

The Institute for Clinical Social Work

HAITIAN-BORN MOTHERS RAISING  
AMERICAN-BORN ADOLESCENT DAUGHTERS

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Institute for Clinical Social Work in Partial Fulfillment  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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June 3, 2005

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study uses grounded theory and social constructivism to explore American-born teenage daughters being raised by Haitian-born mothers. Findings include strong vibrant mother-daughter dyads that work in reciprocal ways, intertwined in powerful, dialectic, and reciprocal relationships that can only exist between mothers and daughters. The girls' strong bi-cultural identity provides a holding and facilitating environment and gives them positive self-regard and self-esteem. The mothers' integrative tendencies included the passing down of Haitian values to their children, their search for the American Dream, and the success of their daughters. Findings included an expectation of a "payback" from the daughters to the mothers, specific issues regarding self-expression and how it is mediated through cultural transmission, and negative and positive changes that take place with the mothers as the result of their migration. Data was from 90 to 120 minute semi-structured audiotape interviews and field note observations of 20 individuals. The mothers were asked, (a) "What is your experience as a Haitian-born mother raising an adolescent daughter born in the United States?" and daughters, (b) "What is your experience as a teenage daughter born in the United States being raised by a Haitian parent who was born in Haiti?"

To Anita Fontaine—Maman—who has been instrumental in my evolution as a child and whose presence continues to be part of me. Your love lives on Maman.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My initial thanks and gratitude go to the participants in the study. Without them, this venture would not have been possible. They allowed me into their homes and hearts as they expressed their feelings and views about issues related to their relationships with one another and with the Haitian culture. I feel proud and honored by their openness and enthusiasm. Because of their participation, I have grown personally and professionally. Secondly, I am grateful and thankful for the generosity and guidance during this endeavor from Dr. Arnold Levin, my committee chair, who was utterly supportive and encouraging throughout this journey. Dr. Levin has been a trusted mentor in providing a calming effect for me during the trying times of this project. Dr. Thayer Lindner, one of the most well-read people I know, was instrumental in this project by giving me steady and useful feedback about different aspects of this dissertation. I thank Dr. Jennifer Tolleson, for constantly asking me to be at my optimum through her probing and guidance. To Marcia Adler, and to Dr. Marie-Claude Rigaud: thank you for being part of this endeavor, for your leadership, and for your support and interest. Lastly, to all my professors at the institute: Your knowledge and expertise have been invaluable to me. All of you have been part of this project. To Marci Kayne, my editor: Thanks for your friendship and support. You have been there from the beginning of this project and it was a joy working with you.

To my very first teacher—my mother—thanks for being a steady force in my life and for guiding me to always be at my best. To my children Nathalie, Patrick, And Pierre—thank you for being my cheerleaders when I wanted to give up. I want to say a special thanks to my husband for being one of my dearest supporters throughout process and most of all for enduring the clutter I created during this process. Your encouraging words kept me going. To my extended family and friends: your belief in me was like a guiding light and I salute and thank all of you.

MMY

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Problem

This study focuses on Haitian immigrant mothers raising their daughters in a culture other than their own and their experiences of their relationships. I have always been interested in the connection between an American-born adolescent daughter and her Haitian-born mother because of the cultural piece involved. The Haitian culture, as I know it, expects its children to be submissive, respectful, and obedient while refraining from questioning or challenging their parents' views, motives, and behaviors. This study asked the mothers, (a) "What is your experience as a Haitian-born mother raising an adolescent daughter born in the United States?" and the daughters (b) "What is your experience as a teenage daughter born in the United States being raised by a Haitian parent who was born in Haiti?"

This study (a) investigated parental attitudes of Haitian immigrant mothers raising their adolescent daughters in a bicultural milieu and the role culture plays in the way they parent their adolescent daughters. (b) explored how the daughters navigate, cope, deal, and manage these cultural attitudes (their own included) during their adolescence. As such, the intrapsychic issues that dominate the mother-daughter relationship with respect to the adolescent-developmental task of identity formation and the resolution of the

Oedipal complex were examined. Since literature on the development of adolescent girls asserts that such resolution can only be achieved through the daughter's "relinquishment" of her maternal ties to her mother, this study also tried to understand their views on the two cultures and the different cultural practices and rituals as they intertwined in their lives. This chapter presents my rationale and interest in this topic and my views as to the value of this research to the field of social work.

### Background

In 2002, more than one million immigrants were granted legal permanent resident status in the U.S. The Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) ranked Haitians 13<sup>th</sup> among groups of immigrants that have migrated in this country. For the past 22 years, the state of Illinois has been among the top ten primary destinations for legal immigrants to settle, with Chicago ranking third among metropolitan cities. In 2002, over 24,000 Haitians were granted legal entry to the U.S. The flux of Haitian immigrants has been steady for the past twenty years.

Despite the presence of this ever-growing number of Haitians in the U.S., we find few studies of the current influx in the psychological literature. Most current literature on Haitians focuses on immigration, acculturation, assimilation, health, and educational issues related to the mid-1970s migration and usually in places like Florida and New York. I saw this gap as an opportunity to study from a psychological perspective a relatively unexplored group of people. This study adds to the body of knowledge on issues of psychological development, immigration, culture, and experiences of immigrant

mothers raising American-born adolescent daughters, an issue which has implications beyond the Haitian immigrant community. Haitians and Americans have different viewpoints on cultural practices and rituals. Our findings may be of interest to persons studying developmental issues between mother and daughter within a broad range of groups within American society.

Aspects of mothers' and their adolescent daughters' development and the role culture plays in this developmental process are discussed. Intrapsychic issues that dominate the mother-daughter relationship with respect to the adolescent-developmental task of identity formation and the resolution of the Oedipal complex are explored. Literature on the development of adolescent girls asserts that such resolution can only be achieved through the daughter's "relinquishment" of her ties to her mother. Since such resolution is crucial to adolescent female development, I am interested in portraying how the subjects in this study handle this particular phase of development.

Chapter II reviews literature on theories on adolescent development, ethnicity, and culture. The revision of these theories is an attempt to gain some understanding and clarity to the different ways they support or refute certain beliefs and ideologies about culture and the development of adolescent girls, as well as issues pertaining to motherhood. Hence, these theories are ways researchers attempt to construct different knowledge, understanding, and reality about certain phenomena in general.

As a second-generation Haitian immigrant parent myself, this study furthered my knowledge of a Haiti that is such a part of me, and allowed me to understand and appreciate my own continued growth as a clinician and a mother. As I had hoped, I also

gained a clearer understanding of the lives and the meaning attached to the life experiences of Haitian daughters and mothers.

I had imagined my fellow Haitian mothers dealing with the complexity of adapting to a new way of life, gaining new understanding not only of themselves, but of the world they entered as immigrants. Furthermore, I believed these Haitian mothers roles changed in this host society, as many of them experienced changes in their social status. More directly relevant to the objects of this study, they would have to deal with feelings of loss and sadness upon leaving what was familiar and comfortable. A period of mourning and perhaps despair might follow if they gave up a part of their selves and embraced new understanding about their and their children's lives. This "giving up" might mean having to reevaluate their thinking and core beliefs about life in general. In some cases, this may create a period of crisis. In their interaction with their children, I believed that there might be a tug between their own cultural embeddedness and that of the host culture in which their children were growing up.

Although I have not worked with many Haitian mothers and their children, I have treated many immigrant parents whose attitudes and behaviors resemble those of theirs. Work with these immigrant parents heightened my interest in the Haitian mother-daughter relationship and the way parenting is navigated. In my clinical work with immigrant parents, I have found them to feel caught between their own culture and the culture of their host country. These challenges, I believe, would become more complex and confusing because of the bicultural element involved. I see the parents wanting to hang on and at the same time needing to let go. For their children, I notice a tug between

wanting to surrender to their mother's ways/wishes and needing to challenge them. The result is often unbearable conflict and anxiety for both.

In my work with immigrant parents, I find that they experience diverse and incompatible feelings. There can be excitement about starting over; a melancholy feeling for having left what was familiar; and a feeling of pressure to readapt or learn another way of being. It is as if they have to readjust their thinking with each new developmental stage of their children. Conflicts are most likely to emerge when mutual understanding and empathy between the mothers and daughters is not strong for the position each may hold. However, there is harmony when mothers and daughters are willing to understand the other and their concerns. This study explores how these mothers reconcile the challenges of the two cultures into their parenting approaches and how their daughters respond to these approaches.

Like most immigrants, Haitian mothers attempt to recreate aspects of their homeland. They attempt to preserve what they can of their cultures in an effort to pass down to their children a sense of continuity and belonging. For example, Haitians in New York and Florida have recreated their own communities with all of the amenities of the Haitian way of life, through such aspects as restaurants, shops, bilingual services, and cultural activities. Chicago is a bit different from New York and Florida because Haitians here do not claim a particular geographical community as their own. Instead, they are scattered throughout Chicago and the suburbs. I believe this is a disadvantage with regard to ethnic connection. It is more difficult for mothers and their American-born teenagers who are not living with other Haitians like themselves to indulge in the conveniences of

the Haitian way of life, as they do not have an accessible Haitian entourage and resources.

## CHAPTER II

## HAITIAN CULTURE

The poem below, to my mind, depicts eloquently a typical dialogue that occurs frequently in the lives of Haitian parents and their children. Marlène Rigaud Apollon read this poem entitled “Buying Shoes” from the book *The Moon’s a Banana, I Am Me*, at an AMHE conference on Haitian youth identity held in Chicago in 1998.

“There is a hole in your sock,” she said  
with the look she takes  
when I say a bad word

“So?” I said  
with the look I take  
when I want to play dumb

“Aren’t we?”  
“Don’t you know?”  
“We’re here to buy shoes  
“For heaven’s sake!”  
She said  
with the looks she takes  
when she says she’s choking.

I know,  
The salesperson,  
The other customers,  
The people passing by,  
Will all look at  
The hole in my sock  
And will say to themselves:  
“That woman sure is a bad mother.”

“Sorry,” I said  
with the look I take  
when I want to soothe her.

“How could you?” she started.  
“Sit over there,” she interrupted herself,  
Pointing to the farthest seat in the store  
with the look she has  
when she is furious inside  
But tries not to show it.

I sat in the farthest corner of the store  
with the look I have  
when I want people to forget about me.  
“Here, put that on,” she said a moment later  
Handing me a pair of new socks.

I removed the ones that had offended her  
Rolling them down carefully  
So she would not see the other holes  
And I slipped on the new ones.

“OK?” she said  
with the look she has  
When she’s pleased with herself.  
“Now let’s get you some shoes.”

“Thanks, Mom,” I said  
With the look I have when I want to please her.  
I sure was glad we were not buying pants.

Culture is the means by which we receive, organize, rationalize, and understand our particular experiences of the world. Central elements of this cultural patterning are story and narrative . . . Much of what culture tells us, the learning of it, occurs early. Once learned, these behavior patterns, these habitual responses, these ways of interacting gradually sink below the surface of the mind and, like the admiral of a submerged submarine fleet, control from the depths . . . To transcend it, we must know that it is there, and then we must summon up the meanings and patterns that make it up. Without that exercise we are doomed to misinterpret the life world of people of cultures or subcultures that differ from our own. (Phillips, 1994, p. 352)

Culture, is expressed in subtle ways that tells a person how he should behave, feel, or think of himself is like a sustaining force, is almost like a mother ship to which one is attached and from which one draws strength.

### Tradition and Customs

Although many Haitian immigrants have adopted numerous Western behaviors, their own religious beliefs, rituals, and values permeate their self-understanding and overall celebration of life. Maier (1969), in his book *Three Theories of Child Development*, discussed the important role culture plays in the life of humans. He believes that culture adds to the human aspect of living. He states, “People live by instinctual forces, and culture insists upon the [proper] use of these instinctual forces.” In effect, it is the cultural environment as interpreted by the individual that selects the nature of that individual’s experience.

Ballenger in her study of Haitians, found a pervasive view of feeling “protected” as they grew up in Haiti. “This sense of being protected was largely based on their understanding that their entire extended family, as well as many people in the community, was involved in their upbringing” (1992, p. 206). She also pointed out a feeling of loss or disconnection by Haitian parents living in America. Because of not having an available support system of an extended family as they did in Haiti, Haitian parents who are living in the U.S. may lose a sense of that protectiveness.

In some Western societies, independence, self-assertion, aggrandizement, personal achievement, and increased independence from one's family of origin are of

great value and a sign of a well-achieved personhood; this is in contrast to Eastern cultures and for Haiti where opposite values are appreciated. Not as much value is given to independence, self-assertion, and personal achievements. Instead, communal living and sharing is the norm. In Haiti, a person's behavior brings either pride or shame not only to oneself but to family members as well (Ballenger, 1992, p. 204). "Respect for parents and other adults is an analogue for respect and obedience to God and God's law" (p. 207). This conflict continues to have a certain level of irony because many of these Haitians insist that the strictness of the family produces their success in life.

Haitian families are extremely concerned about how others view them; consequently, they are optimistic for acceptable behavior by its members. These expectations are quite pervasive and extend to many areas of Haitian life and behavior. For example, it is common for Haitian parents to remind their children of their "Haitianness." This simply means that the children must adhere to cultural expectations, such as the way Haitians greet each other, acceptable table manners, how one walks, speaks, addresses elders, the degree one can express one's feelings, the degree of independence one has, one's level of self-assertion, and so on.

There are growing and visible conflicts between Haitian teenage girls and their parents when it comes to sexuality and sexual matters. Teenage girls are expected to keep their womanhood pure and sacred. This includes being conservative in their manner of dress, perhaps in an effort to hide their sexuality. Issues concerning sexuality and sexual matters are not usually discussed in many Haitian households. The onset of menarche marks an important passage for girls in general. It simultaneously implies the child's

sexual availability and her reproductive potential. During that time most parents talk to their adolescent girls about the possibility of pregnancy. Most girls learn to be fearful of one of the most natural and innate phenomenon for girls and women. They understand that it is taboo to speak about their sexual developing selves—making menarche a negatively charged occurrence.

There is a paradox when it comes to Haitian boys' sexuality. In contrast to Haitian daughters, many mothers and fathers hold different attitudes about sexual matters about their sons. In subtle ways, mothers may encourage boys to be sexually expressive while their message to girls may be to be sexually oppressive, creating a horrible paradox for the girls. Such differences in sexual attitudes toward daughters and sons create a double standard for the girls. If these girls experience their mothers as being less restrictive toward boys, conflicts emerge within the mother-daughter relationships. Whether such conflicts are discussed or not, they will be felt by the daughters and inevitably will affect the way the daughters feel about themselves as female.

The way Haitian girls are raised is contrary to their American counterparts, whose exposure to sexuality and sexual matters through the media and family seems to exceed that of a Haitian girl. Although Haitian girls can be exposed to sexual matters through school, the media, and so on, it is perhaps more difficult for them to be expressive because of the cultural constraint attached to sexuality. For many, their American peers may seem freer to exercise their sexuality by claiming interest in the opposite sex.

Studies of Haitian immigrant parents have found that they feel that American children have too much freedom and are disrespectful to parental authority. Attempts by Haitian parents to enforce their traditional beliefs about child-rearing practices, including issues of sexuality, become the basis for intergenerational and intercultural conflicts (DeSantis & Thomas, 1994; DeSantis & Ugarriza, 1995).

DeSantis, Thomas, and Sinnett (1999), in their study of first- and second-generation Haitians in Florida, demonstrated some areas of potential intergenerational and intercultural conflict related to issues surrounding adolescent sexuality. Their findings include discrepancies about values, attitudes, and beliefs by Haitian adolescents and their parents. Cultural conflict and disobedience become inevitable when parents try to enforce traditional beliefs through restrictive rules and practices. Further, as obedience is an expected cultural norm within the Haitian culture, the risk of child abuse may increase as parents attempt to regain control of their children who have been influenced by the more liberal sexual freedom of the new society.

Literature on Haitians who have migrated to the United States often reflects concerns of Haitian parents about the potential for lost traditional Haitian cultural values due to the “Americanization” of their offspring (Laguerre, 1984; DeSantis, 1985; Giles, 1990; Charles, 1986). In another study regarding relational issues between immigrant Haitians and their children, Portes and Zhou (1994) found a strong need by first-generation Haitian immigrants to preserve a robust national identity, which they associate both with community solidarity and social networks promoting individual success. However, in trying to instill in their children national pride, they often clash with the

youngsters' everyday experiences in school. These researchers are suggesting that conflict occurs because of parents *holding on* to what is familiar and by their children's exposure to what is contrary to parental beliefs. Hence, their cultural values from their place of origin govern a belief system that is impermeable.

### Child-Rearing Attitudes

Family structure is hierarchal in Haiti. Parents have complete authority in the household. Haitian children are taught to unconditionally respect and obey their parents and elders, and to refrain from questioning their parents' behaviors or motives. Haitian parents believe that it is within their rights to influence their children's behavior. There is a strong bond between family members. In traditional Haiti members of the extended family, which includes blood relatives and non-blood "relations," often play an important role in the decision-making process of its members. Haitians often refer to a good friend as a cousin, sister, brother, aunt, and the like. This denotes strong friendship where mutual respect and good will are preserved. In the same vein, these relatives, whether blood relation or not, often join in the task of raising the children. This way of living is still practiced by many Haitians in America and Haiti.

The family structure is patriarchal and matrifocal. For most Haitians, children are perceived as a gift from God. During infancy, children are considered vulnerable. Infants are seldom left alone. They often sleep in their parents' room at night and are always carried by an adult or older child. Their cries are responded to quickly. Infants are groomed, positively encouraged in their developing skills, enjoyed, and played with. At a

later age, cultural education becomes more intense, bearing mostly on discipline, good manners, and belief in God (Bornstein, 1991, p. 49).

Education of Haitian children centers on discipline, kindness, good manners, obedience to parents and elders, strong family ties and obligations, respect for oneself and others, and belief in God and the church. Formal education or schooling is of the utmost importance to Haitian families because it is seen as a means to achieve some financial stability and social status. A major task of Haitian adults is to mold the children to display desirable characteristics in order to integrate them into the social group. This entails a collaboration of shared responsibility toward the child not only by immediate family members but also by extended family members and even close friends in guiding that child to social norms, expectations, and behavior.

Physical punishment is customarily practiced among many Haitian parents in order to promote expected behavior. Unlike in America, Haitian authorities do not usually get involved when excessive force is used to discipline children. The ability and right of parents to influence and discipline their children may be jeopardized as their children become increasingly aware of their right to be protected by welfare officials whose power and authority supercede that of their parents if they are in imminent danger.

Haitian children living in America are well aware of their option to involve the law or social services when they feel threatened by physical harm. Police and social workers have numerous examples of children shouting, "I'll call the authorities and charge you with child abuse if you hit me!" (Stepick, 1998, p. 24). This forces some Haitian parents to alter their way of disciplining their children, a notable change in their

behavior, undoubtedly linked to the fact that these children of Haitian parents are American-born, exposed to a dual belief system—Haitian and American.

## CHAPTER III

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

In attempting to understand developmental issues and development as a whole one must focus not only on what goes on during the beginning of life but also throughout life. Studies of development often start with infancy, or even as early as conception. Accordingly, this literature review includes studies on infancy and through adolescence and adulthood. Scholars and researchers of the Object Relations realm have historically focused on the quality of an infant's relationship with his primary caregiver and how it serves as a catalyst for healthy mental and physical growth. The infant's mental and physical survival is seen as depending on this social environment and relationship with the infant's primary caregiver (mainly the mother). This literature review covers relevant theories on Object Relation theory pertaining to development, specifically focusing on Winnicott. Relevant literature in the areas of female development (including girls, adolescents, and mothers), on mother-daughter relationships, ethnic identity, and gender identity are also included.

## Theoretical Approaches

### *Object Relations Theory*

I chose to use object relations theory as my main paradigm for this dissertation because it resonates with the theoretical knowledge base I draw upon in my work with my clients. “Object relations theory provides the linkage between the subjective and external worlds and creates a theoretical framework that allows the therapist to address individual needs and perspectives” (Siegel, 1992, xvi). Object relatedness or representation is a construction resulting from interpersonal exchanges between the self and the object. Thus, the interrelation and interdependence of self upon object and object upon self is quite complicated as they evolve in association with one another. The child depends on its mother for positive, or in worst cases, negative feelings about him/herself. The mother (as an object), on the other hand, is influenced by her own accumulated subjective experiences. The internalization of her own mothering and her view of herself and her experiences can either enhance her functions as an object or impede them.

The gist of object relations focuses on how an individual relates to others and the world around him/her. Object relations theorists hold that an infant's efforts to relate to its mother or the primary caretaker constitute the first and most important relationship in the baby's life. Object relations theorists hold the notion of a lifelong need for relationships with another. The importance of the quality of such a relationship between a developing infant and its primary caregiver is the foundation to the quality of relationship thereafter. This relationship is the basis of one's ego development. Many prominent object relations

theorists are of the opinion that a poor relationship with one's primary object through internalization yields developmental pathology (Summers, 1994).

Thus, internalization as described by Mitchell and Aron (1999) is “a kind of underlying substratum of our mental activity—a constant symbolic digestion process that constitutes an important part of the cycle of exchange between the individual and the outside” (p. 192). It is a process by which objects in the external world acquire permanent mental representation (Rycroft, 1995, p. 84). According to Siegel (1992), “Mental representations of self and significant others (objects) are formed throughout life. The earliest representations play an especially important role in determining mental health and emotional well-being of the individual” (p. 9). In terms of the representation, Dietrich and Dietrich (1989), citing Winnicott, state, “The nature of the caring functions of the maternal figure and her symbolic representations ultimately determines the quality of the child's development” (p. 260). Internalization provides building blocks of psychic structure (Scharff & Scharff, 1998; Bowlby, 1969; Stern, 1985). Psychic structure, according to Freud, develops after a loss, when the libido invested in the lost object is withdrawn and internalized in the form of an unconscious memory. The lost object is retained in memory and qualities of the lost object become part of the personality (Siegel, 1996).

### Winnicott's Theory

If human babies are to develop eventually into healthy, independent, and society-minded adults, they absolutely depend on being given a good start, and this good start is assured in nature by the existence of the bond between the baby's mother

and the baby, the thing called love. So if you love your baby, he or she is getting a good start. (Winnicott, 1964, p. 17)

According to Winnicott, an infant in the beginning can survive and develop only within his/her interaction with the mother. Winnicott's critics refer to his well known statement, "There is no such thing as an infant" (meaning without a mother or primary caretaker, the infant cannot exist), which thereby supports that core belief of the importance of an infant's primary caretaker in the life of the developing infant. In my work with adolescents, I believe the same holds true about parental involvement along with continued healthy development. I do recognize a slight difference between the adolescent and the infant. Unlike the infant, the adolescent can physically and perhaps psychologically survive.

