we will find that through their dreams and their example, resonant with an ethic of caring and of service, they will re-introduce into American life the connectiveness of family and community, thereby enriching, if not transforming, our American society.

In this study I have tried to make sense of a particular type of experience, the emigration and immigration of adolescent girls. During the process, I have been moved by the candor with which the girls told me about their lives and by the content of the stories

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they shared with me. In the end, however, it is the individuality within their collective experience, and the universality of all their experiences, which have given me pause, the capacity and the resiliency of each of them to move forward with their lives, no matter what lay before them and no matter what the odds.

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# CHAPTER X

# SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This has been an exploratory study. The number of girls I interviewed was relatively small. And, the group of girls, although quite diverse, was not a random sample. Thus, while the girls represented many different immigrant populations and experiences, they were not necessarily representative of any. Further, instead of providing internal structure for the interviews and for the girls' narrative process, the study was designed to allow the girls to lead me to and through their experiences. The material that I gathered thus reflected the variability of the girls' choices about what to reveal to me, the stranger, and what they thought was significant. The result is a breadth of material simultaneous to variability in the depth of material about any single dimension of the girls' diverse lives. It is in recognition of the limitations of my chosen methodology and the potential importance of the material obtained that I now turn my attention to possible areas for future research.

## General Random Sample

How representative of new wave immigrant adolescent girls in New York City was this study's cohort? To what extent did the girls in this study reflect the larger pool of new immigrant adolescents? If a larger more random cohort ends up reflecting a very different profile, what are the factors which separate the two groups? Answers to these questions might help to inform school and community programs.

## Multi-City Study

This study has had as its context New York City and its unique diversity and

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history. It would be very interesting to have this study or the above proposed general random study implemented in a variety of cities around the nation. Would my findings be replicated? Would the findings of the large sample studies by Rumbaut and Portes (1995), which were undertaken in San Diego and Miami, be replicated if they had been done in New York or Chicago or Atlanta? How much does place impact on the nature of adjustment, identity and future mobility for the same and different immigrant groups? Multi-city studies would help answer these questions and perhaps better inform national immigrant and social welfare policies.

**Ethnographic Study, the Life of Immigrant Adolescents**

This study relied on girls telling me their stories and sharing their experiences. The material gathered was thus shaped by the girls and was limited by the narrative process. I believe, despite the richness of the narrative material, that only part of their story was gleaned. An ethnographic study such as Horowitz' "Honor and the American Dream (1985)" would provide valuable insights about the interactive processes which take place in the girls' lives which both facilitate and inhibit their adjustment and their ability to realize their dreams. By spending time with the girls, with their friends and families and in their schools we would have an opportunity also to observe the nature of inter-group relations and how these shape the development of the girls' identifications.

**Longitudinal Study**

I found myself fascinated by the girls' hopes and dreams for the future and the potential of their realization of them. While I know that two of the girls I interviewed for this study are now attending Hunter College, I am curious how the rest of the girls have

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fared and what will, in fact, be their lives when they are 30, ten and fifteen years hence. The original study was not set up as a longitudinal study, I thus have very few home addresses, and I am sure even some of those have already changed. Tracking the girls of this study is thus impossible. However, to truly understand the experience of immigrant adolescence, and to understand issues of acculturation and assimilation at the end of the twentieth century, it would be very important to undertake a longitudinal study of a cohort of adolescent immigrants.

**Immigration During the Life Cycle**

This study was stimulated, to some extent, by the fact that there has been relatively little attention to how a phase of life impacts immigration and the post-migration experience. It would be ambitious, but potentially extremely important in terms of policy and program development, to undertake a group of comparative studies which would examine the experience of immigrants by life phase: pre-school, school-age, adolescence, young adult, middle age and the elderly

**Immigration During Adolescence**

To better understand how developmental and chronological age impacts on the immigrant and adolescent experience, I suggest a study that breaks down the adolescence period into three year sub-periods, 12-14, 15-17 and 18-21. In the proposed study, all subjects would have lived in the United States for at least two years but no more than three. By holding constant the amount of time post-migration we would gain insight into the process of adjustment, while eliminating the turmoil frequently experienced during the initial year.

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**Adolescent Immigration by Type of Migration**

The current study included a wide range of migration patterns. My findings suggest that there are significant differences in the post-migration experience given the migration pattern, i.e. with whom the girl migrates and into what kind of post-migration household they settle. The frequency of post-arrival problems amongst the girls who experienced prolonged chain migration suggests that this is an important area for study. A comparison of family migration versus segmented or chain migration would help clarify the phenomena versus the particulars of individual/familial experiences. Research findings might then help inform the reform of immigration policy, and the development of social supports for families both pre- and post-migration.

**Mother-First Migration**

Women continue to dominate many migration streams leaving behind their husbands and children. In terms of immigration and family policy, I believe it is increasingly important to understand the social, psychological and economic consequences of the women's departure and their reunification with children who follow them.