Winnicott's focal point is the adequacy of maternal caregiving activities toward the child and its pervasive influence on the psychological development of a child. Similarly, Winnicott's view of object relations focuses on the infant's unintegrated self and how this infant is held, soothed, handled, talked to, and cared for. The mother's gaze is an equally important part of creating a secure internal world for the child. Winnicott (1971) believes that there must be a good fit between the child and its mother in order for healthy development to take place. Thus, Winnicott does not advocate perfect parenting. Instead, his theory dictates that the mother needs to have "good enough" emotional and physical connection with the baby.

Winnicott (1971) refers to the relationship between the mother and the infant as a "psychosomatic partnership." This relationship evokes the richness of the intense

relationship that is at once extremely physical and fundamentally psychological (Scharff & Scharff, 1991). The mother's psychological and physical activities provide the initial prevailing conditions for the child's mental/psychological and bodily experience.

Winnicott (1986) views the mother-infant dyad as one psychological entity. This union is best described in Winnicott's term of primary maternal preoccupation. "This preoccupation decreases according to the baby's growing need to experience reaction to frustration" (p. 22). In other words, Winnicott is alluding to a good enough environment in which the infant's caregiver adapts to its needs. Winnicott (1971) postulates that such adaptation gives the infant a sense of reliability and confidence in the mother. "The baby's confidence in the mother's reliability makes possible a separating-out of the not-me from the me" (p. 109)

Winnicott, whose insights lead us to understand the genetics of the relationship between the infant and its mother, wrote,

It could be said that at the beginning the mother must adapt almost exactly to the infant's needs in order for the infant's personality to be developed without distortion . . . if the mother was unable, for reasons to do with her own development, to adapt to the infant's needs and was, herself, intrusively demanding, she would foster a precocious compliance in the child. (Winnicott, 1965)

Central to Winnicott's theory is *good enough mothering*. Per Winnicott (1971), The *good enough mother* (not necessarily the infant's own mother but the primary caregiver) is one who makes active adaptation to the infant's needs. Ogden (1986), referring to Winnicott's theory, added that the good enough mother's presence or caretaking should be unobtrusive to the point that her functions are unnoticed by the child. Eventually, this

active adaptation will gradually lessen according to the infant's own growing ability to account for failure of adaptation and tolerate frustration.

The good enough mother's task must be balanced. According to Winnicott, mothering even at the beginning must not be too good, for too long because it will prevent the infant from experiencing appropriate frustration, tolerating anxiety, desire, conflicted desire, and conflict. Correspondingly, the child will be robbed of the experience of desire and zest for life, and left with undischarged aggression. This "too good" mothering will lead the infant to internal differentiation—"Conflict between the desire to feel/think/be in specific ways and the desire not to feel/think/be in those ways" (Ogden, 1986, p. 176). The not good enough mother, on the other hand, creates an infant who becomes a collection of reactions to impingement, and the true self of the infant fails to form or becomes hidden behind a false self which complies with and generally wards off the "world's knocks" (Winnicott 1965).

Winnicott's theory does not delineate stages of development. Rather, his theory describes development in progressive terms within the realm of certain concepts necessary for development. For instance, the concept of *potential space* – referring to the physical and mental space between mother and infant – is one of importance as it delineates the child's potential to self-discovery. This concept refers to the intermediate area of experiencing that lies between fantasy and reality. For Winnicott (1971), "Potential space . . . is the hypothetical area that exists (but cannot exist) between the baby and the object (mother or part of mother) during the phase of repudiation of the object as not-me, that is, at the end of being merged in with the object" (p. 107).

“Specific forms of potential space include the play space, the area of transitional object and phenomena, the analytic space, the area of cultural experience, and the area of creativity” (Ogden, 1986, p. 203). Creativity gives meaning to a person’s life. The use of “play” and imagination adds to one’s creativity.

Thus, the transitional phenomenon is a period equally important for the developing infant. It is a period in which the developmental task for the mother/infant unit is to wean the infant in a non-traumatic way from their usual and customary dyadic interaction. This is attained through the infant’s experience of being alone and playing alone even in the presence of the mother. In discussing Winnicott’s theory on transitional phenomenon, Ogden (1986) stated,

The crucial psychological-interpersonal phenomenon that makes possible the weaning of the infant from the maternally provided psychological matrix is the maintenance of a series of paradoxes: The infant and mother are one, and the infant and mother are two: the infant has created the object and the object was there to be discovered; the infant must learn to be alone in the presence of the mother. It is essential that the infant or child never be asked which is the truth. Both are true. The simultaneous maintenance of the emotional truth of oneness with the mother and of separateness from her makes it possible for the infant to play in the potential space between mother and infant. (Ogden, 1986, p. 187)

During the transitional phenomenon phase, the role of the mother is replaced by gradual disillusionment through a gradual weaning process of reliance on the mother. Winnicott’s conception of the role of the mother as the manager of the weaning process is essential for psychological internalization to take place. The end result is that the infant, through internalization of the mother, can generate for himself a matrix for his/her psychological and bodily experience. One of the main goals in this theory is for the mother to help the infant to learn to be alone in her presence. That is fundamental in the

psychological connection between the two, with the end result arriving at greater independence for the child.

### *Developmental Theory*

Palombo (1991, part II) proposes that the development of the sense of self is based on the meanings conferred upon self-experiences by the community within which the infant is raised. About the mother-infant relationship, Scharff and Scharff (1998) posit that the loving relationship between the child and its mother is the only element that can bring meaning to the child. As Chodorow (1978) reminds us, early development consists in the building of a social and emotional relationship between the mother and the infant, both in the world and within the infantile psyche and fundamental aspects of the person's sense of self, develop through this earliest relationship.

This suggests that the quality of care also conditions the growth of the self and the infant's basic emotional self-image (sense of goodness and badness). "The infant's development is totally dependent on parental care, on the fit between its needs and wants and the care its caretaker provides . . . Dependence, then, is central to infancy and central to the coming into being of the person" (Chodorow, 1978, p. 59). For Winnicott, the development away from this dependence is equivalent to what he refers to as "coming into being" or the development of the "self." It is also hypothesized that in the beginning of infancy the child is not able to differentiate his self and the self of the mother. Through maturation and repeated experiences of the mother's departure, the infant oscillates between perceptions of his mother as separate and not separate. Thus, the presence of

consistency and continuity allows the infant to develop confidence and trust which is the beginning of one's identity.

Development, according to Kegan (1982), is a process of change through which one leaves one's embedded culture and is integrated into another (p. 186). Hence, with each new balance, the individual's distinctness is solidified. Kegan warns, "While resolving the conflicts of the former stage's need-embeddedness, the balance is vulnerable in its own embeddedness, to another sort of conflict" (p. 207). The shift from one stage to the next can be painful and confusing. The loss of important relationships can be experienced as the threat of losing the self.

The theory of infant development within the object relations domain posits a total dependency during the early period of the infant to the primary caregiver. Bowlby (1951) talked of this dependency in terms of a sort of fusion; Mahler (1968) refers to it as external ego that serves as an environmental provider as well as a mediator; Benedict (1949) calls it confidence; Erikson (1950) refers to this dependency as basic trust which is the pathway of the child's core identity; and Fairbairn (1952) labels it as infantile dependence which denotes a sense of helplessness on the part of the child. In addition, in this early period the infant moves from this absolute dependence toward the self.

This movement toward selfhood is facilitated through the relationship with the primary caretakers. During this period, infants begin to differentiate between the inner and outer world. They gradually leave their embedded state of undifferentiation as well as differentiating the quality of their experiences. As such the infant is able to distinguish pleasurable feelings as well as painful feelings. From this develops a "dim awareness" of

the person helping to produce this experience. Through the mother's consistent presence and assistance, the child will have a sense of omnipotence. This sense of omnipotence is maintained by the projection of any unpleasurable sensation or perception beyond the boundaries of the child's symbiotic unity with the mother.

One's early relationship and its affective quality shape the development of other relationships to be formed in later life. This early relationship is also called primary love. As stated by Chodorow (1978), "On a psychological level, all people who have experienced primary love and primary identification have some aspect of self that wants to recreate these experiences, and most people try to do so." In the past three decades or so, many researchers, including Winnicott (1971), Kohut (1984), Stern (1985), and Mitchell (1988) have established the growing importance of an infant's relationship to his primary caretaker as the main foundation for psychological structure and continued health. It can be postulated that this early form of relationship (primarily with the mother) only grows over time, and becomes the precursor of a woman's lifestyle of learning, pleasure, growth, and self-enhancement in regard to others with whom she relates.

Palombo (1991) states that the task of developmental theory is to tell how a specific person comes to develop his or her own unique interpretation of particular life episodes. The aim of such a theory is to explain how meanings are construed from experience and to give an account of elements that enter into and shape a child's understanding of a lived episode. This task also involves an understanding of how life episodes are woven into an historical account that has coherence and that ultimately

becomes a person's life narrative. Thus, such narratives play a powerful role in the course of a person's life and continue to be shaped by experience during the life cycle.

To Kegan (1982), development occurs as a result of organizing oneself to understanding the world that one is part of. Kegan also suggests that human beings constitute reality through their perception, experience, thought, and the meaning attached to their world. Many theorists in this field believe that there is an ever-present need for studying the meaning of the human experience in order to explain the motives behind behavior.

Human beings are understood as involved in an ever-progressive motion engaged in giving themselves a new form through the movement of one stage to the next. Kegan enumerated three evolutionary functions necessary in aiding an individual to evolve: (a) Holding on (*or the desire to be attached to another*). Healthy holding provides the individual a sense of being recognized, validated, cared for, nurtured, and loved. Such healthy holding according to Kegan (1982, p. 127) lays the stage for healthy separation. (b) Letting go (*or helping and allowing one to differentiate*). This will give the individual a sense of autonomy. (c) Remaining in place (*or the provision of a consistent, secure, and steady presence of the embedded culture*). This will assist the individual in reintegrating the self during this transition.

Literature on development stresses the important role one's environment plays in individuals. Many theorists, such as Winnicott (1965), Erikson (1950, 1963), Stern (1985), Blos (1962), and Kegan (1982) support the importance of an understanding, supportive, caring, and secure environment to growing individuals as intrinsic to

evolution throughout the different stages of their lives. This holding environment is a product of one's primary caregivers, parents, family, friends, community, and ethnicity. It creates an embedded culture which defines individuals and maintains self-esteem, self-perception, and self-identity. Connection with an empathic human environment is considered essential to human psychological existence. Kohut (1984) stresses importance of empathy, surmising that the loss of an empathic milieu, the loss of an understanding milieu creates disintegration anxiety, the most severe and disabling of all anxieties. Empathy provides validation of one's psychological existence.

### Girls' Development

The development literature strongly supports the view that boys and girls historically have had strong attachments to their mothers. However, most importantly, many researchers also posit that their primary caregivers socialize infant boys and girls differently. This supports the notion that boys and girls, and naturally men and women, will behave differently as a result. Chodorow (1978) observes that mothers encourage societal values in their girls, which promote and support attachment and identification with the mother. Boys, he notes, are socially supported to curtail the primary identification with the mother, forcing them to create less flexible self-other differentiation. Chodorow believes that the infant ends up defining herself through her relationship with her mother through internalization—the end result being how the child comes to relate to the world. Chodorow has examined the extent to which gender

differences affect developmental paths of males and females. As she and many others observe, girls and boys are treated differently by their parents and their environment. For Chodorow, one's experiences in the family affects one's internal psychic life.

For example, various accounts are given as to how boys and girls differ in the way they go through the Oedipal phase. Freud posits that at around 3 to 4 years of age, a little boy's attachment to his mother becomes genitally focused. Consequently, he sees his father as his rival for his mother's love and wishes to take the place of the father by getting rid of him. The boy fears retaliation or specifically castration by his father and forsakes his heterosexual attachment to his mother by denying or repressing his feelings and identifies with the father. This turning away from his mother is a crucial stage in development for boys. This yields a successful resolution of the Oedipus complex. Hence, the boy's superego is formed through the incorporation of paternal prohibitions.

For girls, however, the process is far more complex. Through the discovery of not having a penis, girls automatically think that they were castrated and inferior, which becomes a blow to their self-esteem. As a result, they feel penis envy and develop contempt for others (their mothers) who do not possess a penis. This contempt turns to anger that leads them to turn to their father who has a penis. The mother becomes a rival for the child because she has access to the father. Eventually, the child renounces the wish of wanting a penis from her father and having her father to herself, fearing that he would eventually reject her. Only if she identifies with her mother will she someday possess her father.

Unlike a boy child, the girl does not need to give up her primary identification with her mother. Since girls do not have castration anxiety, the impetus to leave the Oedipal stage is not as urgent; therefore, the dissolution complex takes longer for girls. According to Freud, this continuous identification with the mother is normal in developing girls. Thus, the mother remains the primary love for the daughter. Only when the mother has been grossly inadequate does the father become the main love object for the girl, around the ages of 3 to 5 years (Lester, 1976). This is evident when the mother's love is experienced as lacking, dangerous, or antagonistic, leaving the daughter to frantically seek another love object.

In this regard, Chodorow (1978) states,

The feminine Oedipus complex is not simply a transfer of affection from mother to father and a giving up of the mother. Rather, psychoanalytic research demonstrates the continued importance of a girl's external and internal relation to her mother, and the way her relation to her father is added to this. Because of their mothering by women, girls come to experience themselves as less separate than boys, as having more permeable ego boundaries. Girls come to define themselves more in relation to others. Their internalized object-relational structure becomes more complex, with more ongoing issues. These personality features are reflected in superego development." (pp. 92-93)

According to the Oedipal object relation theory, family structure produces crucial differentiating experiences between the sexes, which become psychologically appropriated, internalized, and transformed, leading to different relational capacities for girls and boys.

Because they are the same gender as their daughters and have been girls, mothers of daughters tend not to experience these infant daughters as separate from them in the same way as do mothers of infant sons. In both cases, a mother is likely to experience a sense of oneness and continuity with her infant. However, this sense

is stronger, and lasts longer, vis-à-vis daughters . . . mothers experiencing daughters as an extension or double of themselves. (Chodorow, 1978, p. 109)

This is in part because there is a narcissistic identification with the daughter.

By contrast to their sons, according to Chodorow, mothers experience their sons as a male opposite. “A girl does not simply identify with her mother or want to be like her mother. Rather, mother and daughter maintain elements of their primary relationship which means they will feel alike in fundamental ways” (1978, p. 110) Therefore, Chodorow concludes that mothers cannot adequately differentiate themselves from their daughters and that daughters as a result cannot readily differentiate themselves from their mothers—leaving daughters with an urgent sense of defending against being engulfed by their mothers.

Within the girl’s inner world a more decisive disengagement from the earlier attachments, both pre-Oedipal and Oedipal, to the mother began as the daughter embarks on a search of the nonincestuous object desire. The girl begins to relinquish her submission within her inner world to maternal authority and to experience authority as originating within herself . . . the girl at this point is to achieve a more integrated sense of self as psychically differentiated from her mother without sacrificing those representations of the earlier object relationships to the mother that are employed in the service of self-soothing, self-esteem, and affect regulation, and narcissistic valuation of the body and its capacity for genital pleasure.” (Dahl, 1995, p. 197)

Surrey (1991) contends that a girl’s most basic sense of self is formed in identification with the primary caretaker of the preadolescent period, and those qualities that the mother values and devalues in herself as a “mother” is transmitted in a powerful, unconscious manner. Through this venue of mutual identification the daughter learns to be “mother,” a caretaker, and a nurturer of others. According to Surrey, this accounts for the persistence of this primary sense of identity as the “caretaker of others” and that the

daughters may be in conflict even in adulthood when they act on their own needs—not taking care of others.

A necessary step for a daughter's psychological growth is to go through what Surrey (1991) refers to "stepping out of the mother-daughter expectation or relationship." This involves a complex process differentiating from her mother by creating newly defined self-images. Developmental theorists have spoken about the different stages in life where this sort of "stepping out" is necessary. For example, Mahler (1975) discusses the phase of toddlerhood where the child separates from the mother. Erikson (1963) discusses the need for adolescents to separate from the family, and Levinson (1978) talks about the need to separate from teachers and mentors in adulthood. According to these theorists, such separations are thought to be necessary for healthy psychological growth for individuals, enabling them to form distinct and separate identities.

Such differentiation may leave girls feeling alone, unsupported, and abandoned. Miller (1986) and Gilligan (1992) conclude that an inner sense of connection with others is a central organizing feature in girls and women's development and that psychological crises in women's lives stem from disconnection. For some, such disconnections may approach a sense of a total loss of self; for many they can result in depression.

According to Blos (1962), "The fact that a girl's first love belongs to the mother predestines the mother always to be considered a refuge in times of stress" (pp. 27-28). Still, the girl's early love for the mother is highly ambivalent, a characteristic quality it never loses; in fact, whenever regression brings this early relationship to life again it is characterized by an excess of primitive ambivalence. Dahl (1995) asserts that,

The process of the psychic integration of the tie to the mother as an aspect of the self is never fully complete. The hallmark of adult female psychic organization lies in the daughter's capacity to permit continuing reverberations within herself of the representations of the tie to the mother in her ongoing intrapsychic dialogue with her mother. (p. 201)

### Adolescent Development

There is a broad range of work on adolescent development. From the psychoanalytic world, Freud speaks of the stage where infantile sexuality reaches its final form where the pre-Oedipal and Oedipal love objects are given up by the pubescent child. He states that during this stage there is also an upsurge in drive activity and the value of the child's environment as a way to contain the expression of these drives.

Blos (1962) describes two phases of adolescence. The first is "early adolescence," marked by a period of repeated attempts at separation from primary love objects. At early adolescence, the need for same-sex relationships and idealizing friendships with members of the same sex is quite important.

During this phase of adolescence, many girls develop an intense relationship with another girl—the best friend—an attempt via reality to relinquish the intrapsychic attachment to the mother of infancy psychically; the attachment to the best friend can be understood as a way station on the path to mature sexually. (Dahl, 1995, p. 194)

The second phase is "adolescence proper" which is marked by a noticeable turn toward heterosexual relationships. This stage also indicates the final and irreversible renunciation of the incestuous/early love object, in a form of sublimation of the child's love for the idealized parent. The defenses of this phase are usually intellectualization

and asceticism. During this phase there is also a tendency toward inner experience and self-discovery.

According to Blos (1962), this phase of adolescence proper has two dominant themes: revival of the Oedipus complex and disengagement from primary love objects.

Blos describes this phase of adolescence in terms of two broad affective states:

“mourning” and “being in love.” The mourning is the result of the inner emptiness, grief, and sadness, which is part of all mourning. The “being in love” process signals the advance of the libido to new objects. This stage is marked by a sense of completeness, coupled with a singular self-abandonment.

In terms of adolescent development, a key developmental task during this phase is identity formation. Identity is the way people think of themselves in a variety of contexts. It is also the way they feel, their level of achievement, their relatedness to self, family, and others, and their value and belief systems, actions, and behaviors. Friendship with peers becomes vitally important to adolescents as they pursue the task of separating from their families. My own observation of adolescent friendships is that they look for in a friend the same qualities that are sought out at later stages in life. These qualities, as cited by Papalia and Olds (1981), are similarity (in personality, values, or attitudes), reciprocity (acceptance, understanding, mutual trust, and sharing), compatibility (enjoyment of being together), structure (geographic closeness, convenience), and role modeling (admiration and respect). Blos (1962) states that the lack of friendship can throw an adolescent girl into longing despair, and the loss of a friend can precipitate depression and complete loss of interest in life (p. 82).

Schlein (1978) and Erikson (1968) maintain that a way that adolescents achieve psychosocial identification is by integrating the traditional values that are continuously becoming significant to them. Erikson's (1950) theory of psychosocial development is comprised of eight stages, the fifth being a focal point in adolescent development. In this phase, Erikson asserts that the task of the adolescent is to forge a coherent sense of self, to verify an identity that can leave pubescence behind, and to work toward adulthood with the capacity to love and work. To Erikson, a successful resolution of this stage vastly hinges on the successful achievement of the four previous stages. In order to carry out this task, the adolescent is suspended between the morality learned as a child and the ethics to be developed as an adult. As a result, this can be a confusing state for them. To deal with that confusion, they tend to cling to each other. Their peers become central pillars for them as they look for external certainties, presumably to counter feelings of internal insecurity.

Erikson (1978) also denotes several changes that take place with the adolescent. Among these are physiological growth, mental maturation, and social responsibility to experience or pass through the crisis of identity. Erikson refers to "crisis" in a developmental sense as connoting not a threat or catastrophe, but a "turning point" (p. 96)—a crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential. In this acute period, it is especially important to understand the manner in which these individuals have managed their "crisis" in search of their personhood. All of this is necessary in this lifelong process in their development as they prepare to successfully enter the next phase of young adulthood.

Erikson (1978) focuses on the ego as the primary agent through which human beings organize their perceptions, govern their actions, and adapt to their environment. Hence, the ego is forced to negotiate conflicts of internalized parental and societal restrictions and personal wishes. Waldinger (1986) believes that issues and tasks of adolescence are quite universal. For Erikson and others, the adolescent effort to make sense of the self and the world is not a kind of maturational malaise, but instead a healthy and vital process that contributes to the ego-strength of the mature adult.

Adolescence is still characterized by some as a period of great upheaval and disturbances, although this concept has been refuted by many in the field of psychology. Researchers such as Rutter et al. (1976) and Offer and Shachin (1984) challenge the view of adolescence as a pervasive state of storm, stress, and turmoil. Their studies propose a nondramatic achievement of adolescent milestones achievements within this period. Eldridge (1991) acknowledges the upsurge of family conflicts during this phase but concludes ongoing conflict is a sign of family distress. She also points out two other possible reasons for conflicts between adolescents and their families: as an adjustment to the changes that personally affect the adolescent, or as an indicator of the existence of long-standing problems in the family. She stresses the importance of assessing the root of these problems and to not concede that these problems are inherent to adolescence. This group of studies also suggests that transition rather than crisis best describes the experience of becoming an adolescent and that increased turmoil and symptomology is the exception rather than the rule during adolescence.

Theories on development have suggested that healthy psychological imprints start from the beginning of one's life and such imprints are needed to succeed along the natural progression of other stages. Likewise, theories on adolescent development suggest adolescence is a second individuation process and have stressed the importance of maternal preoccupation as a marker for healthy psychological passage into adulthood, especially for girls' development. A healthy passage during adolescence does require attuned, responsive parents in the mix who are willing and ready to respond to the demands of the lives of the adolescents. In my work with adolescents, resolution to psychological stresses, concerns, and problems are more easily attained with involved parents who are not set in their ways but are willing to work with their teenagers to reach a new understanding not only of themselves but their adolescent children as well.