**Gender Transformations**

Although I was able to collect some interesting data on pre- and post-migration gender expectations and roles, this study did not set out to specifically gather data in this area. It would thus be a fascinating study to focus explicitly on gender expectations and roles and to solicit material from both immigrant girls and their families.

**Adolescent Immigrant Boys and Girls**

This study focused exclusively on the experience of adolescent immigrant girls. I

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believe it would be very important to engage in a comparative study of adolescent boys to further surface how gender affects the adolescent immigrant experience. What is the experience of immigrant adolescent boys? How are their experiences similar to and different from the experience of adolescent immigrant girls? What creates the differences? And do girls and boys need different supports and/or programs to facilitate their post-migration adjustment?

**First Generation Decline**

The literature on the second generation indicates a decline between the first and second generation in terms of social economic opportunities and status amongst some populations. In this study I have suggested that some first generation immigrant girls will not realize their parents' pre-migration social economic status and some girls will also not realize the dreams that stimulated their families' migration. My study did not hold constant pre and post SES. To better understand the trajectories of opportunity for first generation immigrants, I suggest a study which holds constant SES within and between different immigrant groups. Issues of ethnicity and SES, as well as issues dealing with residential segregation, social isolation and racism could also be explored in such a study.

**Ethnically Homogeneous Versus Heterogeneous Schools**

There are multiple areas of study in regard to the girls' school experiences. The girls in this study had a generally positive reaction to attending school with students from many different places. The girls reported that the presence of other immigrants created a supportive environment for their adjustment and, at times, positively reinforced some of their experiences, even values. I also indicated the opposite experiences in which

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intergroup relations caused tensions between various immigrant groups. Further, I suggested that there is an unequal distribution of resources and opportunities in schools that were racially and ethnically homogeneous. No doubt residential segregation and thus school composition also reflected class factors. However, it would be important to better understand how student composition impacts on school success, facilitates progress towards academic and career goals and facilitates or inhibits acculturation processes. Waters' (1993, 1996) comparison of Caribbean students in public and private schools might provide the basis for this research. But, the study or studies I suggest would include many different immigrant groups and focus on the student composition, student-teacher relations and resources in public high schools.

**Transitional or Specialized High Schools for Immigrants**

Almost all the girls I interviewed attended their zone high school. The few exceptions were girls who attended Yezierska High School to avoid attending their local high schools and to participate in Yezierska's track and field activities. There are, however, a number of high schools in New York City, which either have transitional programs for newly arrived immigrants or are exclusively for immigrants students. What are the advantages or disadvantages of attending a zone school or a specialized program or school? To what degree do specialized programs facilitate adjustment and to what extent do they inhibit social adjustment as they isolate students from their US born peers?

These are just some of many possibilities my study suggests for further exploration. There are, however, many other areas for research, e.g. the effect of changing immigration and social welfare policies on past, present and future immigrants. The ability

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of each generation of immigrants to both enjoy and contribute to that which is America will depend on our ability to welcome them and to establish more humanistic immigrant and social welfare policies. To develop such policies and related programs we have much work to do - listening to, and learning from, those who have come to America.

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# APPENDIX

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THE
GRADUATE SCHOOL
AND
UNIVERSITY CENTER
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

OFFICE OF SPONSORED RESEARCH
AND PROJECT PLANNING
33 WEST 42 STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10036-8099
212 642-2059 FAX 212 642-2546

November 4, 1994

Suzanne Michael
Ph.D. Program in Sociology

RE: Your proposal, "The Web of Identity: A Study of Adolescent Immigrant Girls in New York City"

Dear Ms. Michael:

The Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects has reviewed and approved your proposal via an expedited review process, subject to the following conditions:

a. The Committee recommends that a separate consent form be given to the students, noting that as they are adolescents they should be able to give their own free consent apart from their parents'. The consent forms for parents and children can be nearly identical in the material they present. Please also indicate when students will sign consent forms (i.e., at the same time as parents, after parental consent has been obtained, or at the beginning of the interview).

b. Please include in the consent forms a statement to the effect that students need not answer any particular question if they do not wish to.

c. Parents and students should be informed that there are multiple aspects of participation in the study. While the investigator may choose whether the parents and students are to give blanket consent or to consent to each aspect separately, potential respondents need to be informed as to exactly what their participation might entail.

d. The Committee notes that there is a discrepancy in the length of the interview across different parts of the proposal and addenda. Please state clearly the lengths of the interviews in the consent forms.



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e. Given that the parents and students may not be native English speakers, the Committee suggests writing the consent forms in simpler language.

f. On page 5, procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency are detailed. The Committee would like you to specify what you mean by this. If you a referring to physical or sexual abuse by a parent, the Committee points out that you may have a legal obligation to report it. Please also let the Committee know what other situations might fall under this heading and how confidentiality will be maintained.

g. Finally, the Committee would like you to clarify how students will be identified for inclusion in the study. There are indications at one point in your proposal that staff will identify students; at another point, there is a suggestion that students will attend an initial session and be screened there. The Committee points out that if teachers make referrals, they may identify students who are not actually eligible. How would this be handled? The Committee is concerned that students may show up and then feel disappointed and inadequate if it turns out they don't "fit" the study.

Please send your written response to me within the next two to three weeks. If you have any questions about the Committee's requests, I can be reached at (212) 642-2062.

Sincerely,

Daisy Edmondson

Daisy Edmondson
(for Jane Gentilini)

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NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

JOSEPH A. FERNANDEZ
CHANCELLOR

(718) 935-3767
FAX: (718) 935-5490

September 11, 1992

Ms. Suzanne Michael

N.Y.

Dear Ms. Michael:

I am happy to inform you that your research, The Web of Identity: A Study of Adolescent Immigrant Girls in N.Y.C., has been approved by the Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment with the following conditions:

1. Approval by this office does not guarantee access to any particular school or student. It is your responsibility to make appropriate contacts and get the required permissions and consents before initiating the study. Participation in your research must be strictly voluntary. The following written consents are required.

   a. Principals who agree to participate must sign the enclosed Approval to Conduct Research Form. In some districts, the superintendent must also sign. You should check with each principal to determine if the superintendent's signature is also required in that district. The signed form should be returned to this office.

   b. Before involving any child in your study or collecting student data, you must obtain explicit written parental consent.

   c. In addition to the above written consent, all participants (e.g., teachers, guidance counselors, children, parents) must be informed that they are not required to participate in the study, and that there are no consequences for non-participation.



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2. Your report of the study should not include the identification of any school, student, or staff member. A coding system should be used if necessary.

Please send a copy of your final report to me in room 718 at 110 Livingston Street, Brooklyn, New York 11201; we are most interested in the results of your research. If you have any questions about implementing your research, please call me at 718 935 3732/3213.

Sincerely,

William M. Weichun, Ph.D.
Chairperson,
Proposal Review Committee

WMW/sb
Enclosure

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October 22, 1993

Mr. XYZ
Principal
Paule Marshall High School

Dear Mr. XYZ

Ms. xxxx of the Board of Education's Division of High Schools suggested that I write to you. Let me introduce myself. I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, currently engaged in research that explores the experiences of immigrant adolescent girls. As part of my research, I am conducting individual interviews and some focus groups with immigrant students. I am thus writing to request an opportunity to meet with you and to discuss the possibility of using your school as a research site.

I have received approval from the Board of Education's Office of Research, Evaluation and Assessment to undertake human subject research in the City's schools, and have already (1992-1993) interviewed students at high schools in Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens. To give you background to my study and its methodology, I have enclosed an abstract of the dissertation proposal, an outline of steps for school-based research, and a copy of a parental consent tailored to your school. (We can discuss what if any additional languages it needs to be translated. Russian, French, Korean, Chinese, Haitian Creole and Spanish versions are currently available.)

I will be calling your office next week to schedule an appointment with you. I look forward to meeting you or your designee and meeting the immigrant students who attend your school.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Michael

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**RECRUITMENT OF STUDENTS FOR IMMIGRANT STUDENT STUDY**
**Suzanne Michael - Researcher**

The following characteristics must be considered in identifying students for initial screening interviews.

Female

Foreign birth, ie not born in the US or any of its territories/commonwealth

Immigrated to the US after 12th birthday

Lived in US for at least 18 months.

English proficiency sufficient to be interviewed without use of an interpreter

Willingness to participate in screening interview

Receives parental consent prior to individual or group interview

Questions, call Suzanne Michael:
Hunter College Center for the Study of Family Policy
212-772-4120.

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November 1992

Dear Student:

**Were you born in another country? Did you come to the United States after your 12th birthday? Have you lived in the United States for at least two years? If yes, you might consider participating in a research project I am doing at Paule Marshall High School.**

I am a student at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York working on my doctorate in sociology. I am involved in a research project which seeks to understand what it is like to be born in another country, grow up and attend school there, and then migrate to the United States as a teenager. Over the next few months I will be visiting high schools throughout New York City and speaking with girls who have come from all over the world, for example Haiti, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, China, Russia, Korea, Mexico, Columbia.

Your principal, Mr. XYZ has given me permission to begin to meet with immigrant girls who attend Paule Marshall High School. During this meeting, about 20 minutes, during lunch or after school I will introduce myself, explain what would be involved in participating in an individual or group interview, answer questions, and give out consent forms for your parent/guardian. I will then select 15 to 20 girls to participate in the research project. Selection will be based on the initial 20 minute meeting, and will include girls who indicate an interest in being further interviewed individually or in a group, and who agree to obtain their parent's/guardian's written consent.

I plan to pay each girl who participates in an individual or group interview $10. Anyone who participates in both an individual and group interview will receive $15.

All individual and group interviews will take place at Marshall and are totally voluntary, but require prior written consent from your parent or guardian.