Literature on adolescence emphasizes the reemergence of the pre-Oedipal object tie to the mother. Blos (1962) posits that adolescence, like any other developmental stage, is marked by typical conflicts, external and internal, which by their very nature promote progressive development. At the same time, he considers adolescence to be a second step in individuation. The first, according to the attachment theory, takes place during toddlerhood, with the attainment of self and object constancy. Through this process, the toddler becomes individuated from the parents. The toddler is able to make a fateful distinction between "self" and "non-self." The same process is necessary during adolescence by shedding of family dependencies, and the loosening of infantile object ties in order to become a member of society at large, or, simply, of the adult world.

A similar yet far more complex individuation experience occurs during adolescence, which leads in its final step to a sense of identity or the attainment of adult femininity. Blos (1962) further states that before the adolescents can consolidate this formation, they must pass through stages of self-consciousness and fragmented existence. This would include some oppositional, rebellious, and resistive strivings, stages of experimentation, the testing of the self by going to excess, each of which has its own usefulness in the process of self-definition. An important task the adolescents must undergo is separation from their parents. This included the realization of the finality of the end of childhood, which can create a sense of urgency, fear, isolation, loneliness, and panic. Others, such as Bernstein and Warner (1994), comment on the tenacity of the daughter's attachment and the difficulty she seems to have in relinquishing those ties to the mother.

Blos (1958) argues that the periods of separation individuation have in common the vulnerability of personality organization and the urgency of changes in psychic structure in consonance with a maturational forward surge and a specificity of deviant development (psychopathology), which embodies the respective failures at individuation. In other words, "not until the close of adolescence do self and object representations acquire firm boundaries" (p. 144). Adolescent individuation can also be described as a progressive disengagement from primary love objects. Consequently, depression may invade the adolescent as a result of decathecting childhood objects. On this particular issue, Anthony and Benedek (1970) assert, "Gaining new objects and losing old ones go hand in hand in the course of normal adolescent development and their only chance of

preventing the escape of the adolescent is to set about systematically enslaving the child from her earliest years, so that by the time she reaches adolescence, the incestuous enthrallment is complete” (p. 320).

Hence, according to object relations theory the major themes for adolescent girls are revival of the Oedipus complex and disengagement from their primary love object. This is closely tied to two parallel processes—object-relinquishment and object finding. That is, a child, in order to be able to go out into the nonfamilial world, must give up her incestuous love objects in favor of other primary objects. Chodorow (1978) states that this stage is marked by a period of renewed crisis and conflicts, in which new object-relational and ego resolutions are made. However, before new love objects can take the place of those relinquished, according to Blos (1962, p. 98), there is a period during which the ego is impoverished because of the withdrawal from the actual parents and the estrangement of the superego.

In an attempt to individuate or disengage from the mother, adolescent girls may adopt many schemes, such as being critical, de-idealizing the mother, and idealizing other females. Just as infants may attempt to split the mother into a good and bad object, adolescents are involved in the same sort of splitting and/or projection, where the mother and home represent bad and the extrafamilial world represents good. Waldinger (1986) asserts the necessity of this de-idealization as a means for the adolescent girl to prepare for future intimate relationships with her peers and with members of the opposite sex.

These theorists suggest that finding new identifications, loyalties, and intimacies outside of their family dependencies permeates the progression of the evolving self,

closing the adolescent phase and allowing the adolescent to move forward to other relationships as an adult. Blos (1958) further posits that the study of adolescence has fully and clearly demonstrated that the final decline, the mastery or resolution of the positive and negative Oedipus complex, is not totally accomplished in early childhood but is also the task of adolescence (p. 161).

Adolescent behaviors depend largely on unconscious fantasy life and previous attachments. Development, according to Kegan (1982), is “a process of change through which one leaves one’s embedded culture and is integrated into another.” Kegan warns, “While resolving the conflicts of the former stage’s need-embeddedness, the balance is vulnerable in its own embeddedness, to another sort of conflict.” The shift from one stage to the next can be experienced as painful and confusing because such a shift may be seen as a threat of losing important relationships, which can be experienced as the danger of losing the self. The yearning of individuals to have separate identities and also to be dependent and attached is another component in Kegan’s theory.

Blos (1992) has identified several psychological problems for adolescents during this phase of transition: (a) *Social and individual forces*, differentiating between internal and external reality, in search of maturation as the central task. The author postulates that success or failure of adaptation to external reality depends greatly on processes that take place in the internal world. (b) *Sublimation* is another special aspect of adolescence. The adolescent struggles between the contrasting forces of action and agony, joy and despair, upheavals and overthrows, and finally, chaos and clarification. The development of the ego proceeds during this phase. (c) *Increase in narcissism* is a result of increased self-

love and shattering of the ego ideal. Also, the need to restore self-image reinforces narcissism as a counter force against self-devaluation and against the masochistic reactions to the superego. (d) *Increased ability of empathy* and its connection to identification is highlighted. This increase is believed to be the byproduct of gaining special intuition about one's internal processes involving intellectual capability. It serves as a tool to interpret the rationality for irrational inner events. (e) *Reactions to sexual maturity*. This process involves the task of dealing with the struggle to synthesize all childhood identifications as they become enlarged and enriched by new ones.

In discussing these special adolescent circumstances, Blos (1992) speaks of parental acceptance, support, consistent attachment, and a sense of security as key elements in promoting a healthy developing self and self-esteem. Recent studies have demonstrated that lower levels of self-esteem and self-competence may be directly linked to the adolescent's relationships, particularly those within the family. However, Blos contends that when societal support is not readily available to adolescents, youth discard the family and make their peer groups serve as their sustaining developmental force. Findings from these studies are consistent with conceptual models that indicate a critical influence by the parent-child relationship on the child's adjustment and perceptions of the self (Ohannessian, p. 621).

Winnicott's theory on adolescents concurs with Blos's finding about the need for strong environmental support. Winnicott understands that adolescents go through a difficult time. As a way to capture the adolescent's struggle to create an identity and feel real, he uses the term "doldrums." Winnicott believes that adolescents need to constantly

get involved in “things” that make them feel real by being involved in at times antisocial behaviors. Again, Winnicott’s work puts a great emphasis on the provision of “good enough” environmental factors as a necessary element to help the child mature. A good enough environment will help the child weather through the tumultuous times that Winnicott sees as normal, healthy, and inevitable.

According to Winnicott, it is crucial for the parents to be able to survive the aggression and rageful states of the infant without retaliation to enable the child to feel confidently assertive and secure, knowing that the parents survived the child’s murderous feelings. In the same light, Winnicott believes that a mother of an adolescent child needs to be able to survive the aggression and rageful states of the adolescent without retaliation, or the adolescent will fear being disowned. This point is important to this study as a rationale for exploring these teenagers levels of comfort in self expression in relation to their mothers.

Winnicott (1986) wrote, “it [the family] is thought of as a place where children discover feelings of love and hate and where they can expect sympathy and tolerance as well as the exasperation which they engender” (p. 140). Regarding personal growth of children Winnicott says, “If your children find themselves at all they will not be contented to find anything but the whole of themselves and that will include the aggressions and destructive elements in themselves as well as the elements that can be labeled loving” (p. 156).

### Mothers’ Development

Jordan (1991) writes, “The special quality of the early attachment and identification between mother and daughter profoundly affects the way the self is defined in women as well as the nature of their interpersonal relatedness” (p. 35). Many studies of women indicate that connectedness is important to women and that they talk more about being connected and relationships in general than men do. However, Miller (1991) believes that such preoccupation runs the danger of being misinterpreted by scholars in the field as dependency. “It is not about wanting or needing to be dependent or independent, but about wanting to be in relationships with others, and, again, to really comprehend the other; wanting to understand the other’s feelings; and wanting to contribute to the other” (p. 22). Surrey (1991) sums up relationship by implying that it is probable that for women at all life stages, relational needs are primary and that healthy, dynamic relationships are the motivating force that propels psychological growth. Accordingly, a woman’s sense of self is enhanced, interpreted, defined, empowered,

refined, and strengthened not through separation with others; rather, in connection with others through mutuality of empathic sharing and resonating and maintaining those relationships and connections.

There are, however, according to Surrey (1991), some necessary early developmental precursors for a woman's psychological growth. First, there is a heightened sense of personal identity and personal power in the context of relationships with others. Second, women possess early emotional sensitivity that is later developed into complex cognitive and affective interactions (also termed empathy). Such empathy brings about a sense of connectedness and capacity for identification. Third, this connectedness and identification become the basis for later feelings of understanding and being understood. These are important elements for the foundation of self-acceptance and are fundamental to the feeling of existing as part of a unit or network larger than the individual.

Often, women are in conflict when they honor their needs. Women experience their needs as expressions of selfishness; they feel they have to take care of others before attending to their own needs. "A lifetime of training to put others ahead of themselves and to be sensitive to others' emotional states has not helped women to identify their inner need states not to feel entitled to pursue their own gratification" (Stiver, 1991, p. 155). Stiver also postulates that women obtain some sort of vicarious gratification and fulfillment as a result of serving and helping others and neglecting their own needs. That type of gratification has its own possible consequences of feeling deprived because vicarious gratification does not adequately replace direct gratification. When women live

vicariously through others, they often project their own needs onto others, which interferes with their ability to differentiate appropriately their needs from those of others. This applies equally for both generations in the mother-daughter relationship.

It is not unlikely that the parents' own adolescent fantasies resurface as they see their children becoming more independent from them. Consequently, some parents may become resentful and jealous and at times over-identify with their children as they realize the sharp contrast of their children's youthfulness compared to them. Some parents may even develop envy and contempt for their children (Papalia & Olds, 1981).

### Mother-Daughter Relationship

Some phenomena inherent in the mother-daughter relationship have been discussed so far. Differences in the ways mothers relate to their daughters as opposed to their sons affects development differently for boys and girls. For instance, the degree of identification between the mother and her daughter, as well as the mother's attitudes, treatment, and behaviors toward her daughter are at the center of the girl's development. Consequently, in more recent studies of mothers and daughters, Chodorow, Gilligan, Dahl, Surrey, and many others have written extensively about girls and women in an attempt to understand issues about female development.

Anthony and Benedek (1970) posit that mothers who are attuned to their own adolescence and who can recollect their own struggles during that period will be able to show empathy and understanding for their daughters' current struggles. When parents pay insufficient attention to their own emotional histories it becomes more difficult for

them to be able to empathize with their children. “This failure to review fully their own past experiences thwarts their ability to feel within themselves the child's similar fears and anxieties” (p. 345). Through this awareness of their own feelings, “the parent will be able to oscillate between experiencing the child’s feelings as his own and drawing back into an objective view of the feelings; this is the oscillation characteristic of empathy” (p. 347), which is necessary in providing support for the daughter.

In effect, what is being talked about is the issue of empathy or what Jordan (1991) describes as mutual empathy. Jordan (1991) says, “mutual empathy occurs when two people relate to each other in a context of interest in the other, emotional availability and responsiveness, cognitive appreciation of the wholeness of the other; with the intent to understand” (p. 89). Jordan also realizes the necessity of sameness in mutual empathy. She stresses a greater importance in the appreciating the differentness of the other’s experiences. Thus, empathy becomes a complex process, relying on a high level of psychological development and ego strength. A well-differentiated self is necessary in order to gain an appreciation and sensitivity to the differences as well as the similarities with another person.

### Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity theory holds the notion that culture is an indispensable component in the understanding of human behavior, making a correlation between culture and behavior (Segall, Lonner & Berry, 1998). To Winnicott (1971), culture is inherently embedded in one’s tradition and a particular pool that one draws from. With migration, it

is important that cultures are celebrated and be given room for their diversity. Arnstein (1979) argues about the importance of understanding the cultures of others as a means to know the nuances of the differences.

Identity is strongly influenced by the way a child is perceived and responded to by caretakers and by other important family members “for parents’ perception of their offspring is influenced by their own unconscious representational worlds and intrapsychic conflicts, that they respond to and reinforce certain traits in each child” (Siegel, 1992, p. 16). Developmentalists like Erikson (1963), Marcia (1980) and Havighurst (1951) have long proclaimed adolescence as a period where much energy is allotted in strengthening identity formation. Erikson (1968) further believes that the development of identity is not only located in the core of an individual but also in the core of one’s communal culture (p. 22). Likewise, Erikson understands the role of environment, rituals, and culture in the development of personality. For Erikson, identity formation is the primary task of adolescence, enumerating “identity versus identity diffusion” as the crisis of adolescence (Erikson, 1959). This speaks to both cultural and personal identification.

Others in the field of ethnic identity hypothesize on the need to know and identify with one’s ethnic culture. Those markers are identity achievement, foreclosure, identity diffusion, and moratorium (Marcia, 1980). The four notions involve issues dealing with vocation and ideology. In the achievement phase the individual works toward a self-chosen vocation and ideology. Foreclosure is in collaboration with the parent’s chosen vocation and ideology. Identity diffusion is where the adolescent has not claimed a

vocational or ideological course. The last concept, moratorium, speaks to a “crisis” typical of adolescent life dealing with vocational or ideological issues. In the same vein, Erikson describes the stage of moratorium as a time of experimentation in an effort to find a place within society. Identity diffusion is directly linked to the difficulties in the moratorium stage (Erikson, 1959, 1968).

A number of theorists contend that ethnic identity development is fundamental to the establishment of a healthy self-concept, especially during adolescence (Pinderhughes, 1989; Ponterotto & Pedersen, 1993; Phinney, 1990; Tajfel, 1981). Ethnicity is seen as having a strong presence that influences and mobilizes human interaction, which is vital for a healthy self-esteem. Pinderhughes (1989) states that the need for societal readiness to accept one’s ethnicity is a prerequisite whether people feel positive, ambivalent, or negative, which then has great significance for how they behave. With negative internalization of one’s self or one’s ethnic group, people will experience insecurity, anxiety, fear, confusion, and psychological conflict and maladjustment. Minority children may find it especially difficult to resolve ambivalence and integrate good and bad images because of socially shared devaluation of objects of identification.

### Gender Identity

According to Stoller (1968), boys and girls have developed what he refers to as a “core gender identity” by 18 months. Core gender identity is a function of cognitive development, parental attitudes, and gender labeling that occurs before boys and girls are aware of their anatomical differences among themselves. In regards to gender identity,

Gilligan (1982), Chodorow (1978), and Stoller (1964) posit that female identity formation takes place in the context of ongoing relationships, as mothers tend to experience their daughters as more like, and continuous with, themselves. By the same token, they also assert that girls, in identifying themselves as females, experience themselves as being like their mothers, thus fusing the experience of attachment with the process of identity formation. Stoller's studies point out that identity or gender identity, the unchanging core of personality formation, is with rare exception firmly and irreversibly established for both sexes by the time a child is around three. Chodorow (1978), on the other hand, believes that personal meaning, unconscious fantasy, and the potential for emotionally resonant experience begin to be created well before we acquire language.

Phinney (1989) concludes that an inner sense of connection with others is a central organizing feature in girls and women's development, and that psychological crises in women's lives stem from disconnection. This disconnection may for some feel closer to a sense of a total loss of self. The end result for many is the occurrence of depression. Likewise, Kohut (1996) contends, "The connection with an empathic human environment is essential to human psychological existence" (p. 188). He surmises from his analytic work that "the loss of an empathic milieu, the loss of an (any) understanding milieu creates disintegration anxiety, which is the most severe and disabling of all anxieties . . . it carries the loss of that most basic human need, validation of one's psychological existence" (p. 188). In discussing these special adolescent circumstances,

Blos (1962) speaks of parental acceptance and support as key elements in promoting a healthy developing self.

### Constructivism

Constructivism holds the assumption that there is no one truth or reality or any unequivocal appeal to an absolute authority (whether such authority be science, scripture, numbers, sense, data, expert consensus, or whatever). “Indeed, in constructivism, the distinction between issues of knowing (epistemology) and the known (reality) is ambiguous, as the boundaries between subject and object and between internal and external” (Mahoney, 1995, p. 386). Constructivism also holds that people do not discover reality but rather use language to construct a conception of reality through social interaction (Green, Jensen, Jones, 1996). Constructivism proposes that human perception and thinking is a construction rather than a direct reflection of external reality as such (Phillips, 1997).

Meanings are co-constructed in the dialogue between two or more people in which ideas are exchanged (Goolishian & Winderman, 1988). “Constructivism holds that the analysts cannot fully transcend their own subjectivity, and that “truth is a matter of creation or construction” (Stern, 1992, p. 331). Mo-Yee Lee (1996) asserts that a constructivist approach recognizes the presence of diversity as normative.

Mahoney (1995) has enumerated some ethical implications to constructivism. First, he states that values, like objective truth, cannot be justified or otherwise unequivocally authorized. What is good or bad, sacred or profane, right or wrong is

always framed within individual, social, and historical contexts. Second, there is not, never was, and never can be a “truly nondirective” or value-free form of human dialogue. All human perception, learning, knowing, and interaction are necessarily motivated by and permeated with biases, preferences, and valuations (which are usually implicit). Third, as socially sanctioned experts in human experience, psychotherapists often play an important role in their clients’ examination and experimental exploration of personal value (i.e., their morals and ethics).

Telling one’s story makes the implicit explicit, the hidden seen, the unformed formed, and the confused clear. Atkinson (1997) believes that the way we tell our stories is mediated by our culture (p. 7). He advocates that professionals in related fields need to hear the life stories of individuals whose groups are under-represented in the literature. He believes that this process will help establish a balance in the literature and expand the options for us all on a cultural level. In that same spirit, he also adds the following: “More life stories need to be recorded of women and members of culturally diverse groups. In gathering such life stories, one must keep in mind the need to be culturally and theoretically sensitive to the population being studied. Strauss and Corbin (1962, p. 42) introduced this concept as “theoretical sensitivity” and cited the following factors: (a) the attribution of having insight, (b) acquiring the ability to give meaning to data, (c) gaining the capacity to understand, and (d) gaining the capacity to separate the pertinent factors.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Assumptions

1. This research is based on the concept that there is something unique about the adolescent development of a girl when her mother is born and raised in Haiti and the girl is born and raised in America. Meaning making of their experiences will be at the core of the research as they are being constructed by each of the participants.
2. The Haitian cultural values often at odds with the cultural values of Americans. Because of the differences in cultural values (dating, parent-child relationships, self-expression, sexuality, etc.) there is an extra layer to the developmental struggles of the adolescents in this study.
3. Several theories pertaining to adolescence and culture have been constructed to account for female adolescent development in general. Some of the theories may offer insights relating to the development of adolescent Haitian girls.
4. Consistent with the epistemological stance of Denzin's Constructivism theory, "There is no one reality out there." Therefore, I make the assumption that the subjects in my study will have their own realities to account for their experiences and that their experiences will become another set of reality that can be applied to others with similar experiences.

5. There is one reality for a mother who was born in Haiti and is raising her daughter in the America and a different reality for a daughter who was born in America. There is a clash between the two realities.
6. Within the different theories on constructivism, culture, development, and girl development, I examine the usefulness of each one of these theories to best describe the results.
7. My research methodology will help capture and understand the existence of clashes, mediation, and resolution, if any, through construction.

#### Type of Study and Design

This study is exploratory in nature with the main goal of understanding the experiences of Haitian-born mothers living in the United States, raising their American-born daughters. Twelve adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17, and eight parents. Semi-structured audiotaped 90 to 120 minute interviews and field note observations were conducted by the researcher and utilized as data. The mothers responded to the question, (a) “What is your experience as a Haitian-born mother raising an adolescent daughter born in the United States?” and the daughters to (b) “What is your experience as a teenage daughter born in the United States being raised by a Haitian parent who was born in Haiti?”

The intent of the study is to identify theoretical themes about the subjects and to gain, through qualitative means, further exploration and understanding of parental attitudes/experiences of Haitian-born mothers raising American-born adolescent

daughters, as well as the daughters' experiences being raised by Haitian-born mothers. The hope here is to give voice to the subjects being studied as well as uncovering their experiences.

The theoretical and conceptual frame chosen to guide this research is social constructivism, as explicated in the literature review. Some researchers have indicated that more life stories need to be recorded of women and members of culturally diverse groups." This study hopes to help fill that need.

Atkinson (1997, p. 19) and many others speak in favor of advocating for feminine voices to be given opportunities to be heard, analyzed, and theorized about, with the aim of deepening our understanding of women in general. Flax (1990) reverberates that same notion by saying, "The history of women and their activities have to be written into the accounts of self-understanding of our entire cultures" (p. 20). She is one of many feminist theorists who attempt to raise to the broader society's consciousness their effort to recover and explore the aspects of societies that have been suppressed, unarticulated, or denied within a male-dominant viewpoint. Social constructivism holds the notion that reality is a social construction.

The results in this study have been explored and analyzed through grounded theory. A grounded theory is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other (p. 23). This enables the researcher to ask relevant questions of the data

and to make the kind of comparisons that elicit new insights from the data into phenomena and theoretical formulations (p. 31). This describes the procedure used here.

### *Scope of Study*

This study is exploratory in nature with the main goal of understanding the experiences of Haitian-born mothers living in the United States, raising their American-born daughters. Twelve adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17, and eight parents, were interviewed. In addition, one of the respondents (a mother) from New York was interviewed twice. The second interview was done one over the phone. A total of 20 interviews between the two groups (mothers and daughters) were conducted over a 22-month period. Two of the fathers spoke to me informally but did not want to be audio taped or be part of the interview. After having interviewed the 12 adolescents and 8 parents, it became evident that I had reached the point of saturation in the subject matter because no new themes were emerging.

### *Setting*

The interviews were conducted in Chicago (South Side), Florida (Miami), and New York (Queens). All the locations were predominately mixed neighborhoods with mostly African-Americans, Haitians, some Hispanics, and few Caucasians. I originally planned to only interview Haitians in the greater Chicago area, but the venture was proven difficult because many Chicagoans declined being interviewed although they thought this study was of value to the Haitian community. It was my sense that many

parents were concerned not only about their privacy but the privacy of their daughters and their families. The interviews took place in the homes of the participants. Four of the girls were from the Miami area, three were from Queens, New York, and the remaining five were from Chicago. I interviewed two mothers from Miami, three mothers from New York, and three mothers from Chicago.

### *Sample*

The girls in the interview were between the ages of 14 and 17, with 12 girls interviewed. Among the girls, there were six 17-year-olds, two 16-year-olds, two 15-year-olds, and two 14-year-olds. Three of the girls were from single-parent homes (living with their mothers); two lived with their mothers and stepfathers; and the remaining seven lived with their biological mothers and fathers. The interviews were done in English with few words in Creole from some of the respondents when they wanted to describe certain foods or words to this researcher. All of the girls were currently attending high school. All of them reported excelling in school and had plans to go to college.