If you are interested in meeting with me to discuss your possible participation in this research project, please complete the attached form and return it to the Assistant Principal, Mr. XYZ in room 123.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Michael
Researcher

Approved:_____
Staff Liaison

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**IMMIGRANT ADOLESCENT GIRLS INTERVIEW PROJECT**

**PAULE MARSHALL HIGH SCHOOL**

Name:_____

Class:_____

Nation of Birth:_____

Date of Birth:_____

Year you arrived in the U.S._____

Lunch period:_____

Study period:_____

Last period:_____

Can you meet after your last period?

On Tuesdays? Yes No
On Thursdays? Yes No
On Fridays? Yes No

RETURN TO MR XYZ IN ROOM A 123

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November, 1993

Dear Parent,

Let me introduce myself, I am a graduate student working on my Ph.D. in sociology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. I am involved in a research project which seeks to understand the experiences of girls who were born in other countries and migrated to the United States as teenagers. As part of the research I will be interviewing individual girls and meeting with groups of adolescent girls who have immigrated from many different countries.

I have worked with the school principal and staff to identify which students have immigrated to the United States during the past three years. Your daughter is one of these immigrant students. I am now asking your permission to meet with your daughter and/or have her join a group of other immigrant girls at the school. All my meetings will be held in the school unless I have received prior permission from you. Individual meetings will be about 30 minutes to one hour. Group meetings will be one to two hours.

During both individual interviews and group meetings I will be asking the girls about their experiences as immigrants and about their lives in New York City. I will also ask them to complete two brief informational sheets which ask questions such as their age, place of birth, their friends, school work, type of work of their parents. Interviews and groups will be taped but no last names will be used during the taping.

Your daughter's participation is strictly voluntary and she can decide to withdraw from this research project at any time. In addition, all information I gather from my discussions with your daughter will be confidential, for example, your daughter's first and last names will never appear in any written report, article, or book that comes out of this study. Further, **the identity of your daughter, her school and your family will be disguised such that no one will have knowledge that the person described or discussed was she.**

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Please call me at the Hunter College Center for the Study of Family Policy
212-772-4120 or 4450.

To enable your daughter to participate in this project, please complete the attached form and have her return it to me through the principal's office at school or at the above address.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Michael

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**IMMIGRANT ADOLESCENT GIRLS RESEARCH PROJECT**

**SCHOOL:**_____ **DATE:**_____

I hereby give permission for my daughter_____ in class_____ to participate in an individual interview and/or group meeting to discuss her experiences coming to the United States and living in New York City.

I understand that my daughter's participation in this project is voluntary, and that my daughter can withdraw from participation at any time. I understand all interviews and groups will be held at the school while it is officially open. I understand that the date and the time of the interview and/or group will be given to me ahead of time.

I further understand that interviews and the group will be taped but no last names will be used. And all information that is shared during the interview or group will be treated confidentially. Further, I understand that my daughter's name and identity and that of the family and school will be disguised in any future written work, including any doctoral dissertation, article, book or other publication which develops out of this research.

_____ _____

Parent Name (Print) Parent Signature

Telephone Number: (day)_____ (evening)_____

**RETURN TO: Suzanne Michael**
**c/o Mr XYZ**
**Principal**
**Paule Marshall High School**

**OR,**

**Suzanne Michael**
**Center for the Study of Family Policy**
**Hunter College**
**695 Park Avenue**
**New York, New York 10021**
**212-772-4120 or 4450**

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HUNTER
COLLEGE
de la Universidad de la Ciudad de Nueva York
Centro para el Estudio de Políticas Familiares • 695 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10021 • (212) 772-4450



Septiembre de 1992

Estimado padre:

Permítame presentarme: soy estudiante de escuela universitaria de graduados y estoy trabajando en mi doctorado en sociología en el Centro de Graduados de la Universidad de la Ciudad de Nueva York. Estoy participando en un proyecto de investigación que pretende entender la experiencia de chicas que, habiendo nacido en otros países, hayan emigrado a los Estados Unidos en la adolescencia. Como parte de mi investigación llevaré a cabo entrevistas personales y me reuniré con grupos de chicas adolescentes que hayan inmigrado de diversos países.

He trabajado con el director y el personal de la escuela para identificar a las estudiantes que hayan inmigrado a los Estados Unidos durante los últimos tres años y su hija es una de ellas. A través de esta carta estoy solicitando su permiso para reunirme con su hija y/o para que se una ella a un grupo de otras chicas inmigrantes en la escuela. Todas las reuniones serán llevadas a cabo en la escuela, a menos que usted me haya dado permiso previamente. Las entrevistas personales durarán entre 30 minutos y una hora aproximadamente, mientras que las reuniones en grupo entre una y dos horas.

Tanto durante las entrevistas personales como durante las reuniones en grupo haré preguntas a las chicas sobre sus experiencias como inmigrantes y sobre sus vidas en la ciudad de Nueva York. También les pediré que llenen dos hojas de información breves, donde se les preguntan cosas como su edad, lugar de nacimiento, sus amistades, el trabajo escolar que realizan o el tipo de trabajo que desempeñan sus padres. Se van a grabar las entrevistas y reuniones, pero durante las grabaciones no se utilizará ningún apellido.

La participación de su hija es estrictamente voluntaria y puede ella abandonar el proyecto de investigación en cualquier momento. Además, toda la información que yo obtenga de mis conversaciones con su hija será confidencial; por ejemplo, el nombre y apellido de su hija nunca aparecerán en ninguno de los informes escritos que resulten de este estudio.

Mucho me complacería poder contestar preguntas que pudiera tener. Por favor llámeme al Centro para el Estudio de Políticas Familiares de Hunter College, al 212-772-4120 ó 4450.

Para permitir que su hija participe de este proyecto, sírvase llenar el formulario adjunto y pídale que me lo haga llegar ya sea a través de la oficina del director o a la dirección indicada al inicio de esta página.

Gracias por su cooperación.

Atentamente,

Suzanne Michael

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**CHICAS ADOLESCENTES IMMIGRANTES**
**Proyecto de Investigacion**

ESCUELA:_____ FECHA:_____

Por medio de la presente doy permiso para que mi hija _____ participe en una entrevista personal y/o en una reunion en grupo para hablar de sus experiencias desde que llego a los Estados Unidos y de su vida en la ciudad de Nueva York.

Entiendo que la participacion de mi hija en dicho proyecto es voluntaria y que puede dejar de participar en cualquier momento. Entiendo que todas las entrevistas y reuniones se llevaran a cabo en la escuela, durante horas en las que este officialmente abierta. Entiendo que la fecha y hora de las entrevistas y/o de los grupos me seran informadas con anticipacion.

Entiendo ademas que las entrevistas y las reuniones en grupo seran grabadas sin que se utilice apellido alguno y que toda la informacion que se obtenga durante la entrevista o reunion en grupo sera tratada de manera confidencial.

Estudiantes seleccionados para participar en una entrevista personal o en una reunion en grupo recibiran $10. Estudiantes que participen en las dos: entrevista personal y entrevista en grupo recibiran $15.

_____ _____
Nombre del padre Firma del padre

Numero telefonico: (dia)_____
(noche)_____

DEVUELVASE A:

Assistant Principal

o: Suzanne MIchael
Centro para el Estudio de Politicas Familiares
Hunter College
695 Park Avenue
New York, New York 10021
212-772-4120 o 4450

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Date: ___/___/____
Site: _____
F/U: ___Individual___ Group___

**SCREENING INTERVIEW PROFILE**

1. Name:_____

2. Class #:_____

3. Grade:_____

4. Birthday: month_____ day____ year_____

5. Nation of birth: _____City_____Rural___

6. Language(s) spoken to family:
   a._____ b._____ c._____

7. Languages spoken with friends:
   a._____ b._____ c._____

8. Current placement in a bilingual class or program?
   ____yes ____no

9. Have you ever been in a bilingual or ESL program?
   _____no ____yes (bilingual___ yrs ESL___yrs)

10. Age when your first emigrated:____ to which country____

11. Age when arrived in NYC?_____

12. Why did the family decide to come to the US?

13. Who came first to the US?

14. Was anyone here prior to family coming? Did they sponsor family? (2/94)

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Name:_____

15. Whom did you live with before you immigrated to the U.S.A.?

16. In New York City, who lives with you?

17. What was the highest level of education completed by you father?
_____ little schooling functional illiterate
_____ elementary school (6th)
_____ high school (12th)
_____ technical school_____
_____ some college
_____ college graduate
_____ graduate degree_____

18. What was your father's job before coming to the United States?
a._____
b.____unemployed
c.____didn't work outside the home
c.____don't know
d.____other

19. What is your father's job now?
a._____
b.____unemployed
c.____doesn't work outside the home
c.____don't know.
d.____other

20. What was the highest level of education completed by you mother?
_____ little schooling functional illiterate
_____ elementary school (6th)
_____ high school (12th)
_____ technical school
_____ some college
_____ college graduate
_____ graduate degree_____

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Name:_____

21. What was your mother's job before coming to the United States?
    a._____
    b.____unemployed
    c.____didn't work outside the home
    c.____don't know
    d.____other

22. What is your mother's job now?
    a._____
    b.____unemployed
    c.____doesn't work outside the home
    c.____don't know
    d.____other

23. Are you working after school or on weekends?
    ____no ____yes, doing what_____hours?_____

24. On average, how are your grades?
    ___A (90s)
    ___B (80s)
    ___C (70s)
    ___D (60s)
    ___Failing one or more subjects

25. What would you like to do when you finish high school?

26. How comfortable or uncomfortable do you currently feel living in New City?
    very uncomfortable very comfortable

    1 2 3 4 5

27. How happy or unhappy do you currently feel living in New York City?
    very unhappy very happy
    1 2 3 4 5

28. What have been some of the changes in your life since you arrived in the United States?

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Name:_____

29. What have been some of the easiest adjustments to living in NYC?

30. What have been some of the hardest adjustments to living in NYC?

31. What do you like best about living in NYC?

32. What do you like least about living in New York?

33. What's it like being an immigrant? (2/94)

34. What its like being a girl? (2/94)

35. What do you think is the American Dream? (2/94)

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Name_____

What do you prefer?
___individual interview _____group _____no preference

What are your plans for this summer?