The parents interviewed were between the ages of 40 to 58. Eight parents were interviewed, three single parents, two never married, one single (divorced) parent, and five married. Four of the mothers were registered nurses, one was a schoolteacher, and three were non-degreed workers holding various jobs. The participants' level of acculturation was high. Although some of them spoke Creole with their children, English

was prevalent in their homes. Consequently, all of the interviews with the mothers were in English and peppered with Creole language from the respondents.

For this project, I have classified middle class as a combination of educational level, income, aspiration, will, and value. Working with Haitians, I needed to consider the significant changes that many Haitian immigrants experience because of their migration. It is not unlikely that upon relocation to a host country professional and skilled Haitian immigrants end up working in unskilled trades, putting them in a different socioeconomic class. Thus middle class will be defined here from two standards—American and Haitian. The family levels of income vary; two of the mothers were from working-class families; one of the families was from an upper-middle class family, and the remaining was from a middle class family.

#### *Data Collection and Instruments*

This research used semi-structured audiotape interviews and field note observations. The participants were asked open-ended questions about their experiences and the meaning attached to Haitian-born mothers raising Haitian-American teenage daughters. The daughters were also asked about their experiences and the meaning attached to being raised by a Haitian-born mother. Questions pertaining to culture, cultural attitudes, expectations, values and beliefs, migration, acculturation, and biculturalism were discussed with the participants. Through the questioning process, different themes and categories began to emerge. The questions were expanded or

amended to gain a deeper understanding of certain phenomena or investigate the data further as the data was being revealed within the study.

### Data Analysis

I used criteria presented by Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 253) for evaluation as the main guide for evaluating and analyzing the data in this qualitative research model. Strauss and Corbin also talk about the need to develop extreme sensitivity to build a theory that speaks to the reality of all the participant's experience (p. 57). I used the grounded theory to help me follow the dictates of this method. By listening to the materials, writing them down, and analyzing them until specific themes emerged, I compared similarities and differences in the coding process with relevant questions about the phenomena as they were reflected in the data. The chair of this project was also instrumental in pointing out those similarities and differences and in helping to adjust research questions for added depth, development, understanding and richness of categories.

Throughout the interviews I made use of memos. As stated by Strauss and Corbin (1990), memoing is an important element of analysis and should never be omitted. For those two researchers, memoing begins at the start of a research project and continues until the final writing. It is important in helping the researcher gain analytical distance (p. 199).

A purposeful sample of Haitian-born mothers and Haitian-American born teenage girls who were being raised by their mothers was used. The study was advertised

through local Haitian churches, a Haitian radio station, Haitian organizations, and through the method of snow-balling (word of mouth). I had a problem in recruiting Haitians in the greater Chicago area. For that reason, I went to Miami and Queens because of the large concentration of Haitians there.

The participants themselves, adults and teenagers alike, recommended other potential participants for the study. In the case of minors, I contacted the mothers to inform them of my interest in interviewing their daughters. If they agreed, I obtained consent from the participants' legal guardian and an assent from the daughter. For some of the participants, either an aunt or an uncle first presented the idea to the child's legal guardian prior to making contact with the legal guardian. It was important to me that different age groups were represented in this study. It turned out that half of the teenagers were 17 years old and the rest of the sample was equally divided between 14-, 15-, and 16-year-olds.

Inclusion criteria for adolescent participants included: (a) Daughters are American-born and have lived in America all their lives. (b) Both parents are Haitian-born. (c) They must reside with their mother. (d) They must be between the ages of 14 and 17. For the mothers, criteria for participation were limited to Haitian immigrant mothers who are raising adolescents in America and whose children are American-born citizens. Selection criteria for parents were as follows: (a) They must be Haitian-born, and raised in Haiti during their adolescence. (b) They must have an adolescent American-born daughter between the ages of 14 and 18 years. (c) They must have resided in the

United States continuously throughout their daughter's life. They could be either single or married.

The sample has excluded (a) adolescents who were born in America but live outside of the America, (b) Adolescents who were not born from two Haitian parents, (c) Adolescents who were not currently living with their biological mother, (d) parents who were not born and raised in Haiti, and (e) adolescents or parents who were being treated for mental illness and/or under psychiatric care. My rationale for this exclusion is to attempt to capture as much as possible the influences of Haiti upon these mothers and to what degree their "Haitianness" or ethnicity has affected them. For these teenagers, I intended to capture the meaning they attached to their mother's parental attitudes, their relationship with their mothers, and their coping mechanisms.

### *Categories Emerging from the Data*

#### Categories from the Girls

For the girls, four main categories emerged: I Am Trying To Make Sense Of It All, Aspiration, Emotional Management, and The Navigation.

#### *I Am Trying To Make Sense Of It All*

This is the category that illuminates or guides all the other categories. It encompasses the teenagers' way of understanding their existence within their family and their culture, and their efforts to understand their roles as Haitian-American born

daughters of Haitian-born mothers. This category also elaborates on the impact of cultural meaning and values in the lives of these adolescents. A noted collaborative effort on the part of the teenagers and their mothers to celebrate their cultures and gain a deep understanding of the mechanics of their cultures was present.

### *Aspiration*

This reveals the girls' ambitions about dreams, fantasies, hopes, and values.

### *Emotional Management*

This captures how the teenagers deal with their emotional world by constantly evaluating how to best express their feelings in keeping with cultural mandates.

### *The Navigation*

This makes clear the girls' stand on their biculturalism and the comparison of the two cultures (American and Haitian)—in their efforts of embracing or discarding aspects of each culture.

### *Categories from the Mother's Results*

For the mothers, three main categories emerged: The Passing Down Of Haitian Values, In Search Of The American Dream, and The Payback

*The Passing Down of Haitian Values*

Here these parents exert great effort to pass down their values onto their children. These include parental expectations, understanding their roots, instilling ethnic pride, and passing down their preoccupation with the manner one is viewed in their communities.

*In Search of the American Dream*

This speaks to the reasons that led these mothers to come to the United States in search of a better life as well as the issues they face here that at times seem to be incompatible to them. Moreover, it addresses the changes that take place with the parents because of their migration.

*The Payback*

This addresses the culmination of their voyage here in America by harvesting the fruit of all the sacrifices that they have made for their children and for themselves by having daughters who have conformed to cultural expectations and have become successful as well.

*Events and Actions That Pointed to Some of the Major Categories*

During the second or third interview with the girls and the mothers, I began to have a sense of the importance of culture in the lives of the subjects. The mothers talked in the sense of passing down their culture to their daughters, and the daughters talked in

terms of complying or remaining true to their cultures and what it meant to be daughters of Haitian mothers. My observations of the presence of culture remained the same as the respondents continued to demonstrate the importance of the passing on and taking in of their Haitian culture.

Although I spoke to the mothers and the daughters separately, a mirroring went on between the mothers and the daughters when it came to the knowledge of cultural intake that eventually led to cultural transmission. As the mothers searched for the American dream, the girls were also searching for their own dream within the frame of their Haitian-American culture. The mothers were expecting the culmination of the teaching through a “payback” from the daughters in a sense that they have acquired cultural knowledge and live by expected direction, behaviors, and values. The daughters in turn were dedicated in this payback through their conformity and scholastic achievements.

These categories were steady as they began to emerge during the interviews. The interviews lasted 90 to 120 minutes with each participant. Few of the participants were interviewed twice. I examined the data looking for differences and similarities. The categories were tightly linked with corresponding subcategories. Strauss and Corbin (1990) believe that tightly linked categories yield sound and satisfactory theoretical frames.

### Theoretical Sampling Guided Data Collection

Theoretical sampling calls for three different types of coding: Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding deals specifically with naming and categorizing phenomena through close examination of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62). This step is the first one in analyzing the data, without which other steps could not be achieved. In this step assumptions about phenomena are questioned and examined. For the girls, all of the interviews were conducted in English. For the mothers, English was mainly spoken, with sporadic Creole. After I made appropriate translations, the data was closely examined leading to many discoveries about the content of the interviews. The interview responses were compared for similarities and differences as the questions about the experiences of Haitian-born mothers and Haitian-American-born daughters were being asked.

The next step was to categorize the data with their proper conceptual names. This entailed the breaking down of observation, sentence, and paragraph, and giving each discrete incident, idea, or event a name, or something standing for or representing a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 63).

Another step was axial coding where the data was put back together in new ways by making connections between a category and its subcategories. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 97). The questions asked were in the attempt to understand the relationship of one phenomenon to another. As such, my objective was to gain a deeper understanding of relational issues relating one phenomenon to another.

The final step was selective coding, in which the researcher's task was a purposeful integration of all the interpretive work involved in the research. Through this, I developed a storyline and translated and conveyed the story analytically. "Central to the procedures is the selection of a core category and the relating of all major categories both to in and to each other" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 142).

Theoretical sampling is a sampling on the basis of concepts that have proven theoretical relevance to the evolving theory. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), proven theoretical sampling indicates the significance of certain concepts (p. 177). Data from the respondents was obtained systematically. I was sensitive to the needs of the participants, and the sampling and questions were planned out, which allowed the data to be broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways. "It is the central process by which theories are built from data" (p. 57). Hence, theoretical sensitivity is a key component in this process. The sampling arrived at a point of saturation, which was indicative that the categories were achieved.

#### Hypotheses Pertaining to Conceptual Relations

1. There is an interaction between the participants' culture and the manner in which they experienced one another.
2. There would be a relation between the two will be demonstrated. With the emergence of the themes and categories, this hypothesis was tested because the participant's culture became the all-encompassing phenomenon.

Culture held up all the way through the research. All of the categories that emerged within the study supported the notion of culture and its force with the mothers as well as the daughters. The themes and categories that emerged had strong relationships with cultural dictates from the mothers and cultural intake from the daughters. Thus there were no negative findings.

#### *Selection of Core Category*

For the girls, the core category of *Making Sense Of It All* became apparent during the beginning phase of this research. Throughout the interviews, the girls made reference to their culture, their knowledge of what their culture expects from them, and demonstrated a constant attempt in trying to make sense of their culture. For the girls, this category had a central role in the way they understood their relationships with their mothers. Moreover, this category is closely related to the other categories in the study. The collection of data was gradual and the emergence of the themes was not difficult because of the consistent presence in the study.

For the mothers, *Passing Down Of Haitian Values* to their daughters also unfolded during the beginning phase of this study. It was selected because it became obvious that this particular category was the driving force for the mothers. This process was evident by the saturation of this category throughout the interview process. This particular theme is also related to the other categories in the study.

*Sources for Error and Attempt to Control*

Two sources of potential error were identified in this research. The first source of error is the researcher—a Haitian-born woman, who migrated in the United States as a teenager. As a Haitian mother who is raising Haitian-American children in the United States, my value system and beliefs, like those of the mothers in the study, have to do with my own degree of acculturation. In effect, this study is in a sense auto-ethnographic because like the teenagers and the mothers, I continuously go back and forth to the expectations of my Haitian culture and my new understanding of the American culture that I was slowly integrating as part of my being. My mother, like the other mothers in this study, was in fact looking for the American dream as her offspring vicariously began to also look toward that direction.

The second source of error is that my own migration coincided with the age of the girls in the study. I came in with my own preconceived idea about Haitian culture as being silencing and stifling and where children are not permitted a degree of self-expression within the family system.

By the same token, I believe that my Haitianness was of benefit to the subjects because I could naturally understand the position of both groups of respondents about issues of conformity, loyalty, roots, Haitian pride, scholastic expectations, acculturation, and the management of navigating two cultures. Therefore, there is a familiar experience when the respondents wrestle with “the way they are,” “the way they ought to be,” and “the way they want to become.” Moreover, my familiarity with the culture and being Haitian

increased my sensitivity to the subjects. Those issues presented both an opportunity and caution in regards to proceeding with the respondents. The opportunity is that I was able to empathically relate to the mothers and the daughters. I took caution to put my own identifications aside so that I could be objective in relating to what both the mother and the daughter told me. I attempted to control the sources of error through constant dialogue, feedback, debriefing, and close monitoring from the dissertation chair and other committee members.

#### *Ethical Standards/Protecting Human Rights*

One of most important aspects in using human subjects in a research project is to ensure that their rights are protected, and as a researcher, I needed to maintain the highest degree of ethical standards. For the same reason, I remained cognizant that there could be some risks involved. “Recalling different and difficult memories will arouse all kinds of feelings and emotions. Therefore, it is never appropriate to push a person further than he or she is ready to go with a topic” (Atkinson, 1997, p. 35) With that in mind, I remained sensitive to that possibility. Therefore, I worked closely with my dissertation chair and committee for feedback and guidance, as well as adhering to IRB protocol and the American Psychological Association guidelines.

In addition, I gave each participant specific instruction on how to get in touch with me in case they were experiencing any discomfort such as changes in moods, feelings, and behavior as a result of their participation in this study. Furthermore, special efforts were made to include a debriefing process that would allow the participants to

express any concerns they might have. Within a day of the interview, I telephoned each subject to inquire about her experience of the interview. Within a week, I made another contact with the participant to again inquire about any reactions. Lastly, each participant was told that if they experienced any difficulties, they could have at least three debriefing meetings with me in close supervision with my dissertation chair Arnold Levin, Ph.D. Information about ICSW was also given to them in case they had any concerns or complaints. Upon their request, they were also informed that I could refer them for counseling at a local community mental health center should the need arise. None of the participants reported any discomfort or difficulties or requested counseling.

I did not use deception in this research project. I explained to each subject their rights to withdraw and decline at any time without penalty or consequences. The written statement outlined that their participation was strictly voluntary with the option to terminate their participation at any time. Furthermore, the subjects were given a clear explanation of the nature of the research project. Atkinson (1997, p. 28). talks about the importance of explaining to subjects the nature of the research project. "The researcher should be clear in communicating the purpose of the research" (p. 38). I personally went over the consent form to assure that it was well understood by each participant. Each participant was given the choice of being interviewed in English or Creole. All of the participants preferred being interviewed in English. Each adolescent and their parents signed consent to their participation. The adult participants also signed consent for participation. The original signed consents remain part of the project and each participant was given a copy of the signed consent (Appendix A).

Steps were taken to protect the confidentiality and assure anonymity of each of the participants by distorting any identifiable data. Special coding was used to identify the participants and all material involved in this research will be destroyed upon completion of this project. The participants were informed that only others who had direct relation to this research would have access to the data. These included ICSW school personnel, typists, and such. Also, within at least five years of this project, any and all information obtained for this project will be locked in a file cabinet.

Lastly, I discussed with the participants the benefits of this type of project in terms of gaining a clearer understanding about themselves and their culture. Furthermore, it could be of benefit to others to gain an understanding of the Haitian culture as well as adding the experiences of Haitian-born mothers and their American-born daughters to the literary world. The possibility of using the data for publishing, workshops, or teaching articles was also discussed with the participants. Whatever future use of this research project, the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants will be protected.

## CHAPTER V

### THEMES AND RESULTS

#### Girls' Results

My parents always tell me to value who I am, what I can become, and what I will become.

#### *Introduction*

This study focuses on the experiences of first-generation Haitian adolescent girls and their mothers. The aim of this study is to understand their experiences and ascertain what type of role culture plays in the mother-daughter dyad. For these first-generation Haitian-American adolescents, their experiences have individualistic characteristics that are distinctive to the Haitian-American culture. The girls interviewed seemed caught up in the phenomenon of making sense of what they have been taught as children by their mothers, understanding their Haitian culture and the American culture, and attempting to understand what is innate to each culture and how such understanding affects them. Consequently, everything that the girls are and believe in involves a constant making sense of the potentials of the two cultures. There are four main themes in the girls' results

with corresponding subheadings or categories with each theme. These themes and categories are discussed below.

Although the girls were not born in Haiti, their actions, behaviors, and way of life are rooted in an intense belief system that represents Haiti and Haitian life. Their mothers are by far the most influential entity in their lives that guides their coming of age. Beliefs about family ties, solidarity, conformity, loyalty, pride, ancestry, gratitude, aspiration, emotional management, dual identity, establishing independence, and feminism are the didactic in their overall effort of making sense about who they are. These components are the core elements of this study as they provide an avenue through which these teenagers understand who they are and their relationship with the world. Their internalization of how they feel about their mothers and their culture makes those two entities an extension of the girls. Therefore, they understand themselves through their identification with their mothers and, through that identification, they have a sense of gratitude for their mothers.

The process began with a phone call to the mothers inquiring about their interests in allowing this researcher to interview their daughter regarding this project. After the mother agreed, this researcher would ask to speak to the daughter to obtain her permission. Most of the time, the mother would inform this researcher that it was not necessary to speak directly to the girl because they would tell her about the study. As a researcher, I began to develop a sense of understanding of the culture. It was important that the teenagers have a sense that they had a choice in being part of this study. As a Haitian, I understand the issue of cooperating with one's parents and following directives. Nevertheless, it was my goal to ensure that the adolescents had a voice in

being a participant. I had to insist that I inform the girls personally about the study. At the time of the interviews, this researcher usually made it part of the interview process to discuss at length the reasons for this study and the importance of the girls' voluntary participation. This researcher gave them an out if it was not their own choosing to be part of the interview.

In the beginning I usually sensed some level of distrust. Being Haitian myself, I imagine perhaps these girls felt that they "had to" be part of this study because they were told to do so by their parents. I, on the other hand, wanted to make sure that they knew that they had the choice to participate or refuse. After a full explanation of the study, there was a noticeable shift from their passive demeanor to a more active one. Issues regarding confidentiality seemed to lessen their rigid, standoffish posture when I assured full anonymity in the interview. Their eagerness to share their stories with me became evident by their enthusiasm that they would be "represented"— meaning that their voices would be echoed and/or heard somewhere. It was quite important for them to tell me of their experiences so that I could be accurate about their perception of the culture.

My observation was that many of the girls perhaps expected me to have "insider information" in terms of cultural behavior and expectations that are culturally ingrained. Some of the teenagers I interviewed seemed to be constantly trying to sort out what is cultural or distinct to their family. The fact that I am within the age of their mothers also enticed their curiosity about my stance as a Haitian woman. Questions like, "Do you do that?" or comments like, "I hope you don't do that" were their efforts to find out whether certain attitudes or beliefs were unique to the Haitian culture or population. I wondered

out loud with the girls about their feelings of being interviewed by a Haitian woman. Unanimously, the girls said they did not mind and thought that it was a great idea because not much has been written about people like them (Haitian girls). Most believed that because I am Haitian, it is perhaps of benefit because I know about the Haitian culture. It was also my sense that they were looking at me as a Haitian person to validate what they were saying, thinking, or feeling. I believe that being Haitian encourages and fosters some type of transference regarding their mothers. They seem to anticipate an empathic understanding from me through linguistic, nonverbal, and cultural knowledge as many of them often asked me to validate, respond, or echo certain realities. On the other hand, perhaps being Haitian may have added apprehension with some of the girls. Case in point, one girl said the following to me: “I hope you won’t take this the wrong way. Haitian adults are too critical.”

For some of the girls, I had a sense of their triumphs and confusion, their ambivalence about understanding their stance on the Haitian and American cultures. Their enthusiasm about their connection to their culture and their appreciation for their ethnicity was evident. Some gave their full approval of the Haitian culture and the way their parents were raising them, while others were not sure how to take in the differences of the two cultures. Those were eager, bright-eyed, highly spirited, and motivated girls whose futures are promising and who were concerned about conforming to expectations of their cultures. They were full of hope and spunk about their foreseen success as they all planned to go to college and obtain a professional degree. These girls had some wish to reach independence and mastery by their aspirations to go away to college, and at

same time there was a presence of a regressive pull to be attached to their families—their holding environment.

The girls' sense of ethnic urgency resonated throughout the interviews as they attempted to have some harmonious understanding of cultures and self. By cultures, I am referring to both American and Haitian cultures, especially in the areas of cultural norms and expectations. According to these girls, family togetherness, respect, and education are the most important values in the Haitian culture. Other aspects that are important to Haitian families, according to these girls, are conformity, privacy, self-respect, loyalty, pride, and preoccupation with family reputation.

The girls describe the Haitian family as being very strict and having high expectations in regards to academic achievement. The girls in the interviews believe that most Haitian parents are overachievers and, consequently, like their parents, they notice themselves becoming overachievers. To many of these girls and their mothers, a C grade is a failing one as they equate such grades as a failure. Their girls' ultimate goal is to obtain A's in their scholastic work; otherwise they perceive themselves as not living up to their potential or expectations.

Besides their schoolwork, their parents are practically obsessed about their overall behavior. Socially acceptable behaviors are taught to them at a very early age and they are expected to demonstrate that they have acquired the necessary social skills to be part of a larger community. The girls spoke candidly of the strictness of their parents and agreed that their parents could exercise less strictness when it comes to certain issues. All of the girls shared their concerns about disappointing their mothers and dread their

mother's disappointment about them. The discussion of this very issue was quite upsetting to some of the girls to the point of tears.

It became evident that these adolescent girls had a strong sense of gratitude toward their mothers because of the sacrifices their mothers made for them. Whether it was through them holding several jobs to send them to parochial school or having made the difficult trip from Haiti to America, they feel indebted to their mothers. That very issue culminates the idea that they cannot "take things for granted" and the pressure to honor their parents' hard work through their own success. They end up with the conclusion that their parents' vigilance and strictness are the byproduct of giving them the opportunities that the parents never had growing up in Haiti.

One of the girls summed it up by saying, "I guess it is because they come from somewhere they could not get all of that . . . and they are trying to make sure that we [kids] take advantage of what they never had. That's why I cannot take for granted what being here [America] means to my family." This type of comment reveals the adolescents' understanding to continue to emulate their parents' ideas about migration and a strong work ethic. Secondly, it is reflective of how family members think of one another because of the interrelation with one another. Working together allows for cohesion and togetherness with a common goal of achieving social, emotional, spiritual, and educational stability.

*Trying to Make Sense of it All*

What was certain was the continued effort on the part of the girls to navigate their way into two cultures. *Trying To Make Sense Of It All* encompasses the teenagers' way of understanding their existence within their family and their culture. This heading also is an integrative push for the girls to organize themselves and have some ordering principles around life events. This category of making sense of it all is an integrative concept or consolidation that also helps the girls solidify aspects of their personalities on their way of becoming themselves. The accumulation of cultural existence and meaning interfaced with the knowledge of culture comes into play as a way of putting meaning to their lives. It is also a way of sorting out who they are and what they believe in. Consequently, this making sense of it deals particularly with *Maintaining Ties and Solidarity, Conformity and Loyalty, Academic Expectations and Achievement, Roots and Pride, In Search of the American Dream, and Gratitude.*

Making sense of it all has an all-encompassing presence throughout the interview. The core category unfolded and became evident as the driving force for the adolescents in this study. Throughout the study, whether they were talking about their aspirations, managing their emotions, or navigating their ways to their understanding of the nuances in the two cultures, all that was compounded with the solid presence of making sense of their lives. It became noticeable that making sense of it all was the essential phenomenon that echoed in all the categories. This making sense of it all in a way fits in with these

adolescents' developmental process of being teenagers and trying to make sense out of their lives as adolescents.