Would you be available for an interview this summer?
___no _____yes (weekdays____ weekends___)

Study period_____ Lunch period_____

Days available after school (last period____)
____Mon ____Tues _____Wed ___Thurs ___Fri

Telephone Number:_____

Address: _____

Follow-up:
Focus Group:_____
Individual Interview:_____

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Date: ___/___/____
Site: _____
___Individual ___Group

**THIS IS ME SURVEY**

1. Name:_____

2. Class#_____

3. Grade:_____

4. What is the most important thing about you?

5. Write down all the words which you would use to describe yourself to someone you have never met?

6. Imagine that you never left the country where you were born, list all the things you think you would be doing at age 30?

7. Now that you live here, imagine all the things you think you might be doing at age 30. List them.

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8. Where is home for you?

9. Where do you want to live when you grow up? Why?

10. List all the words that describe how you feel about being an immigrant?

11. Write down all the words which describe what it is like to be female/a girl/a woman.(R)

12. What is your dream for the future? (R)

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# COOPER-SMITH INVENTORY

Name:_____ Date:_____

High School:_____

Please mark each statement in the following way:

For each of the following statements think if this describes who you are: never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3), often (4), or always (5). Indicate your answer by circling the appropriate number.

Please answer as honestly as possible. There is no right or wrong answers.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | I spend a lot of time daydreaming..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. | I'm pretty sure of myself..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| | I often wish I was someone else..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. | I'm easy to like..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. | My parent(s) and I have a lot of fun together..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. | I find it hard to talk in front of the class..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. | I wish I were younger..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. | There are lots of things about myself I would change if I could..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. | I can make up my mind without too much trouble..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. | I'm a lot of fun to be with..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. | I get upset easily at home ..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 12. | I'm proud of my school work..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 13. | Someone always has to tell me what to do..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 14. | I take a long time to get used to anything new..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 15. | I'm sorry for the things that I do..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 16. | I'm popular with kids my own age..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 17. | My parent(s) usually considers my feelings..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 18. | I'm doing the best work I can..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 19. | I give up very easily..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 20. | I can usually take care of myself... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 21. | I'm pretty happy..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 22. | I would rather play with children younger than me..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 23. | My parent(s) expect too much of me... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 24. | I like to be called on in class..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 25. | I understand myself..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 26. | It's pretty tough to be me..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 27. | Things are pretty mixed up in my life | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 28. | Kids usually follow my ideas..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 29. | No one ever pays attention to me at home..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 30. | I'm not doing as well in school as I'd like to..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 31. | I can make up my mind and stick to it | 1 2 3 4 5 |

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 32. | I really don't like being a girl..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 33. | I have a low opinion of myself..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 34. | I don't like to be with other people. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 35. | There are many times when I would like to leave home..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 36. | I'm never shy..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 37. | I often feel upset at school..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 38. | I often feel ashamed of myself..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 39. | I'm not as nice looking as other people..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 40. | If I have something to say, I usually say it..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 41. | Kids pick on me very often..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 42. | My parent(s) understands me..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 43. | My teachers make me feel I'm not good enough..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 44. | I'm a failure..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 45. | I get upset easily when I am yelled at | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 46. | Most people are better liked than I am | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 47. | I usually feel like my parent(s) is/are pushing me..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 48. | I always know what to say to people... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 49. | I don't get discouraged at school..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 50. | Things usually don't bother me..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 51. | I can't be depended on..... | 1 2 3 4 5 |

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## KEY INFORMANTS BY NATIONALITY/REGION

### CHINA/HONG KONG/TAIWAN

Li
China. Documented, nuclear family migration
Arrived age 15. Here 2 years
12th grade, Grades: 90's

Lisa
China-born, lived in Panama. Undocumented, came alone
Arrived 16. Here 3 years
11th grade, Grades: 90's

Mei
China. Documented, father first migration
Arrived age 15. Here 3 years
11th grade, Grades: 90s

Nancie
China-born, lived in Columbia. Documented, family migration
Arrived age 17. Here 3 years
10th grade, Grades: 80's and 90's

Tracy
Hong Kong. Undocumented
Arrived age 12. Here 4 years
10th grade, GPA 75

### ENGLISH CARIBBEAN

Grace
Barbados. Documented
Arrived age 13. Here 5 years
12th grade, GPA 73

Janet
Jamaica. Documented father first
Arrived age 15.5. Here 2.5 years
12th grade, GPA: 85

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Julie
Barbados. Undocumented, mother first migration
Arrived age 15. Here 3 years
12th grade, Grades: 80's

Marva
Guyana. Documented, chain migration, grandmother, then father
Arrived age 16. Here 2 years
12th grade, GPA: 93 (2nd in the graduating class)

Patrice
Barbados. Documented, chain migration, sister first
Arrived age 14.5. Here 2.5 years
12th grade, GPA: 89

**LATIN AMERICA**

Blanca
Honduras. Documented, chain migration, aunt and grandfather first.
Orphaned lives with aunt's family
Arrived age 13. Here 3.5 years
12th grade. GPA: 87

Carmen
Dominican Republic. Documented, mother first migration
Arrived age 12. Here 5 years
12th grade, Grades 80's

Gabriella
Brazil. Undocumented, chain migration, sibling first. Lives with friend
Arrived age 14. Here 4 years
11th grade, GPA: 87

Lina
Dominican Republic. Documented, father first migration, but lives with relatives
Arrived age 16. Here 2.5 years
12th grade, Grades 60-90's

Maria
Dominican Republic. Undocumented, nuclear family migration, but parents returned home.
Lives with sibling and spouse
Arrived age 14. Here 2 years
11th grade. GPA 79

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Marisol
Mexico. Undocumented, father first, parents divorced
Arrived age 14.5. Here 3 years
12th grade, Grades: 80's

Zenobia
Ecuador. Documented, family migration
Arrived age 16. Here 2 years.
12th grade., GPA: A

**EUROPEAN**

Antonia
Czechoslovakia. Documented, mother first migration
Arrived age 14.5. Here 3 years.
11th grade, GPA 85

Eva
Poland. Undocumented, grandmother first.
Lives with grandmother, divorced parents in Poland
Arrived age 15. Here 3 years.
Grade: 12th, GPA: 91

Kristina Kosov
Yugoslavian (ethnic Albanian). Undocumented, father first migration
Arrived age 15. Here 3 years
11th grade, GPA: 93

Marina
Yugoslavia. Documented, father first migration
Arrived age 16. Here 3 years
12th grade, GPA: 89

Michelle
France (of Haitian and Arabic parentage). Undocumented, came to study English, lives with uncle
Arrived age 14. Here almost one year
10th grade, GPA: 85

Mila
Latvia. Documented, mother first. Father lives in Latvia
Arrived age 16. Here 2 years
12th grade, GPA: 85

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Teresa Kosov
Yugoslavian (ethnic Albanian). Undocumented, father first migration
Arrived age 13. Here 3 years
10th grade, GPA: 95

**SOUTH ASIAN**

Aisha
Bangladesh (Muslim). Documented, parents first migration
Arrived age 12.5. Here 3.5 years
12th grade, GPA: 94.17

Leela
India (Hindu). Documented, nuclear family migration
Arrived age 14. Here 3 years
12th grade Grades: 80s and 90s

Jyoti
India (Hindu). Documented, nuclear family migration
Arrived age 13. Here 3.5 years
12th grade, GPA: 80

Meena
India (Jain). Documented, nuclear family migration
Arrived age 16.5. Here 10 months
12th grade, Grades: GPA 94

Salma
Bangladesh. Documented, nuclear family migration
Arrived age 15. Here 4 years
12th grade, GPA: 80.5

**HAITI**

Evelyne
Haiti. Documented, chain migration, grandmother first.
Mother in Haiti, lives with grandmother
Arrived age 17. Here 3.5 years
12th grade, GPA: 78

Jossette
Haiti. Unknown INS status probably undocumented, father first, but lives with relatives
Arrive age 12. Here 5 years
11th grade, GPA: 78

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Natalia
Haiti. Documented, family migration
Arrived age 14. Here 3 years
11th grade

Noelle
Haiti. Documented, nuclear family migration
Arrived age 13. Here 3 years
9th grade./ GPA: 70

**FORMER SOVIET UNION**

Alexis
Russia. Undocumented, nuclear family migration
Arrived age 12. Here 2 years
9th grade, Grades 60's

Anya
Russia. Documented refugee, nuclear family migration
Arrived age 13. Here 2 years
10th grade. GPA: 90

Natasha
Russia. Documented, migrated with divorced mother and grandparents
Arrived age 12. Here 2 years
9th grade, Grades 60's

**KOREA**

Chong-Suk
Korea-born, lived in Paraguay. Undocumented, nuclear family migration
Arrived age 15. Here 3 years
11th grade. Grades 90's

Jassum
Korea. Documented, nuclear family migration
Arrived age 15.Here 2.5 years
11th grade, GPA 94

Yoon
Korea. Documented, father first migration
Arrived 16.5. Here 3 years
11th grade, GPA 90

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Young-Ok
Korea-born, lived in Liberia. Undocumented, parent first migration
Arrived age 16.Here 2 years
11th grade, Grades: 70's and 80's

**ARAB STATES**

Fatima
Palestine. Documented, father and siblings migrated first
Arrived age 13. Here 3 years
12th grade, GPA 88

Isis
Egypt (Coptic Christian). Documented, father first migration
Arrived age 15. Here 3 years
12th grade, GPA 85

Lubra
Morocco. Undocumented, parents first migration
Arrived age 14. Here 3.5 years
12th grade, GPA: 80

**SUB-SAHARA AFRICA**

Doretha
Ghana. Documented, father first
Arrived 17. Here 1.5 years
$11^{th}$ grade, GPA 88.