In *Maintaining Ties* the participants discussed the importance of family togetherness (nuclear and extended) and being there for one another during joyful and sad times. This also entails visiting relatives in Haiti as a means to know one's relatives and becoming familiar with Haiti.

*Conformity and Loyalty* deals with knowing and accepting expected values, and knowing cultural rules necessary for cultural survival—and solidarity is more about a sense of duty one has toward one's family, how a family is supposed to “stick together.” Conformity is also abiding by the rules and expectations of parents while refraining from questioning parents' motives, upholding family privacy, preserving the family's reputation, showing unconditional respect for elders, and abiding by societal expectations in the way one dresses, speaks, and behaves in the larger community.

*Academic Expectations* speak to the great value that the family puts on achievement and academic success, and the efforts of the respondents to uphold and maintain their achievements. *Roots and Pride* conveys the knowledge and the pride of knowing and understanding who one is by focusing on aspects that are typically of cultural relevance. *Roots and Pride* has a strong link with ethnic identity, which is important in helping these teenagers clarify who they are. In the search of the American dream, the participants stay attached to the plight of the Haitian struggle and economic deprivation as well as the opportunity that America can and will provide for them. Like their parents, these teenagers see America as a place where they can aspire for a better tomorrow as well

as realizing their dreams. Gratitude illustrates a deep sense of appreciation and indebtedness that these teenagers have for the sacrifices that their parents have made and are making for them. The sense of having to repay that debt is expressed through adhering to cultural expectations.

### Maintaining Ties and Solidarity

My idea of a good Haitian girl is one who goes to school, does what she has to do in school, they have a social life as well. To my parents, a good Haitian girl is one who goes to school and get straight A's . . . One who respects herself and others. . . . And one who listens to her parents.

*Maintaining Ties And Solidarity* is an important aspect in the Haitian culture. Families of the participants do this to keep tradition and values alive. One way of maintaining ties is through visits to Haiti and keeping close contacts with family members.

One girl said, "My family gets together all the time and we hang around with each other whenever we can."

Another girl said, "My mom thinks that it is important for me to go to Haiti to visit my relatives. When I first went there, I didn't like it. The dust . . . um . . . I couldn't get used to the outhouses."

A way of maintaining ties is to ensure that their children visit Haiti or keep in close contact with family members whether they are near or far. Most of the participants have already visited Haiti, and it did make a difference if they visited Haiti only when

they were latency age or younger and/or they went back when they were adolescents.

They did seem to get more out of Haiti if they were older.

One informant said, “I didn’t want to return there because the first time I went I didn’t like it. I was about nine years old . . . But my mom told me that I had to go back. I remember telling her that I did not want to go, but she made me. Now I like going there, maybe because I am older.”

Some wanted to visit their mother’s place of birth. “I love going to Haiti, especially au Cap [Cap-Haitian].” Visiting Haiti serves a double purpose for these girls—getting to know their relatives, and satisfying a keen curiosity to know where their parents come from.

One teenager articulated the following: “I have not heard good things about Haiti . . . I am going to go there for the first time in two weeks . . . I heard that Haiti is a very poor place. I imagine that there will be a lot of homeless people . . . No electricity . . . I want to go anyway because I want to learn more about where my parents came from . . . I won’t really know it until I know it myself.” For some girls, their trips to Haiti resulted in a stronger desire to return and know more about the culture, its people, and history.

Another teenager said, “When I go to Haiti, I like hanging out with people there. They think that I speak Creole funny . . . I don’t really know much about Haiti and I wish I could learn more about it.” Ironically, Creole is the only language that most teenagers have the desire to speak. To them, it is more the language of all Haitian people, while French is seen as a language for a select few.

Those who have not made that trip talk of their desire to visit Haiti. Many talk of their sadness because they cannot visit Haiti as they wish because of political and social unrest. They concede that if it was not for these problems they would like to make frequent trips there.

This statement is typical of many in the study: “I heard that it is unsafe to go to Haiti. My mother told me that there are a lot of *Zinglindos* [hoodlums] running the streets and they are pretty bad.” These respondents anticipate insecurity and unrest while in Haiti, a prospect that deters them from visiting Haiti more frequently. Regardless of the conditions in Haiti, many still vow to return to Haiti to continue to learn about their parents’ native land.

The aspect of *Solidarity* in the Haitian culture is appealing to the girls because it gives them a constant presence of being taken care of and protected by family members. It means that family comes first. It is about duty, responsibility, and an overall a sense of togetherness. Haitians who are here, for the most part, continue to help their relatives left behind in Haiti—monetarily or emotionally. This is a testimony to the sense of duty that Haitian families have toward their members.

One girl said,

I like the fact that we are very big on family. I know some kids in my school where they don’t get along with family members. What I like about Haitian families is that even though they have their differences, they work it out and they stick by each other . . . One thing that gets them angry with us is when we don’t get along . . . My parents send money to my grandmother, my uncles, my aunts, and a bunch of other people. You can’t leave your family member for your friend. It doesn’t matter how far or close they are from you . . . whether they are in Haiti or here, we still talk to each other and we take care of one another. I like the music, the food, how everything is a tradition . . . Like big bows in our hair, the

fluffy dresses. We would shop for two weeks to get the right Easter outfit. I like the way we like celebrate many things. I think Haitians are really close. You can relate to any Haitian. You can tell a Haitian from another culture. When Haitians get together, they can talk for hours and they are never quiet . . . I think it's easier to be friends with Haitians than non-Haitians because of the way I feel like I can relate to them." Likewise, solidarity is about maintaining and nurturing traditions, camaraderie, friendship, and mutual understanding.

Maintaining ties and solidarity also means keeping alive family traditions, with the main purpose of strengthening those ties. Family traditions such as get-togethers to share meals and good conversation are another way to nurture, encourage, and solidify these ties. These meals are not just about eating but the bonding that occurs at such times.

### Conformity and Loyalty

Haitian parents expect their kids to adapt to their rules and abide by them unconditionally . . . Things like how kids are supposed to listen to their parents and nothing else . . . I am not supposed to question them because I am being raised like a Haitian, and Haitian kids are not supposed to question their parents.

This quote from one of the girls represents the view of all the participants. Being "raised like a Haitian girl" means that the girls conform to the expectations of the parents. Conformity and loyalty are encouraged and expected in Haitian families. From an early age, children are taught to obey rules and expectations of their nuclear or extended families and the household. This conformity serves as a way for children to maintain the cultural values to be part of the larger community. One way of conforming is by showing respect for oneself and others by the way one speaks, dresses, behaves, carries out social and educational expectations, and one's responsiveness to adult's directions, as well as mannerisms and the ability to remain private. Conformity is also respecting the

hierarchical makeup of one's home shows the great emphasis on generational hierarchy or boundaries.

Conformity about practicing their faith and being spiritual is another way of making sense of it all. Although these teenagers are not necessarily enthusiastic on the idea of attending church on a regular basis, they have to attend church because their parents command them to.

This reflects the opinion of several of the girls:

Religion and family is a big thing for the Haitian culture . . . Religion is important because the state that Haiti is in right now, I think that religion and their faith is all that they have. Money and riches is not an option for them. Things are so hard, and all they have is to pray to God. Going to church is important to my mother. My mother would make me go even if I didn't want to go. She would tell me that she doesn't care because she is my mother, and what she tells me I have to do. Many times I don't feel like going to church, but my mother insists that I go every Sunday.

I had expected to find religion and spirituality at the forefront of many endeavors with these teenagers and their families. I specifically asked the respondents (mothers and daughters) whether religion and spirituality were the main driving force behind certain ethical and moral decisions. Every respondent stated that religious concerns were not the main force, but rather cultural and familial expectations.

Dress code is an area where parents are very concerned and will impose their views rigidly. One girl said,

My stepfather is especially strict on the kind of clothes I wear . . . No braids, big hoop earrings, and certain types of clothes." Another said, "My mom doesn't like the low-rise jeans. She thinks that if your shirt rises just a little, it's that I am trying to expose my body or something . . . When I wear something she does not approve of she tells me to change.

Another said, “I can wear them as long as I am not going outside.”

Conformity also means not challenging the mother’s view. I asked the girls whether they challenge their parents on those types of issues. Some girls could not conceive of challenging their mothers, while others admit that they sometimes do, but within limits. One girl said,

I don’t say anything to my mother. I figure that it’s better not to rock the boat . . . I don’t want to deal with it and I don’t like the lecture and the arguing . . . I don’t wear them outside because they told me not to . . . I must admit I have been tempted to wear them anyway but I usually decide that it’s not worth the argument . . . I stay within the limits of what I should and should not do.

Another respondent said,

She [her mother] is the one that usually buys my clothes and there are certain clothes that she will not buy . . . The ones that are questionable are not from her . . . They are from my friends and my cousins . . . She doesn’t like the “daisy dukes” [short cutoff pants] that my Tatie [Auntie] bought me. I wear them sometimes but she allows me to only wear them in the summer time because she knows it’s hot . . . When I wear them, she would complain that my legs and my butt are showing.

Conforming to family values and expectations is important to these girls because it keeps discord with their parents at bay.

Conformity is closely related to the family’s preoccupation with how others in the community view the family. The ways one dresses, acts, and speaks are direct reflection on the mother or other family members.

She [mother] worries about what other people might think about me or her. When she takes me out, she knows that I have manners and I won’t embarrass her. Some people might not want to take their kids out because of their behavior, but my mom can take me to a group of Haitians and I will be polite and respectful, and not embarrass her.

All of the girls expressed their awareness that their mothers keep a vigilant watch over all aspects related to conformity because the way a daughter is viewed has a direct reflection on the mother. One girl stated,

My parents are so concerned about their reputation . . . They always worry about what I wear. They believe that ‘fast girls’ wear that stuff . . . She [mother] is worried about what people would say about me . . . She would always say ‘If someone sees you they are going to think that we didn’t show you how to dress and blah blah blah and they will think that I am not raising you right. That is very typical of Haitian parents. They are always worried about what other people would say about them . . . I don’t care what people say, theirs [kids] are not even better . . . ’Cause if people are going to say something they will say it anyway no matter what you do.

As this girl put it, her mother believes that respectable girls would not wear back-baring clothing. The daughter’s choice in clothing is a reflection on the mother’s capability and ability to provide appropriate guidance to her daughter.

Wearing certain clothes may be seen as being disrespectful not only to the mother, but also to the father, the self, the community, and the culture. The way others view the mother is important to her as it is equated with having “done a good job.” If her child is judged, *she* will naturally be judged. Having judgment passed on them will bring shame and discord to the family’s name or reputation. “Family” in this context is used in a broader sense representing both nuclear and broader kin relationships, including non-blood relations. Family members included people who are “adopted,” creating a broader sense of having a family. This adds to the sense of kinship and a tighter sense of community. Part of the balance for members of communities of this type is that there is a sense that people take care of one another.

The parents are concerned about their status within the Haitian community. A teenager stated, “Having manners is also a big thing in the Haitian culture. If I give my mother a glass of water and if I don’t serve it to her on a tray she won’t take it . . . ‘Please’ and ‘thank you,’ kissing people even if I don’t know them. I have to do all that. If I don’t do that, it’s a reflection on my mother and how she did not teach me manners.”

The girls do not seem as concerned about what people think or say about them as their mothers are because they believe that no matter what, people will choose to be critical if they want to be critical. Unanimously, however, what their mothers think of them is important. This particular girl said,

Yeah, because my mom is the only person I truly care about what she thinks of me; my dad, yeah, but not like I do my mom . . . My aunt and my family [extended] . . . if they think a certain way about me is their prerogative. My mom is the only one I worry about. I don’t want to disappoint her. It has been like that ever since I was a little girl. It was always important to me not to disappoint her.

When I asked them about the intensity of their worries about not disappointing their mothers, all of them held the same feelings regarding this matter. One teenager said, “Because, my mom has done a lot for me.” This show of gratitude is embedded in many aspects of the teenagers’ lives and often is the driving force behind what they choose to do or not do. This will be discussed more fully later in this chapter.

Similarly, remaining loyal to one’s family is an expected virtue that is highly regarded in the Haitian family and is a byproduct of conformity. This loyalty may take the shape of privacy, sacrifice, the show of respect through the code of silence, and togetherness. One girl’s family motto is, “What goes on in this house stays in this house”—an example of the privacy code or expectation of privacy. Remaining silent also

means that the teenagers are less likely to use sources outside of their kin relationships to express their thoughts and emotions. Keeping family issues private gives their members a sense of protection, of not being judged by outsiders. There is confidence that family members will not only help to resolve the problems but also share the burden of protecting the member's name, as a way to protect their own name. This speaks to one's immediate surroundings as a facilitating environment in which one is expected to grow. This rule about privacy is often mediated by confiding in trusted adults.

Conformity includes not questioning parents' motives. The teenagers' bicultural status creates some ambiguous feelings in this respect. When they make their American values known, they find themselves at odds with their parents, and their efforts of self-expression can be met with a level of disapproval and criticism.

In the Haitian culture, a child is seen as impertinent if she asks her parents why. Thus, children in Haitian societies must refrain from questioning or disagreeing with their elders.

One girl commented on that very idea with the following: "When I asked my mother why, she would answer, 'Why are you asking me why?' It does not make sense to me; why is she answering my question by a why?" This is contrary to the American culture where children are taught that it is not only all right to have opinions, they may be encouraged to ask questions. "My non-Haitian friends don't have that as an issue—their parents don't react the same way when they ask them why."

When they ask their parents "why," some girls stated they feel that they are not conforming to their parents' expectations, but at the same time do not understand the

logic behind such expectations. All of the adolescent subjects admit that are aware of the fine line that exists between conformity and loyalty, but have difficulty conforming to expected rules. At times, they may risk certain consequences in order to express their views. When I asked several teenagers if they were conflicted about discussing their family situation with me, one of the girls, who reflected the feelings of many other girls in the study, said, “No, you have to be accurate for what you are trying to find out to be exact . . . So I have to be truthful.” This statement shows that there are distinct family idioms and cultural idioms which sometimes overlap. Talking about their cultural idioms in the context of these interviews gave these girls permission to talk about their family idioms; therefore, they did not feel conflicted breaking the family rule of privacy.

These girls do not seem to be as preoccupied as their parents are about what people say. They contend that they choose not to do certain things because of their own reasons, not because they are worrying about others’ reactions. From their point of view, their prohibition is more self-imposed than their mother’s. Their only preoccupation is how their mothers view them.

Likewise, respect and self-respect are another way of conforming to parental and societal expectations. In the Haitian culture, respect means yielding to elders and authority figures. Since parents are viewed as authorities, this means that the children unequivocally surrender to their parents. Instinctively, the girls seem to know how to respond to their parents in ways that would concur with those expectations. A respondent’s statement, “I just know when to keep my mouth shut,” is a reflection of that very idea. Their understanding of the word “respect” is that it is part of their culture and

they have to abide by the cultural rules and expectations as dictated by their families, especially when dealing with hierarchy.

Another girl said, “Respect for your elders is a big thing in the Haitian culture . . . You are supposed to acknowledge the fact that they are adults, and not children . . . When they speak to you, you are not supposed to say ‘Um’; you are supposed to say yes or no . . . You just can’t say hi to an adult, you have to kiss them.”

The teenagers’ views about respect are different from their parents’. To them, expressing their views is not disrespectful; to their parents, it is a lack of respect. One girl said,

I am just expressing myself . . . She [her mother] says that I don’t respect her . . . To them, respect is only listening to them regardless what they tell you . . . In America, respect is like both sides of the story . . . You have to listen when kids talk, and then the kids have to listen when the parents talk . . . For Haitians only the kids have to listen to their parents and what they say goes. They don’t want to hear the child’s point of view for anything . . . Respect to me is that you give respect, you get respect. My parents don’t understand that . . . They can speak to you any which way but you can’t.

As stated previously, exchanges of this type bring discord to the parent-child dyad because they represent issue of conflict between Haitian and American values, a sort of interaction of those two values. Ultimately, it appears that these teenagers see the mandate to respect their elders primarily as a means to yield to elders and take in their wisdom.

People who are older than you have more experience. They do know more than I do. I am only 17; people have forty years worth of stuff, fifty years worth of stuff, and that is many years of knowledge and experience. Even twenty years it’s still more that I haven’t had. So I understand that, but we [kids] too have something to say.” Mentally there is a strong presence of their internalized parents that keeps conformity, expectations and loyalty intact.

This particular girl said, “To my parents, I am what they are, I am what they created. If I go on the street I have to have manners . . . If I don’t it’s like they have no manners, because they taught me my values.”

Discipline or the threat of discipline is regarded as a reminder in upholding conformity and loyalty. In my talk with Haitian parents, other Haitians, or reading about the Haitian culture, many do claim that corporal punishment was necessary in their upbringing. Discipline is mostly done in the form of corporal punishment.

This teenager said, “My parents used to spank us. Actually, I have never been grounded or got any other restriction. Come to think of it, I am not sure that they know about stuff like that. If they know, they haven’t used it.”

Many parents adopt corporal punishment as a means to ensure consequences for lack of conformity. Many of the girls were corporally punished at some time. Although most have not been corporally punished since about the age of eight or so, they are apprehensive about that possibility and, consequently, refrain from opposing their mothers’ wishes. As one of the girls put it, “I know my limits and I know not to rock the boat and when to stop. Besides, I don’t want to get hit.”

#### Academic Expectations and Achievement

The participants, teenagers and mothers, agreed as to the importance of academic achievement. It is constantly discussed between parents and children. “Ever since I was little, my parents told me that I had to go to college.” The adolescents have all discussed

their plans to go to college with the final aim of obtaining a professional degree. Whether they are freshmen or seniors in high school, they know that it is a natural progression to attend college as part of the expectations their parents have for them.

Reflecting the feelings of the other girls in the study, one girl said, “It was never if I went to college, it was always when I go to college . . . Going to college was always part of it.”

Most of these girls have attended some type of private schooling throughout their years in school. They know that it is one facet of their lives that is not open for negotiation with their parents because of the high value that is put on education. One girl said, “My mom is always on me about my schoolwork. They [parents] go nuts when I don’t bring good grades home.” Most of the subjects in this study would be classified as high achievers. This was evident by the numerous academic trophies that were on display in many of the homes I visited.

Another girl said, “My mother never has to worry about my schoolwork. She has always told me that school has priority over everything else.”

Education has historically been an important value in the Haitian culture. The parents believe that a professional education is the gateway to a better life. Attending college is another way of confirming a job well done on the part of the parents. These mothers have emigrated from a country where illiteracy is phenomenally high and thus they consider it highly important and relevant that their children achieve in school. As immigrants, the parents have been searching for mobility and have expectations that their daughter will share that attitude.

One respondent reflected, “My mom did not finish high school, and now she works hard and sometimes she is too tired to do anything . . . When I complain, she would tell me that is why I have to work hard at school so that I won’t have to have the type of life that she does.”

The parents want to be assured that their offspring take full advantage of the availability of education in this country. Again, this illustrates the issue of mobility or perhaps the sense of the absence of the class struggles seen as part of life in Haiti.

As one girl said, “She is always telling me how hard things are in Haiti . . . When I complain she tells me how easy we [kids] have it here, because in Haiti, they had to memorize all of their lessons, and get a whooping if they did not know it.”

The phenomenally high illiteracy in Haiti is not because Haitians do not value education. Social conditions, including lack of opportunity, poverty, political unrest, and social injustice, all contribute to make formal schooling unavailable to many. Sons and daughters of immigrants who have been deprived of formal education often carry a burden of performance and excellence to conform to the high value their parents place on education.

One girl said, “It’s like, my mom gets mad when I complain about school. She would always tell me that I should feel lucky that I can go to school.”

Their parents’ common belief is that hard work and perseverance will prove fruitful and is often the foundation for success. The parents as well as the teenagers noted that America has more opportunities and fewer obstacles to overcome when it comes to obtaining an education. The message passed down from the parents to these adolescents

is that America is truly the land of opportunity and it is expected that they take full advantage of this opportunity. According to these teenagers, their parents believe that education and hard work are curative to illiteracy and poverty.

In search of this dream, many parents make great sacrifices to ensure that their children receive the necessary foundation during their primary and secondary schooling as a means to gain access to higher education.

As one said, “My parents have a lot to deal with: they pay for my school, and they have to send money to our relatives in Haiti. Both my parents work long hours.”

Most of the parents in this study do not have financial excess; many seem to be struggling. Most of the families interviewed live in inner city and working-class neighborhoods and still find ways to send their children to private school in an effort to shield them from the poor education that is offered in typical inner city schools. Coming to America is viewed as a way out of poverty and an opportunity to have a better life.

### Roots and Haitian Pride

I think that Haitian people are very interesting. Haitians are very proud and I am glad to see that. It's so weird, the way they are with each other. Like my mom has a great big old shirt that has “Haiti” written all over it. Sometimes I just look at them and laugh. Another thing I like about the Haitian culture is the way Haitian families stick together. My parents are cool. My mother and father love to dance and there is always some type of Haitian music going on in the house. Unexpectedly, they would start to dance. My dad would put on a record, not a CD, and they would blast their music. My parents love being Haitian and I think that makes me love it too.

It was interesting to listen to these teenagers talk of their roots and particularly express a sense of a clear understanding of who they are. Although some of these teens

have never been to Haiti, there is still a strong identification with their Haitian roots.

Their immediate and extended families provide them with strong ethnic identification that gives them refuge, safety, and belonging. As one girl articulated,

I've hung around Haitians all my life . . . We are proud people because we know who we are . . . I just say I am Haitian. Some will say you are black; I will be like OK and . . . I may appear black but being black is not what is important to me. I consider myself black also because Haitians are black. But being considered Haitian—that is the only thing that I care about. Black is only a color, it doesn't say anything about you, but being Haitian tells a lot about you and your people. Being Haitian means that there are some behaviors that are understood. If I see a black person on the street, it is just a black person. But when I began to talk to the black person and find out she is from Belize, United States, Canada, Jamaica, Haiti, Nigeria—that would already tell me a whole history about the person, and each of their experiences will be different. I am an American by birth but I have no American blood running through my veins. I have pure Haitian blood. I love this country also but I am not American.

It was clear that the children knew their roots because of their exposure to their culture. Their overwhelming response to the issue of roots and cultural connectedness resonated throughout the interviews. There was a tremendous emphasis on this subject. The teenagers held “roots and pride” close to their person and considered it one of the guiding forces of “who they are.” As a Haitian-born, I was likewise overwhelmingly proud to be in the presence of such proud young women. They demonstrated a keen interest in broadening their knowledge about Haiti as well as identifying themselves with Haiti. An important finding in the context of American culture, is that the color of their skin was not an identifier; rather, their ethnic origin. One can conclude that race is not the subject that holds the most important to these Haitians; it is their Haitianness.

The concept of Roots provides a way for these girls to explain and define themselves. The use of the Creole language is another means by which these children can

identify with their Haitian roots. Although they lack knowledge about the language, they express strong desires to learn the language. As one girl responded, “I wish I could speak Creole better. I understand it, but I feel intimidated speaking it because I am not fluent in it.”

The ones who are not fluent in French or Creole express their desire to learn it. They feel unworthy to call themselves Haitians because of their inability to speak either Creole or French, as one 17-year-old said, “If I spoke Creole better may be I would feel more comfortable saying that I am Haitian. So I call myself Haitian-American.” All the participants are taking French in school or have taken French at one point in their lives. Although they are learning French, most preferred learning to speak Creole because they believe that all Haitians understand Creole while many do not fully understand French.

Embracing their roots gives the teenagers a sense of ethnic pride which is the glue that holds them and their families together. As one said, “All my life, that is what I have known. I have been around family members who have strong ties to the Haitian culture . . . They know who they are and they are proud of who they are.” Having a strong ethnic identity provides a form of protection because it resonates resilience and direction. There is a group identity. There are specific ways that Haitians affirm each other. Ethnic identity becomes a way of transmitting values.

In defining themselves, these teenagers are attempting to acquire additional knowledge about Haiti in various ways. Many have written reports on different aspects about Haiti (historical or present). For example, one reported, “I did this report on Haiti and we [Haitians] defeated one of the greatest armies in the world. That is what got us

our independence.” Some obtained their information through the media including the internet. The same girl said, “I usually look up things about Haiti through the internet for my grandfather. When it is in English, I would read it, but when things are in French, I can’t. But I would ask my grandfather to explain things to me.” Some discover things through classroom discussions: “We have discussions about Haiti all the time,” and others through their family and friends: “My parents are always discussing Haiti.” This is a way many of the girls believe that they can enrich their knowledge about their roots. In addition, more knowledge allows them to share part of who they are with their non-Haitian friends. When they do so, they believe that their friends will have a better understanding of who they are.

### *Haitian Pride*

I call myself Haitian-American because that is what I am. I do not hide away from who I am . . . If people come to my house, they will see how it is at my house . . . I remember when I had my birthday party and my aunties, uncles, my mom, and dad were speaking a different language . . . My friends heard them speaking another language. They saw how I understood and I was speaking back to them. I am proud that I am different from most people around here.

It is clear that ethnically, these teenagers have a strong sense and vision of their identities. Said one girl,

I like calling myself Haitian because it’s different being Haitian than Haitian-American . . . but my mother would call me ‘Ti-Americain’ (little American) whenever she thinks that I am not acting like a Haitian . . . I have always been proud calling myself Haitian because it helps me understand who I am. All my life that is what I have known. I have been around family members who have strong ties to the Haitian culture . . . They know who they are and they are proud of who they are.

A different girl declared,

When I tell them [other Haitians] that I am Haitian and they would ask me if I was born here and I tell them yes and they would say, 'You are not Haitian.' So I would argue with them and tell them that I am Haitian . . . I am more Haitian than I am American because I am with Haitian people all the time. Everything I do is Haitian, like the food, the language . . . Everything. It's important that people know that I am Haitian because that explains who I am and what I do, and why I think the way I do.

Although others deem it necessary to call them "Ti Americain" or strip them of their claim to call themselves Haitians, they remain loyal to their identity as Haitians. This pride comes from the knowledge and the perception of being different. Like their mothers, these girls have a real sense of wanting their Haitian ethnicity be shown and known. This Haitian pride also means that their Haitian roots must be acknowledged and celebrated. They do not want to be called African-American or Jamaican because they simply want to be seen for "who they are"—Haitian or Haitian-American.

Having a strong ethnic identity is like having a good immune system because it gives the possessor some resilience and a sense of survival. Having a different language base, food, customs, etc. allows children to explain their differences while giving them a sense of belonging to others. Haiti's motto of "Vive la différence" speaks to embracing one's differences. As one girl said, "It's a package, being Haitian. I accept the package and that's that." Her sense of acceptance for her difference seems to make it easy for her to claim her Haitian roots and at the same time gives her inner strength in her self understanding. This inner strength also resonates in the way they feel about Haiti, its people, and ultimately themselves. About their culture, one girl said, "I like the people; they are warm to be around . . . Like my parents and their friends . . . They are loud and

have loud discussions, especially when they are talking about politics, and that is so funny to me.” Liking a certain group of people with whom they have a strong identification is equated with liking themselves because they are part of that particular group that they hold in high esteem. In essence, this adds to their overall positive feelings about themselves.

Roots and pride are also about rituals. These teenagers spoke about family traditions and practices and the manner in which those experiences have enriched their lives. One girl says, “I like how the family gets together every Sunday to share a meal or spend holidays cooking Haitian food.” It sounds like it is not about eating itself that makes those Sundays special to her but the binding of the ties and the bonding that occurs during those times. “I like being around my cousins, I like hanging out with them.”

Roots and pride also means having to deal with prejudice and preconceived ideas about Haiti. That entails having to endure hurtful comments about Haiti and having to fend them off. A 17-year-old said,

If my friends say bad things about Haiti that would piss me off. They know not to say anything bad about Haiti. They would talk about the president and how the U.S. should not get involved. I would stick up for Haiti and told them that because they don't know how bad the Haitian people have it over there. Some of my friends just don't know but, when I explain things to them, they will be like “Oh just like Castro?” I would say “Yeah!”

Comparing Haiti to Cuba is another way that this girl is showing her ethnicity and simultaneously is trying to add meaning to her Haitianness. Again, it is about who they are and what their boundaries are. Explaining things to their friends makes them an authority and perhaps a “junior ambassador” for Haiti and at the same time humanizes

the plight of the Haitian people. Many of these teenagers talk about the unpleasantness of stereotypical ways that others view Haitians.

This 14-year-old said, “Sometimes my friends make me upset when they say they wouldn’t mess with me because I am Haitian, and that I would do a voodoo spell on them. I don’t like the stereotype people have about Haitians, especially when they talk about voodoo or when they talk about me putting a spell on them.”

#### In Search of the American Dream

There is a connection between these girls, their mothers, Haiti, and the America that has at its heart the search for the American dream. All the participants shared a common pride about Haiti and the Haitian culture. Interestingly, they are also as proud of their American culture. Growing up, the participants have joined their parents’ search for the American dream—meaning acquiring all that is necessary to improve their lives educationally, financially, culturally, emotionally, socially, and as well as acquiring the English language.

Acculturation appears to have been well established by these mothers and they have passed that attitude to their daughters. In essence, the fact that their parents have acculturated has given the OK for these adolescents to be comfortable with the Haitian culture and the American culture as well. Like their parents, they do not want to take lightly the opportunities that they find here in America. All the girls in this study were first-generation American-born and have been well informed by their parents of the opportunities they have here as daughters of immigrants. In the same vein, they are aware

of the huge struggle of Haitians living in Haiti and that their parents came to the United States as a means to have a brighter and more promising future.

One respondent said the following,

They are strict about what school you go to and what type of crowd that you hang around with . . . I guess it is because they come from somewhere they could not get all of that . . . and they are trying to make sure that we [kids] take advantage of what they never had.

Her comment suggests an understanding of the search of the American dream about education as a means to achieve a goal of financial security, personal power, and social status.

The American dream is usually in the context of Haiti's lack and a reminder of their parents' strong work ethic. The participants are well informed about the political and economic situation in Haiti and they seem to have some genuine empathy for native Haitian children. Similarly, some consider themselves lucky and blessed that their families are not enduring such hardship. One girl, who has never been to Haiti, has heard stories about the deplorable social and economic conditions of Haiti. She has heard that people live in small shacks over there and is curious to see how things really are. She says,

I want to see things with my own eyes . . . I think that I would change my perspective on how I think about things because I know that I take a lot for granted . . . I have advantages that they don't have . . . You know things like food . . . Many times, I have food in the fridge but would complain to my mom that there is nothing to eat . . . Just because it is not the type of food that I want to eat . . . My mom often tells me go to Haiti and you would soon know that what ever you have in the refrigerator is what you want . . . Kids don't have the choices we have here . . . They are not as comfortable as we are here and I would like to experience being there . . . I really think that I would be more appreciative of what I have.

Gratitude.

What became evident was the profound sense of appreciation that these girls had for their mothers for the perceived sacrifices that their mothers made for them.

One high school senior said,

My mother has been through a lot of things. They had two children, worked to take care of them, and later on had another kid, me . . . Yeah, she is a phenomenal woman. She is a little woman: five feet tall and about 140 pounds but she is strong. She doesn't care what people think about her. She is tough and is not scared of anyone. She got sick, getting cancer, working through that and surviving it, and she is here. And she is doing all that for us.

This adolescent's deep sense of admiration for her mother's strength also gives her a sense of strength in a strong role model that she can emulate. This deep sense of gratitude is also the result of realizing the price of migration and the sacrifices their parents are making for them. This I believe is tied to not only conformity and loyalty but also to a deep sense of appreciation they have toward their mothers as they realize the cost of migration.

Having gratitude is another area all the teenagers interviewed found important and necessary. For this reason, the teenagers feel dutiful toward their mothers as a way to "pay them back" for all the sacrifices their mothers have made. They feel they must find a way to show to their mothers that they are appreciative of them.

One 16-year-old said,

I feel like my mother has done so much for me that I could at least respect her . . . I see how some of my other friends [non-Haitian] yell at their moms—they

probably hit their moms. . . I would always wonder how they could do that . . . Their moms do so much for them. . . How they could treat their mothers like that?

There is a sense that these adolescent are cautious and deliberate about not hurting their mothers. Gratitude was a prominent theme in this study and often took the form of protecting the feelings of their mothers through cooperation, conformity, loyalty, and appreciation of the meaning of migration.

A 14-year-old said,

I also know that there is a lot of poverty in Haiti and that people are suffering there. Sometimes I do feel bad for them. Here I am in my warm home and have everything I need, and to think that some kids are hungry, uneducated, they can't eat. That makes me feel real bad when I think about it. Sometimes I feel lucky and wonder why they couldn't be as lucky as me. That is why I will not take being here for granted. I am grateful to my parents for coming here in America and giving me a different life.

I observed that most of the girls had a profound worry about causing pain to their mothers. This idea became more obvious by their preoccupation with this phenomenon as several girls came to tears when they talked about it.

In relation to self-expression a 15-year-old responded,

I don't feel like arguing with them because I will probably say something that might hurt their feelings . . . I would worry that they [parents] might be hurt and I can't hurt them or disappoint them . . . I don't want to hear that I cause them any pain and I don't want to be disrespectful. I don't like it when she tells me that I worry her. I don't want to hear about that because I don't want to be the cause of stress for my mom.

Not wanting to hurt their mothers is a demonstration of their psychological ties to their mothers and also a feature of their culture. Cultural ties to "not wanting to hurt" their mother is an intrinsic part of cultural expectations. By not causing pain for the mother, the girls in fact remain "good enough" in their mother's eyes and their

community. Likewise, the mother continues to be good enough in the community. At the same time, I noticed ambivalence about self-expression that is eventually mediated through silence. As one adolescent says about her reaction to her mother when she is upset, “Sometimes, I feel like telling her when she gets on my nerves, but I don’t. I just keep quiet.”

Many of the respondents also see conformity as another way of not only remaining loyal to their mothers and also a way of assuring their mothers’ trust through a show of respect. Learning to refrain from being explosive and nonconforming would assure that they could have sound and acceptable judgment dealing with inner control.

A high school junior said, “If I disrespect her, she will look at me differently and she would not trust me. She will think that I cannot control myself. She won’t be able to talk to me the same way and I will lose her respect. Without trust, what is the point?” Partly, there is a burden of protecting their mother’s honor by distinctively preserving it and not bringing shame to the mother.

Another girl said, “I think that is being disrespectful in a way if I am going to be rude in front of her peers. That would embarrass her.”

With gratitude, there is also a sense of admiration and sensitivity for all the hard work that their mothers have done.

Another respondent stated, “When Haitian women come down here, they go to school, like nursing, and they really work hard to achieve something good in life. They work hard to get a better life, not only for themselves but also for others in their families.

Maybe American women take things for granted because they have not seen the level of poverty in their country like Haitian women have.”

During the interviews, the girls revealed a distinct feeling about their enormous dread about not receiving the approval of their mothers. They did not seem to worry much about environmental responses; rather they focused only on their mother’s responses to their behaviors. It was not fear of corporal punishment, but rather fear of losing the mother’s trust, respect, and good feelings toward them.

All of the participants see their mothers as women who have beaten the odds, and they equate their mother’s efforts as equivalent to their mother’s sacrifices for them.

Another respondent said,

If my behavior is not what it should be, my mom will think bad stuff about me, and even if I tell her the truth she won’t believe me. It’s important to me that my mom believes in what I say to her. I cannot disrespect her because it’s the least I can do to show her that I appreciate what she has done for me. My mom means a lot to me and I want to do whatever I can to please her, to make her happy, and I don’t want to fail her. I am just scared that if I disappoint her I am not going to feel good about myself.

Lastly, gratitude is another way of thanking one’s mother for “having made it” and for giving them the necessary structure in molding them. As many of their counterparts may fall victim to early pregnancy, gangs, drugs, or other mishaps, these adolescents are glad that they did not succumb to such societal ills.

A high school senior commented, “My African-American friends, they go out to clubs already and stay out ‘til three o’clock in the morning—they are drinking. They come to school talking about it. I don’t really understand, girls that are my age, their

parents allow them to have 25-year-old boyfriends. I ask them, 'does your mother know?'

They are like, 'Yeah.' And that is outrageous to me."

Most of the girls have attributed their success to the guidance and structure that was provided to them by their parents, especially their mothers.

The same girl said,

My mother raised me is very different from Americans. My mom has raised me to have discipline. Like when I was young, I used to hate how my mom would hold me in the house, like some of the friends I used to be in grammar school with would go out a lot and I couldn't go out with them. I know two of them that are already pregnant. Now I thank my mom for holding me in the house, but then I hated it. I didn't understand. I used to tell her that I was in prison. Now she has to understand that I am older and I have to make my own decision. She has to let go and you know . . . I need to have my own life now.

This particular chapter, I believe, has captured the meaning of, *I Am Trying To Make Sense Of It All* as it elaborates on the impact of cultural meaning and values in the lives of these adolescents. In making sense of it all, a collaborative effort on the part of the teenagers and their mothers to celebrate their cultures and gain a deep understanding of the mechanics of their cultures is evident. While conformity is expected, there is also a celebration of inclusion that comes from being part of a larger culture through the embracing of their roots and Haitian identity.

Also revealed is the depth of appreciation these teenagers have for the sacrifices their mothers have made for them, an appreciation often is expressed as admiration for their mother's resilience and strength. This appreciation is reciprocated by the mothers.

One adolescent stated,

In some ways, she might be worried about what people might say but she is not afraid to stand up for what she believes in. I think because my mother focuses a

lot on her family she gets great joy from it. She is proud of us, she feels good about us. She is proud of me. She tells me that all the time and it's nice to hear.

### Aspiration

Aspiration is another prevalent theme that arose in this study. This section deals specifically with that theme and the corresponding categories that have become visible. Three categories emerged here: *Who Do I Want to Be Like When I Grow Up? My Prize Is Being A Virgin. I Know I Will Make It*. These categories focused on the girls' fantasies, dreams, and resonance about their future.

*Who Do I Want to Be Like When I Grow Up?* deals with the girls' search for their ego ideal as they attempt to find a suitable other to emulate. In finding their ego ideal, there is a constant comparison between how important women in their lives interact with males and their own vision about what they believe is the ideal way for women to behave with reference to male and female relationships. Consequently, they talk about gender issues relating to femininity as a whole.

*My Prize Is Being a Virgin* is the girls' vision about their sexuality that remains in accord with their parents' as well as their own desire to remain virgins, and the efforts they put into keeping themselves chaste. *I know I'll make it* speaks to the girls' belief about their academic success and hope for a brighter future.

*Who Do I Want to Be Like When I Grow Up?*

Part of the aspiration held by these teenagers is coming to terms with who they are as well as searching for an ideal person they can emulate. In doing so, cultural issues are always at the backdrop because of their continued effort to make sense of it all. It is developmental that teenagers embark on a search for an ego ideal. In their identification with their mothers, these teenagers scrutinize the mother's behavior and consciously either want to replicate certain attitudes about their mothers or alienate themselves from these behaviors.

One girl said,

My mom thinks that my dad should get more respect in the house because he is the main breadwinner. I don't agree with that. It's like when he gets home, the food has to be ready, and the remote for the TV has to be ready. Everybody has to get in his or her places . . . It's like the KING is coming to town . . . I don't like that because I don't think anybody should be treated like a king unless he did something significant. Anybody can pay the bills. Why do women have to cook and clean; why don't men cook and clean? While the women work, the men can relax . . . I think that is so wrong . . . I will not treat my husband like that.

Their ego ideal is not someone who will be self-sacrificing rather someone who will be vocal and assertive. "I will not allow my husband to treat me like that" was a common expression that I heard from the girls.

In this search, if they could not emulate their mothers, the teenagers did not look outside of their immediate circle; instead, they sought someone with whom they have a personal relationship. Their aspiration is to model after someone who represents them and their views on most issues—their Haitianness and their Americanness. The

availability of this ego ideal is within reach for these teenagers through their family members, trusted friends, and teachers. Since these teenagers come from strong families, they do seem to have numerous people they can admire and try to imitate. “I go to my sisters or my aunts when something bothers me . . . Or my aunty, well she is actually a friend of the family, but we call her aunty because she is like our aunt.”

In their efforts to make sense out of who they want to be when they grow up, the girls are in a constant battle to understand what is normative for the Haitian culture or what their families’ norms are when it comes to expectations, behavior, and attitude. Most of the girls expressed their dismay about their perception of Haitian women as being passive and subservient vis-à-vis males in the Haitian culture. That raises a particular issue for them as they wonder, “What kind of woman should I be?” This question is difficult for them because they feel a tug between the two cultures as exemplified by the submissiveness and subservient attitude of their mothers toward males, and their feelings that women ought not to be subservient and submissive; rather, free willed and assertive.

A 14-year-old said,

Most of them [men] act as if you have to serve them . . . Now, when I see my aunty fix my uncle’s plate—I look because I am not going to fix someone’s plate like that unless they do things for me . . . I fix my mom’s plate because she asks . . . If I am dating someone, I have no problems telling him where the forks and the plates are . . . So if he wants to eat, he had better fix his own plate . . . Some men would say that my wife has to cook every day . . . Now, if my husband would treat me like that I would say, “Look, you know where the nearest Popeye’s is” and that is the closest he will have to Haitian food . . . Oh, that makes me so mad. And Maman [referring to her grandmother], she would tell my mom you have to fix his plate and you can’t start eating until he does . . . I say, “Maman, please!” I would sit down and start to fix my food while Maman is talking . . . I am not

going to sit there and wait for my stepdad to start eating before I eat . . . By the way, do you do that?

To this teenager, I represent part of her culture. This question was her way of ascertaining whether her mother and her grandmother's subservient attitude is customary of all Haitian women.

*My Prize Is Being a Virgin (Sexuality)*

Having a boyfriend does not mean that I want to have sex with him. I am a virgin and I intend to keep it that way. I don't know why they are so concerned about that type of stuff. I am 17 and I never had sex, why should I start now? Being a virgin is important to me and that's my gift to myself. If my mom thought I was having sex, I think she would think badly of me . . . I think it would be more of an argument than her whooping me . . . But they can't handle the idea that I am growing up, as if I were eight, and I tell her that I am eighteen and that I can handle my own decision about sex; that I am grown enough to think on my own, they would ask, "What does eighteen have to do with it? Eighteen is nothing," they would tell me. They would give me this excruciating lecture.

All of the teenagers say that they are not and never have been sexually active.

Several of them think of virginity as a prize or proof that they are complying with cultural expectations. Likewise, all of the teenagers talked about their interest in boys and their fantasy that they could be allowed to date or at least talk to their mothers about dating.

A 17-year-old added, "She [mother] won't allow me to date." This was a common phrase that resonated throughout the interviews. Their virginity is regarded as a gift that they would give to their parents, especially their mothers. It is clear that parents and their teenagers do not talk about issues of sex and sexuality. One way to explain the Haitian attitude about sex and sexuality perhaps is to attempt to understand the manner in which

sex is mystified by this particular culture. This mystification is about strict prohibition instead of appropriate explanation that could lead to some understanding about the teenagers' curiosity and physiological changes. It is also about keeping the girls focused on their studies as a way for them not to get distracted from their education. As one said,

My friends think I am retarded because there is so much that I don't know about this. They would be talking about it [sex] and I would be like, "What's that?" They would laugh and say "You don't know that?" One time I remember asking her something about sex, she gave me that look, and she asked me if I was having sex or planning to have sex. It's like I had to convince her about the fact that I was not having sex. One simple question turned into this great big old argument. Now, I leave it alone.

The majority of the girls interviewed have alluded to what they refer to as "the sex talk." Reflecting the reports of many of the girls in the study, this particular teenager said, "My mom tells me not to get pregnant." This talk usually follows the onset of the girls' menarche and the correlation between sex and pregnancy. The message to the daughters is that they need to stay away from boys because they will get pregnant.

This 17-year-old recalled,

I had my period when I was about ten and I remember my mother telling me that I could get pregnant by boys. I remember being so scared that I was going to get pregnant. I had sex education at school and I found out that I would have to have sex with them [boys] before I would get pregnant. She was so mad when I told her that in health we were learning about sex and the changes in our bodies. She said that my teacher had no business teaching me about things like that.

The message to these girls is to fear boys' sexual potency because "they [boys] are interested in one thing"—meaning that boys only want to have sex with girls. Thus, the onset of menarche for this daughter is marked by oppression and fear as a result of the messages from her mother. The girl's womanhood is not celebrated; rather, it becomes a

mysterious load that is not explained fully to her. This message is like a double-edge sword. The girl is told to fear and stay away from boys and at the same time she is dealing with innate sexual feelings that are most likely at an upsurge due to her sexual maturity.