Raquel
Eritrea. Documented refugee, sibling first migration
Arrived age 17. Here 3 years
12th grade, GPA: 80

**OTHER ASIA**

Amelia
Philippines. Documented, parent first migration
Arrived age 14. Here 1 year
11th Grade, GPA: 85.6

Lan Bi
South Vietnam. Documented refugees, family migration
Arrived age 19. Here 3 years
12th grade, GPA: 83

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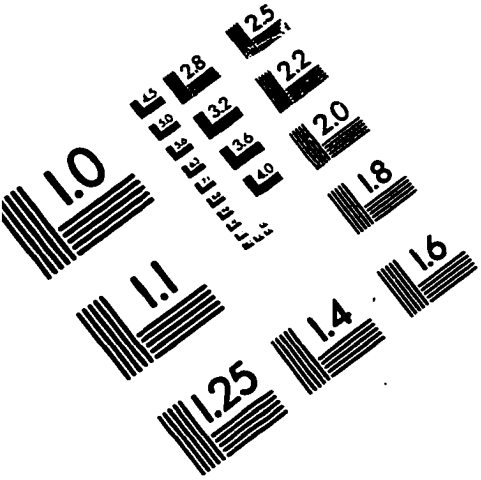


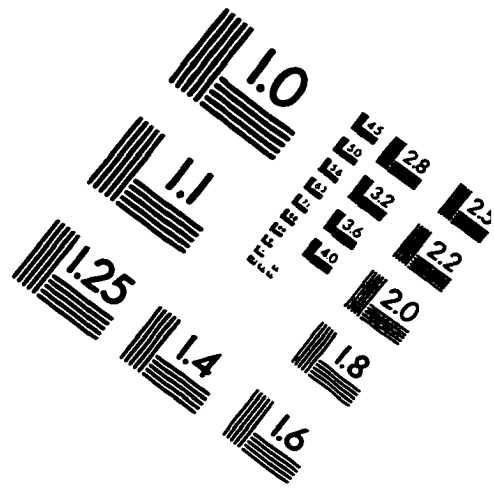


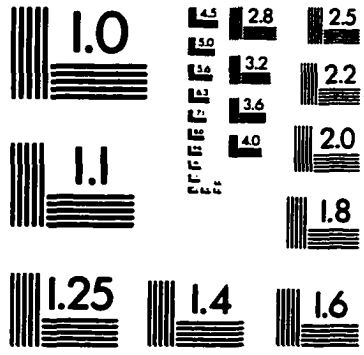


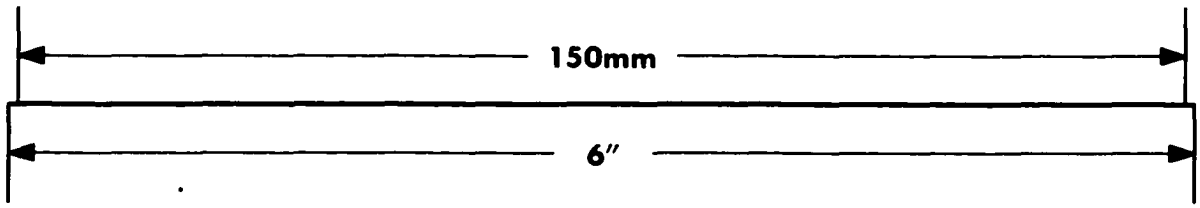


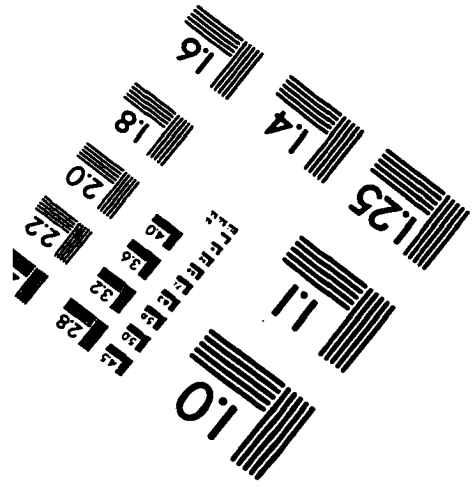


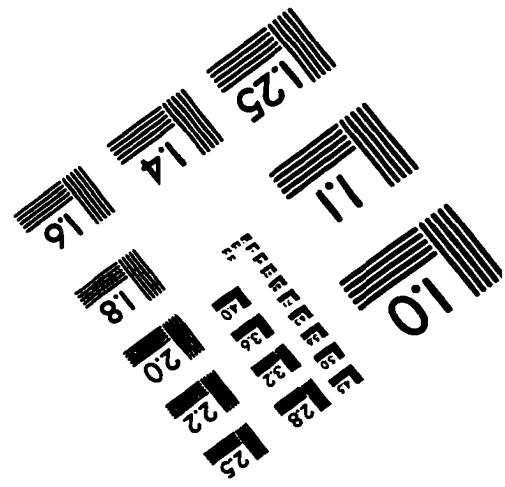


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