This interaction leaves the adolescent with the sense that she cannot talk to her mother about sex. One of the girls said,

I can't talk to my mom about sex . . . Not even if I like a boy . . . I don't know if she wants to hear it or not. But ever since I was little, she would tell me "Don't let boys touch you down there . . . that type of stuff" Places like my breasts or my private parts. She talks to me about drugs and sex, or stuff I should stay away from. She does not really tell me like all of the things that go on, she tells me about the pregnant part—rape, and stuff.

Concerning dating, these Haitian mothers are very preoccupied about their children getting pregnant, especially at an early age, or before marriage. "Don't get pregnant" is the usual message the mothers give to their daughters. These mothers are concerned with not only pregnancy but also a fear that pregnancy out of wedlock at a young age would equate to social suicide, not only for the child but also for themselves. Similarly, pregnancy may get in the way of their daughters' education. "My mom always tells me that having a boyfriend will only bring trouble . . . She told me that my education is first. She is always talking about her worries that people will think that she is not raising me right, if I start being too involved with boys."

In Haitian families, where one's actions can bring either pride or shame to the entire family, the mothers stress the importance of education as something that would bring them pride, and teenage pregnancy would bring them shame.

One girl said, “My parents don’t want the family to know that I have a boyfriend because she doesn’t want to have to explain it to them . . . She is worried about what they might say.”

All of the girls except two have told me that their parents forbid them to date until they are old enough to go to college. When I asked the girls how they felt about having to wait until college before they would have their parents’ blessing to date, they said that although they view this as not realistic they have learned to deal with it. In learning to deal with it, they secretly talk to boys in their school but admit that they cannot openly date these boys because their parents would not allow them to. They flirt or talk to boys on the phone but concede to “letting it go and moving on.”

One of the girls said the following:

My mom has not said much to me about dating. I just know that I am not supposed to date because my stepdad says that he better not see any boy in the house, or I better not be talking to any boy on the phone . . . I am 17. In a couple of months, I’ll be considered 18 by year . . . [Pause] I talk to them, I look, and I leave them alone . . . Sometimes I tell my mom that I would like a boyfriend and ‘li chuipe’ (a distinct noise made by smacking one’s teeth to express displeasure, disagreement, etc.) and we started laughing out loud and let it go.

An attitude such as this suggests that this particular girl, as have the others, has learned to adapt to the obstacles in her life by “moving on” while refraining from challenging her parents’ point of view. This attitude is in continued accord with expectations dealing with conformity.

Some of the girls say that they are under the watchful eyes of their mothers and that their mothers do not trust the fact that they are not sexually active. One girl said,

I don't talk to her anymore. If I tell her something, I know she is going to tell him [stepfather] . . . I don't feel comfortable having my period because that's awkward . . . because he knows about it . . . Every month she asks if I had my period . . . Now before she asks me, I would tell her not to worry . . . She always has the wrong impression about me . . . One thing that I know is that my virginity is the only thing I have now. That's proof . . . Everything else has to be proven in time . . . She can say whatever she wants but I know.

Being a virgin seems to be an important issue for these girls. Being a virgin also adheres to the expectation of their parents and is also a way of conforming to cultural norms and expectations.

The girls seem to be abiding to their parents' wishes of not dating while in high school, but do not understand the logic about not dating until college. Another reason why college is important to these mothers is that they are fearful that having a boyfriend will defocus their daughters' attention away from school.

One girl said, "My mom thinks that if I have a boyfriend that I won't be able to pay attention at school." Another said, "She is thinking that I am going to get pregnant." Most of the teenagers on the other hand claim their virginity and see it as their prize. "I don't know why she keeps thinking that I am having sex; she knows I don't have sex."

Contrary to what their mothers may be thinking, these teenagers say that they are not having sex. Plus, they are quite hesitant to talk to their parents about feelings of sexuality.

The mothers in a sense feel as though they have to be the external control for their daughters. The idea that the mother must externally control her daughter suggests the mother's belief that the child may not be able to exercise her own sense of internal control. This is in contrast to what the girls are saying.

A 17-year-old said, “I am not having sex and I tell her not to stress about it.” This external control may be a way to protect the girl’s sexuality. Protecting the girl’s sexuality, keeping the girl from getting pregnant, or keeping any harm from the daughter is perceived as one of the mother’s main jobs. Many of the girls and their mothers have a talk about pregnancy, the topic seems to be usually discussed between many of the girls and their mothers. One adolescent said, “She [her mother] wouldn’t want anything like that [sex and pregnancy] to happen until after marriage . . . Stay abstinent until marriage and that is about it . . . She tells me not to rush into anything.”

Some of the mothers are quite vocal about the type of boys that their daughters should bring home when they are allowed to date. Regarding this issue, one girl said,

My mom says nobody with braids, no one with piercing, not *Ti Americain* (Little American), and no sagging pants . . . So whom can I date? I want a guy with the right personality. If not, what’s the point? So why would you not like him if he wears braids? The braids don’t make him . . . What if he wears sagging jeans? Those don’t make him either . . . She [her mother] has to learn to not be judgmental. . . The thing is she is not going out with him, I am; if he respects me, she should be glad . . . I know that my mom would probably want me to bring a Haitian boy home . . . I want to bring who I want to bring home . . . Color never really bothers me; if I want to date a guy, I don’t care what color he is . . . I always tell my friends that personality is really what matters.

Some of these girls, although they do not agree with the “no dating rule” while in high school, have admitted to having a keen interest in boys, and once in a while break the rule. Others say they do not have boyfriends because they do not have the time to invest in liking boys given that their investments are in their schoolwork and sports for the moment.

Most of the girls say that having a boyfriend would distract them from their studies. One girl said, “I don’t want a boyfriend; it’s too distracting. I will be ready during or after college. Even if I couldn’t wait, I would force myself to wait. I have parents and I have Haitian parents on top of that . . . They have always told me no boyfriends . . . They told me I have to finish college.”

At the same time, they believe that it should be up to them to make the decision whether or not to have a boyfriend. Some of the girls do not think that teenagers should be in serious relationships but they believe that parents should allow their children to have “special friends” so that they [teenagers] can learn how to manage that part of their lives.

A 16-year-old said, “I know how to make decisions about boys . . . Many of my friends are boys. I listen to what they say about girls and I learn that way. It should really be up to me to decide whether I want a boyfriend or not.”

One of the girls talked about her understanding for her mother’s caution and apprehension about boys because of the mother’s awareness of the high rate of pregnancy among some teenagers within her neighborhood. This particular girl has many acquaintances who are either pregnant or have some type of venereal disease. For that reason, she believes that her mother is extra vigilant about teen pregnancy and sexuality.

Regarding her mother one girl reflected,

She has issues with me talking with boys and she is always checking on me, especially when I am talking to some of my guy friends. She thinks that because some of my friends are having sex that I will also be having sex . . . That’s them and not me . . . This girl I know, my mom doesn’t want me to be friends with her because the girl came in the hospital where she works, and she found that that she

[the girl] has a venereal disease. We have been friends since we were very young and why should I break our friendship because she is having sex with boys?

Most of the teenagers dread their mother's anger and disappointing their mothers by having boyfriends. They show their compliance through reassuring their mothers that they are abiding by her expectations that they remain chaste.

A girl talked about her understanding from her mother about having a boyfriend. "My mom would get totally angry if I had a boyfriend . . . I would probably lie to her, and if she were to find out she would be angry and disappointed." The children seem to have the capacity to "mentalize" what other people are thinking, and if they get upset, the teenager in turn will also get upset.

Three of the respondents had the support of their mothers when it comes to dating. Unlike the other mothers, they embraced their daughters' sexuality and did not seem anxious about their daughter dating while in high school. This next quote echoes the responses of these mothers to their daughters, message of trust, guidance, and personal power.

We [mother and daughter] talked about boys when I first got my boyfriend. She told me not to do anything that I don't think is right. To listen to my heart for what is right . . . She told me not to start messing with stuff that I don't think is OK, or that my heart tells me I shouldn't do. Maybe it's going to lead to something bad.

. . . It feels good that she trust me to make the right decisions about my life . . . Another message is that she believes in me . . . That is a great feeling to have the trust of your parents . . . To me, that come with the responsibility to not let them down and like my mother says, I have to make the right choice. The only thing is that she has to meet them and see what they are all about.

*I Know I Will Make It*

I really don't know why I am thinking about being a doctor . . . But I like to do things with computers . . . I would like to build computers and stuff like that . . . I even told my uncle and he said no, you have to be a nurse . . . They all want me to be a doctor . . . I was thinking about being a doctor, but when they told me all the types of doctors like psychiatrist or psychologist, I like talking to people and giving advice . . . I like writing; I might want to be a writer . . . They say that is the best type of money . . . They don't want me to be a lawyer . . . They say lawyer's lie and they don't tell the truth. [Pause] I am sick and tired of the way my family acts. [Tears] I don't feel that they understand me . . . I would tell them one thing and they would say something else . . . It's like I am always fighting to get them to listen to me . . . I am very tired of them not understanding me and me always having to tell them stuff and them not hearing me . . . They expect me to do what they want me to do. [Pause] I just don't know.

This excerpt captures a girl's feelings about her career choice once she goes to college. Her family's opinion about her choice of career is important to her. Whether she makes a personal decision about her career or whether family members influence her regarding her career, it seems that this teenager's needs for conformity is the driving force behind her personhood. Education has always been a subject of top priority to the girls and their families; it is also a marker by which they say that they will make it. This idea about education is one expectation that is closely tied to the issue of conformity.

As their parents would expect, these girls take school seriously. Most of them are studious and take great pride in their accomplishments in school. Such accomplishments bring a sense of pride to them and their families. Achieving in school is an expectation that has usually been held by their parents since they were small. In turn, their success brings mutual pride to them and their parents.

One of the girls relishes in the joy that her mother has about her studious and conscientious attitude about her schoolwork. She says that her mother brags and recognizes her efforts as a great student. For that reason she says,

I cannot settle for less . . . If it means that I have to stay up until four o'clock in the morning to finish a project I will . . . I don't hand in any sort of project, just for the sake of handing it in . . . I hand in my best work and I don't like to settle for anything less, that is just not me . . . She [her mother] likes that about me and she always brags about how I can go to sleep at three o'clock in the morning and then wake up the next day, pay attention and do my work, go back home do my work and start all over again . . . My mom is very proud of me . . . She always tells me that she is proud that I am the way I am.

To this girl, the compliments and acceptance she receives from her mother is a testimony that she is appreciated and noticed for her hard work.

This girl believes the following: "I know that some parents only pay attention to their children when they accomplish something big. I am glad that my mother pays attention to all the little details about me." Her hard work is a testimony that the mother has done a good job raising her and she has done a good job conforming to parental expectations.

All the girls interviewed have plans to go to college and seem to have mapped out the type of education they want to pursue in college. Parents are quite involved in suggesting the choice of career for their daughters. While the girls want to adhere to these expectations, they do not always go along with their parents in choosing their careers. Interestingly enough, I did not have the sense that they felt disloyal by not conforming to cultural expectations.

About career choices one girl said,

My mom wants me to be a doctor but the idea of being around people in pain freaks me out . . . I don't know why, but all Haitian parents want their kids to become doctors . . . I really want to be a writer . . . There are so many professions out there, like, I can be successful as a lawyer, a stockbroker, a business major, or a CEO at a Fortune-500 company . . . Haitian parents only know about being doctors . . . I am interested in music and I might want to write songs or be a producer or something . . . I told her that I am not going to be a doctor because I can't stand seeing people in pain . . . Besides, if my heart is not in it, I am not going to be good at it.

In "Making It," parental support is indispensable. One of the girls talked about the support she feels from her mother regarding her education.

I don't have any chores because I go to this college prep school and I have lots of homework . . . I don't cook, I don't clean, and I don't have to wash my own clothes. She [her mother] has told me that she doesn't want me to start doing that type of stuff . . . Even though she wants me to take some responsibilities, she wants my head in the books . . . She does all this stuff for me because she wants to make sure that I don't get distracted by other activities that will keep me from my books . . . I'll do things once in a while but if I don't she will do them for me . . . like cooking me breakfast in the morning . . . Most other parents say to her, "You still cook breakfast for your daughter in the morning?" She knows that I don't eat cereal, so she cooks for me . . . Sometimes she gets mad if I don't offer to help . . . she wants me to know when I am supposed to offer my help even though she may not need me to help.

When it comes to education, this mother's actions indicate the intense value that she puts on education and the mother's effort in helping her daughter quest for education. This mother is not giving her daughter the typical message that a girl must be in the kitchen. Rather, the message to this adolescent is that she has to find ways to nurture her intellectual self and *achieve her educational goals*

### Emotional Management

I do tell my mom how I feel but it does not do any good . . . I can't tell them that I am angry. She does not listen . . . I just get mad inside, but I don't tell her how I feel . . . [Tears] When I do, nothing comes of it, so I stop. If I told her how I felt, she would say that I am talking back. I don't look at her, I just look mad and that's how she knows . . . When they make me mad I just ignore them and stop talking to them. I put on this angry face when I don't want to talk to them. My mom would ask me "Why do you look like that?" I think in my head, Why you ask that type of question when we just had an argument? That type of thing, I don't say it because I know that will bring on another argument, I just say it in my head . . . Yeah, that's what I do . . . If I told them how I was feeling, they would argue and talk too much . . . So it's easier not to tell them anything at all.

This area of Emotional Management captures how the teenagers deal with their emotional world. Three main categories emerged from this particular theme—*Holding It In Vs. Letting It Out*—that speak exclusively to the manner in which these teenagers consciously choose to deal with their thoughts, ideas, and emotions. The balance between "holding their feelings in" and "letting them out" is difficult for them to achieve. They are caught between the need to express their thoughts and feelings and the prohibition of about expressing them. "Letting it out" would entail not worrying about preserving the feelings of their mothers, and not being anxious about issues of conformity.

Expressing their feelings means they are no longer conforming to cultural demands of submission and cooperation. “Holding it in” would comply with cultural expectations but conflict with the girls’ needs to express their point of view.

*The Bridge* is another facet through which the teenagers express their thoughts. The bridge serves as the teenagers’ observing ego, a sounding board, a confidant, a mediator, a broker, an interpreter of the cultural gap, and a role model. The bridge serves as someone who can keep her from “falling off,” and give her hope. That person is seen as someone who can empathize with her struggles or inner conflict as well as rejoice in their delight. The bridge provides a place of refuge to the teenager, which is another way of managing their emotions. *The mother-daughter relationship* addresses specifically those issues that evolved between the mothers and the daughters in this study. These issues address their candid views of their relationship with their mothers, including their admiration, hope, fantasies, discord, and longing.

#### *Holding It In vs. Letting It Out*

There is a noticeable conflict about whether or not these teenagers ought to express their thoughts and emotions. All the participants are preoccupied by that thought and are continually deciding when to speak up and express their views and feelings, which often creates some adversities for them. This section explores the manner in which these teenagers deal with such adversities.

The responses regarding self-expression vary, from “Most of the time I keep it inside, or I cry or go to my room and go to sleep,” to “I start screaming, yelling, my voice

gets loud and stuff . . . Sometimes I am a quiet person but when I get mad, everything comes out all at one time. I usually get louder when I feel strong about a particular issue. When I am mad I am always afraid that I won't be able to stop."

Although the second response is not the norm, many of the girls talked about expressing their feelings at least occasionally. In cases where they openly show their contempt, their responses are usually followed by an apologetic exchange with their mothers.

One girl talked about her conflict when she expresses feelings of anger toward her mother: "I usually tell her that I am sorry . . . I can't yell at grownup because is wrong. I don't talk back and lately I have been doing that . . . But every time I do it, I feel bad. I would play it back in my head because I know I should not be doing that."

Several girls talked about avoiding arguments altogether because they make them feel uneasy and they get anxious about upsetting their family. Instead of expressing how they feel, they prefer to silence themselves in order to avoid discord.

One girl commented,

If I know that this thing is going to lead to an argument, I will keep my mouth shut because I don't like arguments that will lead to too much drama . . . Like not talking to each other or ignoring each other . . . I cannot stand not talking to her . . . I hate it . . . I would probably go crazy if that goes on for too long.

This girl was quick to tell me that she does not yell at her mother. "That's disrespectful if I yell at her . . . But at times, I can admit that I yell at her and I usually apologize . . . That's anger coming out." Yelling at one's mother is atypical behavior of a Haitian daughter toward her mother. Again, the ambivalence was quite noticeable when

it comes to expressing their feelings. It seemed important that the girls were quick to inform me of their apologies to their mothers.

*Holding Their Feelings In And Letting Them Out* relates to dealing with expressing feelings in general. One girl remembered,

When I was younger, she used to say that she loves me all the time, but not anymore . . . It seems like we have grown apart since I got older . . . At times, I wish we could be closer and at other times, I don't want that . . . Because if we were closer she would end up being more of a friend than a mother.

This last statement suggests the ambivalence that is felt by this teenager in this separation/individuation stage. Furthermore, it speaks to this teenager's understanding of the hierarchy that exists between her and her mother.

One girl asserted, "My mother can be friendly toward me but not a friend because her place is not to be a friend but a mother . . . I would not want her to act like a child but like a mother because I wouldn't want to be the one to tell her to act like an adult." This way of thinking on the part of this participant, I believe, provides her with structure and a sense of safety.

The need for self-control is an area that was also prominent with these teenagers. They see that particular issue as necessary as it will keep them conforming with their parents expectations of them.

One girl said,

I cannot lose control. You know how kids scream at their parents until they get what they want. I won't do that because it's rude. When my sister yells at me, I think she is being rude even though I am only two years older than her. My parents have always told me that I need to be nice, be good, and do good. I see movies when kids yell at their parents, and I just don't get understand it."

When this researcher asked these teenagers if they ever felt like yelling, most of them replied yes but at the same time they said, “I don’t because I have to exercise self-control.” In exercising this self-control they employ a customary style of management by walking away, letting it go, writing in their diaries, and so forth.

Another way that these teenagers manage their feelings is by the camaraderie and the support they find in their friends. Their friends become a source of support for them and at the same time, they can empathize with each other. When they are irritated, angry, disappointed, or disillusioned by their parents and their surroundings, they find refuge in one another. Because many of them share similar issues or concerns, they feel understood and supported. This support provides a bond and serves as a shelter against undesirable and painful feelings.

One girl said,

I like to have my Haitian friends around because we can sit and talk about how we feel about the way they preach at us and how they always insinuate that we are up to no good . . . At least we understand each other because we have the same feelings . . . My non-Haitian friends don’t understand what I am going through when I talk to them about what is going on with my parents . . . I have Haitians friends who are my age who belong to my church . . . When I go to church, I like to sit next to them . . . They know what I am going through . . . I don’t like to hang around Haitian adults because they always find something wrong or they never can be straight with me. When I ask an adult why, it’s always “Why do you ask why?” They answer a question by a question . . . It is as if I will never have that question answered . . . She would say “I am an adult. Why do you ask why?” She is the adult and I am the child and I am supposed to listen to her.

This sort of exchange is typical in the lives of these teenagers and at the same time demonstrates a strong hierarchical structure in the family relationship.

All of the respondents have common responses to the resolution of intense and conflictual feelings. They seem to have this innate sense of knowing what is permissible or forbidden when it comes to self-expression. In other words, they seem to avoid confronting issues that they deem are losing battles. When I asked about coping styles, one girl said, “I walk away.” Another declared, “I let it be.” Similarly, another revealed, “I get over it.”

They are all in accord when it comes to expressing their feelings. Some talk about it with friends, while some turn to their bridge, and others seek a familiar voice for comfort, understanding, and grounding. It was evident that most of the girls did not confront their conflicts alone. Those who have older sisters, confer with them as a means to gain empathy, understanding, and strength because they too have had the same parents with similar rules. In effect, their sisters represent some sort of hope and aspiration since they have survived these rules and were not destroyed by them, and therefore, they too can survive them.

Most girls had someone to talk to when they experienced intense and unpleasant feelings. One girl said,

When I am real upset, I'd call my sisters. Complain and talk about it. They would say that it happened to them too. They would tell me that there are reasons for it—that even though I may not understand them now that I would later. They usually remind me that they didn't understand them either when they were going through it. After a while, it made sense. They say that's how our parents are and that they won't change.

Using their sisters to find out about how they have survived is a way through which these teenagers can absorb the present and at the same time keep their hope about

a brighter future. “They get along well my mother, they made it, and I know that I will make it too.”

### *The Bridge*

My mother makes things seem harder because you can't tell her anything. . . . They [Haitian parents] make their kids scared of them . . . they are not approachable . . . I am scared of my mom when it comes to telling her things. I am scared that she will explode, and my Auntie will not. So, I talk to my Tatie.

The teen years are marked by the need to find oneself. Teenagers are in search of an identity, understanding, and making sense out of their feelings. Girls especially often need another female who can serve as an observing ego. While the mother may be the ideal person to fill that gap, in many instances this may not be possible. In cases where the mother falters, it is important that the teenager find a surrogate person with whom such phenomena can unfold. I refer to this person as “The Bridge.” The bridge has many functions. It is the teenager's observing ego, a sounding board, a confidant, a mediator, a broker, an interpreter, and a role model. The bridge serves as someone who can keep her from falling off, and give her hope. The bridge serves as a mediator dealing with the cultural gap and generational gap between the mother and the daughter. The mother may see the bridge at times as someone who keeps her away from the daughter, which can result in anger from the mother toward the bridge. In some cases, there is competition between the mother and the bridge person.

The bridge is someone not quite as old as mom, someone not as authoritative, but someone close enough to be a model, to have ideals that the girl can hold on to. This

someone who attempts to understand or intervene on the girl's behalf, giving her a sense of being listened to, heard, and understood. The bridge provides a place of refuge to the daughters. The bridge is usually a trusted female. Psychologically, this trusted person provides an avenue by which the youngster can emancipate herself into adulthood.

One girl's maternal aunt serves as the bridge for her. This aunt serves as a sounding board for her; a consistent figure that supports, listens, and attempts to understand her. About this particular aunt she says, "I feel close to my Tatie. I am always calling her . . . I get in trouble for calling her so much . . . My mom gets hurt and I think sometimes jealous when I turn to her. I would say to her, 'Mom, calm down'"

In many instances the mother may recognize the importance of the bridge and at the same time feel "put out" by that same bridge. The bridge has to have a keen understanding of both cultures in order to be effective in the lives of the teenager and the mother. The bridge in effect has a dual role that filters information to both parties. The bridge uses her judgment on how to translate the information to the mother. The bridge is nonjudgmental toward the girl while she attempts to counsel her. The bridge in turn can help the mother with the mechanics of her relationship with her daughter because of her position of having the "inside story" about the daughter.

One girl commented, "My aunt is the only one I would feel comfortable talking to about things . . . She seems interested in helping me through my questions . . . She is the one who came to me and told me that I could talk to her about sex or anything else I need to talk to her about." The bridge also gives the teenager a feeling of being listened to and understood. "She [aunt] will try to reason and understand me."

At the same time, the teenagers perceive a conflict regarding the usage of that bridge. Another said,

My mom does not understand me or what I am going through. She makes excuses or gives me reasons why I can't talk to my aunt. If she cared about me, she would let me talk to my aunt because she knows that my aunt means a lot to me. She would tell me that she is my mother and she should be the one I go to. I am like "I don't care." My aunt tells me how it is, and she would not pass judgment. She tells me to make sure that I come to her if I plan to have sex. She talks to me about condoms. She is more open. She would keep my secrets if I wanted her to.

Although having this bridge is important in the lives of these adolescents, the mothers may not always understand the function and the role of the bridge person. Inadvertently, the bridge may isolate the mother by the very nature of her function. This issue is repeatedly mentioned as a concern throughout the interviews with the mothers. Consequently, the mother lashes out with anger and contempt about the relationship between the child and the bridge.

One believed, "My mom is too jealous because I tell my Auntie more stuff about me . . . I tell her [aunt] everything about my life . . . I told my Auntie one day that she should have been my mom and she [mother] got real mad at me."

Another girl has chosen her teacher as her bridge—a person she admires for her openness and most of all for reaching out to her with topics that her immediate surroundings does not provide. Moreover, the bridge at times provides an avenue through which they can understand their mothers.

One girl articulated,

My English teacher always talks about how strict her parents were on her and how concerned they were about their reputations . . . My teacher talked about how much she hated it and how she is doing the same things to her kids . . . I think it is like

my mother and the way she goes about things . . . the way she was brought up, that's the only way she knows.

Talking to her teacher normalizes her experience with her mother because she can vicariously understand her mother, through the understanding of her teacher.

Teenagers who make use of a bridge find a level of comfort that they do not have with their parents. That level of comfort allows them to have in-depth discussions with their bridges and to deal with subjects that they can not discuss with their parents.

The same girl said, "Sometimes, she [the teacher] will approach us with the questions . . . and I guess because she has a daughter our age and she kind of understands us . . . My mom has never asked me questions like that." Her teacher remains constant in her life as she inquires about her well being. "Sometimes she would be sitting in her desk and starts a conversation with me that has nothing to do with school . . . Just about me . . . but the conversations between me and my mom are about school."

In essence, this teenager laments about her relationship with her mother and at the same time feels visible to the bridge that through her inquiries allows this teenager to feel heard. This teenager yearns to have a different type of relationship with her mother. When I asked why she has not tried to talk to her mother about those yearnings, she said, "I usually hold those feelings in." Holding those feelings in allows this teenager not to face her yearning and the painful reactions about her relationship with her mother. As she put it, "I try not to think much about stuff like that because I usually get mad . . . Come to think of it, this is the first time that I am openly talking about it."

The bridge is also someone who is the go-between for the mother and the child. At a time of extreme distress, they turn to the bridge as someone who will serve as a buffer with their parents.

Another girl said, “When my sister was here for my graduation, I was telling her how I would clean up the house. See she gave me a cell phone for graduation so that I can talk to her when I need to. I told her that I would not be able to keep up with the cell phone because I have no money. She told me that I have to clean the house up for money. So I clean up the house, but I don’t get anything [money]. Now my sister pays for my cell phone.”

Another says,

My brother many times would have to explain to her what we are trying to say. They always take things for the negative. When I try to explain something to her, she always takes it in a negative way. But when my brother explained it to her, she understands it. That is why he told me whenever I get into an argument with my parents, he said just e-mail him or call him so he can talk to them about it. I would talk to my older sister. She is the oldest, she has a lot of experience with my parents, and she knows how they are. I can talk to her about anything—school, boys, sex, anything. She would answer like my mother would but because she is my sister she would not preach and probably counsel me.

Using a bridge does not preclude the daughter’s longing to have a relationship with her mother. Although most adolescents in the study used a bridge at one point or another, they continued to silently wish to have a closer relationship to their mothers, and at the same time realized the difficulties in attaining that relationship. “I think most mothers and daughters are free to talk about anything . . . I think it’s OK but when its time . . . I guess there are times when I really need to talk to her but I don’t . . . I have to

be more open to her . . . but now that I am getting older I need to do that . . . I wish I was closer to her.”

### *Mother-Daughter Relationship*

Haitian mothers always know what their kids are doing. They are always on you, making it their business to know what you are doing and stuff. Like you can't come home too late. Like “Are you having sex?” It's always the “Are you having sex?” thing. She gets on my nerves but I see it as her way of caring about me.

There is a general sense among these teenagers that their mothers provide them with safety and security through their vigilant ways of keeping track of what they are doing. Their mothers provide the strongest anchoring for them.

This particular quote reflects the view of many of the girls in the study. “When things go wrong, I can count on her. I don't really talk to my mom but if I had a problem I know she would be there for me.” All the respondents have a genuine attachment to their mothers. Even those who rely on a bridge still understand the importance of the support and presence of their mothers. “I feel more comfortable with my mom. She is another woman like me and I feel like she can understand me better. Like when I got my period. I am glad my mother was around.”

In terms of their relationships, the teenagers feel that there is usually more tension between them and their mothers than with their fathers. The respondents all agree that their mothers are overprotective of them while their fathers are more relaxed when it comes to issues like dating and going out with friends. Although their mothers and fathers are in agreement with parenting issues, the mothers are the ones who make day-

to-day decisions about the teenagers. For that reason, I believe that the teenagers find that their mothers are stricter than the fathers are.

One girl said,

Since I was in second grade, she [mother] does not let me do things outside of the home. My friends used to invite me to go their house, sleepovers, or just to go to their house and stuff and my mom would always refuse. My dad always says let her go; it will be OK. Now, they let me go over to my friends' houses but no sleepovers. My mom would always have to know who the parent was where I was going. Even when it came to a "sleepover thing" even if she did know the parents, she would always say no. My parents would always tell me that I can't do this and that because people don't do that in Haiti. I always thought to myself that we are not in Haiti . . . They should have known that by coming here to North America that things like that would come up . . . Many of my friends are going to sleepovers and I thought how fun it would be. But I can't experience that . . . She doesn't want me going over people's houses. My parents think that it is OK for my friends to come over, but it was not OK for me to go over their house. I get rude to my mother because she gets on my nerves when she gets so unreasonable . . . I might answer her freshly but I stay within my limits.

Staying within their limits is a trademark for these girls.

For most of the respondents, not being able to go to their friends' houses or going to sleepovers often puts them at odds with their friends and intensifies their worries that they will be passed over and eventually no longer be invited by their friends.

Another girl lamented, "I always have to tell my friends no and they stop inviting me. Then it will hurt me when they will come up to me and ask why, and I can't explain it. I'll say my mom does not want me to come and they will ask again why, and I will have nothing to say. Sometimes, I would say I can't come because I have something to do that day or just make up something." At the same time, the adolescents are well aware of their mothers' fears and anxiety about sleepovers.

One girl conveyed, “She is always scared that something bad is going to happen to me. Like things she sees on shows or anything in the news. Like when kids would go over to sleepovers at somebody else’s house, and the parents beat on the kids or even raped them. I think that’s mostly what she’s afraid of.”

Although the teenagers for mostly speak positively about their mothers, they battle with certain conflictual feelings about them also. Those conflicts are compounded with cultural issues about conformity. When it comes to conflict resolution, it seems that conflicts are not usually resolved. Perhaps this results from the hierarchical structure of the Haitian family and the culture’s strict expectations about compliance, submissiveness, loyalty, and devotion.

Another girl said,

When I am angry with my mom, I don’t speak to her. She doesn’t let me know that she knows that I am mad. I could never stay mad with my mother for a long time. I am the one who usually won’t talk to her. One time she was the one who did not speak to me for a long time . . . I got scared and I had to go tell her that I was sorry . . . I was about 15 and I thought that she was never going to speak to me again. We usually let it cool off for a couple of days, when thing gets tense, and we drop the subject, we just move on.

This last statement is suggestive that there are no true resolutions between the adolescents and their mothers and those issues are usually resolved by moving on to the next subject.

Most adolescents described their relationship with their mother as good although they admit that there are many aspects about their relationship that they would want to see changed. These teenagers agree that communication could improve between Haitian

children and their parents. They feel that the Haitian culture does not foster communication between parents and their children.

One teenager believed,

Communication is the key. It seems to me that parents from different cultures speak to their kids more . . . Haitian parents don't explain things to you . . . They don't have a dialogue sometimes . . . It's always, "I am your mother" or "I am your father, do as I told you" and that's it. As a parent, they don't talk to their kids about sex, emotions, or things they are dealing with. It's all about education and that's that. I think education is the only they seem to care about . . . Even if they have to send their kid to speak to therapists or someone, they [kids] are still being spoken to.

In addition, the generational gap is heightened by the different ways the teenagers and their parents view the world.

Another asserted, "If I could change anything about the my relationship to my parents, I would like them to view the world as it is today, not the way the world was 40 years ago when they were growing up in Haiti."

A third area of conflict is their mothers' refusal to admit to wrongdoing.

"Although sometimes my mom knows that I am right she doesn't say it to me. I would hear her talk to her friends about it . . . She would never let me know that she is wrong . . . My father apologizes when he is wrong. I would rather speak to my mom more than my dad because she is a girl like me, but my father is much more understanding."

In summing up their relationship with their mothers, all but one of these teenagers expressed a sense of deep trust in their mothers. "I know that no matter what, my mother would never betray me. I know that she will be there for me when I need her."

### The Navigation

I am Haitian . . . well, Haitian-American. Since my parents are Haitian, they were born there [Haiti], and I was born here [United States] . . . I claim both cultures because I take a little of both . . . Well it is fifty/fifty. It's important for people to know that I am Haitian-American, but it is not to an extent to where you have to know that I am Haitian but I think it is important because that is me and that shows how different I am than everyone else.

Navigating between the two cultures is a living metaphor for navigating between this giant elastic band to Haiti and the United States. It is a culmination of an integrative process of the Haitian and the American cultures. It is by far a way of continuing to make sense out of these two cultures and reaching a resolution about their one's belief system about what it means to be Haitian or Haitian-American. Consequently, Haitian values and American values are pinned against each other.

One girl said reluctantly, "Sometimes she thinks that I am being disrespectful when I speak to her but I don't I think that I am because I am just speaking my mind." This is another example of the navigation that goes on between these teenagers' beliefs about the two cultures. As a result of their exposure within the two cultures, there is a constant redefining of meaning and interpretation for these girls and their parents. While "telling" their mothers how they feel may be sometimes interpreted as being disrespectful, they don't agree with that observation because they are borrowing this view from the American culture of self-expression.

One teenager commented,

My mom thinks that respect is always agreeing and never raising your voice, and just being on your most polite behavior all the time. I have a lot of respect for my mom but I am not going to tiptoe over things . . . I am going to tell her how I feel. When I do that, she feels that I am being disrespectful. I think that respect in the Haitian culture is that parents are the authority and what they say goes, and the children are to just follow their rules respectfully. Here it is very different. Speaking your mind is something stressed from when you are young 'til you are older. Here [United States], they will always want you to say how you feel. They want you to make your point, but they don't want you cursing, be rude or violent. But they do stress being creative; being individuals, showing your creativity and most of all expressing yourself.

Likewise, this navigation is making sense of what is intrinsic to Haitians and what is intrinsic to Americans.

Another teenager said, "I know that Haitians and Americans see things differently: To me, the Haitian part of me is about respect and being polite, and the American part of me being is about being individual and expressing that. I think I was fortunate in the way I was raised because I got the best of both worlds. I got the Haitian way and some of the American way. I like the way I was raised."

Navigation also means constantly attempting to compare the two cultures. The children are steered toward simultaneously evaluating Haitian and American cultural practices. This navigation deals with three main categories: their *Dual Identity*, which focuses on their American and Haitian identity; *Things Have to Change*, where the adolescent visits issues pertaining to views on equality and feminism; and *Establishing Independence*, which addresses the adolescent's efforts towards their own emancipation.

*Dual Identity*

My parents did a good job of letting me be an American too. Sometimes I think that they think that I am weird. Like having my ears pierced twice. That's weird to them. But they understand that. It's something that I like and they understand that.

Dual identity means that the teenagers are well assimilated into both cultures and that acculturation happened within their household. In a way, to these teenagers, being bicultural also means having two different grammars. Having two different grammars is metaphoric for having two different ways of being or behaving. It is in that spirit that the girls find it important to claim both identities and at the same time strive to have others know their realities about their dual identities.

A 15-year-old said,

If they don't see me for who I am, it will be hard for them to understand why I do the things I do. I am Haitian-American and that's that. They won't get me and I won't get them. To know me is to understand that in my family things are done differently. Anyway, since many of my schoolmates are Mexicans, like me they have a different culture. I believe that they understand how different it is to have another culture. Like many of my Mexican friends always tell me things about themselves and how Mexicans do stuff. Haitians also do stuff that is different from the rest of the kids.

To many of these participants, being bicultural has two different significant pieces. The first explains their differences and the second allows them to deal with those differences. Being Haitian-American also means living both cultures and attempting to reach some resolutions especially when there are cultural discords. In doing so, there is a constant comparison with both cultures as a way to try to make sense of it all.

One teenager said,

Haitian kids are not free to express themselves like American kids can and they don't get in trouble . . . I think it's stupid that we can't or we are not supposed to express our feelings . . . When I give her my opinion about things, she thinks that it is very disrespectful. It is not that I swear at her. She [her mother] says to me, "Oh I would never say that to my mother or I would be slapped" and things like to that. Here [United States] kids can and do express their point of view and their parents don't get offended.

An intriguing phenomenon was quite noticeable as the adolescent themselves in many instances sounded like their parents. They are already predicting how they are going to carry on the same expectations when they have their own children. For example, they had strong opinions about etiquette and manners. The opinion that stood out the most was "having manners" in social settings and how indignant they felt when conformity and proper behavior was not upheld.

Another teenager said,

I can't believe how some mothers let their kids so out of control when they are out in public . . . If a Haitian mother were to see how some of some American children act at a restaurant, she would probably complain about it. You know things like running around in the restaurant, crawling on the floor, and not having good table manners. Haitian mothers don't allow children to misbehave in that way. A Haitian child behaves differently from an American child. A Haitian child would sit, eat, not be wild, and not be impolite . . . You know, the respect thing . . . I think the children should be respectful and that is how you shape them into good adults.

This evaluation has a sort of affirming presence as to what they have taken in as well as the things they do not want to repeat from the American culture.

This 17-year-old said,

American children have a very different way of looking at things. I do agree with a lot of what my mom says . . . Having the right manners is important . . . She [her mother] is always complaining about these kids outside, 'You say hi to them and they won't acknowledge you.' She thinks that they are not polite, and I agree with her on those types of issues. American kids are rude. It is not that they are being

intentionally rude; it is just that's how they were raised. Whereas my mom has stressed being respectful to adults and not to be rude. When you see someone, you are supposed to say good morning. At least acknowledge their presence. Like here, if you come into an elevator, people won't say hi or good morning, I think that's rude . . . When I have my kids, they will know all about the way they are supposed to act. They will have manners.

In discussing their dual identities, teenagers belonged to three distinct groups.

One group (about three girls) claimed only their Haitian heritage, another group conceded to being Haitian-American, and the last group said that they were Americans.

One teenager said,

I know a lot of the culture but I never lived in Haiti. So if I lived there for a period of time or something, I think that I would say that I am Haitian. They [Haitians] would probably say that I am not because I can't even speak the language. So, I think that I choose something that you can fit in. I think she [her mother] understands. I was born and raised here and I love America, so I do not see why I shouldn't say I am American. In a way, I am also Haitian.

Having the blessing of their mother to their cultural claim is important to these girls. "She [mother] is proud that I am not denying my roots. My mom is Haitian and I am not going to say that I am American. Some kids do that." Whether they claim the Haitian identity, the American one, or both, their mother's acceptance of their claim is important. Furthermore, I did not see a difference in the way of thinking from the different claims about their identities. Their reasons vary as to which claim they are willing to hold on to. Regardless of their claims, it was evident that their mothers' and/or family's influence as well as their Americanism were present with all of the girls. Moreover, whether they call themselves Haitian, American, or Haitian-American, they are being raised in households where there are strong culturally embedded messages about expectations and behaviors and all seem to abide by those expectations.

The mother sanctioning their duality in effect is telling of the mother's own level of assimilation and acculturation, and that in turn gives their children a sense of ownership and deeper appreciation for both cultures. In this attempt to deal with their children's dual identity, some of their parents would call them *Ti Americain* (Little American) and yet constantly reminding them of their Haitianness. "I like calling my self Haitian because it's different being Haitian than Haitian-American . . . I have always been proud calling myself Haitian because it helps me understand who I am . . . All my life that is what I have known . . . I have been around family members who have strong ties to the Haitian culture . . . they know who they are and they are proud of who they are . . ." This quote suggests strong ethnic ties to their Haitian identity and a strong vision of who they are as Haitians.

This adolescent commented,

They understand that I am not going to listen to a Sweet Mickey tape in my car; that I am going to listen to a Justin Timberlake CD or that the clothes I wear reflect typical American clothes and they are OK with that. I am definitely Haitian but I am American too. My taste is different from theirs and that's OK. They don't impose their own views on how Haitian or American I should be. They accept that about me. As the teenagers mentioned in the interview, their parents' attitudes toward embracing the two cultures provide them permission, comfort, acceptance, understanding, and stability.

### *Things Have to Change*

This navigation also entails challenging certain views that are irreconcilable for the teenagers. Challenging these views allows them to reflect on aspects about the Haitian culture that need to be looked at. Most of the girls interviewed believe that their

parents or family members have different expectations for females than they do for males.

One girl said, “They expect different things from me that they expect from my brothers . . . At times, they expect the house to be clean . . . My dad expects me to wash the clothes all the time . . . He says that is my job. They don’t have the same expectations for my brothers even when they were my age . . . That is to keep the house clean, cook, and wash clothes.”

In the same vein, many also believe that boys are treated better than girls are and are allowed more freedom. “When it comes to dating, boys are allowed to date earlier than girls. They [parents] don’t let girls go out as much.”

Among the things that have to change is the expectation that girls are to be domestic and boys do not have to be.

She [her mother] starts to tell me stories about when she was little that she knew how to cook since she was six . . . My dad always tells me that when my mom is not here that I am supposed to take her place in the household . . . Like watching after my brothers, what does that mean? Well I know I have to look after my brothers, tell them what is right and what is wrong, and stuff . . . I don’t like that because it’s not my job to maintain the house.

Similarly, most girls see Haitian women as being subservient to their mates and again believe that things must change. This places the teenagers at odds with their culture because they favor reciprocity in dealing with others. As one girl says, “From what I know and observe, most Haitian men rely on their wives to do a lot for them . . . The wives always have to get them their foods and drinks . . . The women get to be treated that way . . . not that they are exactly their maids but they get to do everything, like their

maids . . . I think that is rude, disrespectful, and inconsiderate.” Many of the girls are at a loss and concede that things have to change. “If I ever got married, it won’t be like that with my husband.” In their own right as assertive Haitian-American adolescents, they believe that it is up to Haitian women to demand that males treat them differently.

These men treat their women that way because they accept that type of treatment . . . Why do you accept your husband cheating on you? Going back and forth to different women? To me it’s not worth it . . . I would move on. Maybe these Haitian women believe in standing by their men because they have had a child with that man. It seems like the more they go through with that man, the more they want to stick around. I don’t understand that at all.

Attitudes such as this create some tension between them and their mothers because many would voice their opinion in support of their mothers. For instance, “I once asked my mother why she had to be the one to do everything in the home. She did not say anything; she looked at me and walked away.”

These girls’ unanimous show of contempt about the specific gender roles prescribed by their culture leads them to evaluate their stance about the gender issues.

Haitian women don’t seem to speak their minds . . . I think that you should speak your mind . . . I could never live like that . . . I could never *not* speak my mind, or have my life revolve around a guy . . . I am not going to let my male friends tell me whatever and just agree with them . . . My role is not to wait on them and make them happy. Today’s women are different. There are different guidelines to what a woman is supposed to do. I am not less of a woman I am just evolving with times, with what a woman is supposed to be.

Most of the teenagers discussed their wish for their mothers to be less indulging and less self-sacrificing when it came to her sense of duty and responsibility toward their fathers or stepfathers. For instance, “Well, I know there are a lot of times that I would get mad for her and I can tell that she gets mad too but she doesn’t say anything . . . Or like if

he is hungry she will just go fix a meal even though she may not want or feel like it. Just things like that, where I can tell that she bothered but she just won't say a thing. I wish she could stand up for her self and say something." By the same token, the girls don't see self-sacrifice as a virtue. Instead, they believe that their mothers' lack of assertiveness and outspokenness as a weakness.

The girls perceive adhering to gender and social scripts of the culture as necessary. At the same time, they add, but within limits. I had the sense that in talking about issues specifically dealing with gender, these teenagers believe that girls are naturally more compliant than boys.

I am glad that my parents only had girls, because if they had boys, he would rebel against all these rules and expectations. I think girls comply better than boys. At least I wear the type of clothes that they want me to because girls don't stand out too much if they don't wear fashionable clothing. I know that if my parents had boys they would not allow them to wear the fashion that boys do and they would have problems with each other.

### *Establishing Independence*

It's weird . . . It's like they don't want you to let go. Like my older sister just got married and my mother told her that she did not have to move out . . . Like most couples that are starting out, things are rough for her financially and my mother complains that she should not have moved out . . . She said that my sister should have stayed home, save money to buy a house. But I think that once you are married it's time to go.

Teenagers in general attain a period in their lives where they need to make a step toward independence. Attaining independence entails some physical and psychological separation. It is a developmental stage on their way to adulthood. Many in the field see it as the second separation/individuation stage with the first being during toddlerhood. "I

feel like my mother is always watching over me. By the time, I go to college I'll be grown enough to watch after myself. Beside, I need to learn how to be on my own and take care of me."

For many of these girls, establishing independence would be to live on campus when they attend college.

I want to go away to college but my mom and my family don't want me to . . . I don't know where I want to go but I told my parents that I want to go to Kansas. My dad he is OK with it but my mom is not. My mom does not want me to go away. I want to live on campus. I would like to go to New York, Florida, or California. I think I am ready to be on my own."

Establishing independence allows a natural progression in the shift in the relationship between mothers and their daughters as they defocus their attention from their mothers and invest in relationship outside of the mother-daughter dyad. "She probably thinks that I am drifting away from her. We used to talk all the time about stuff, we still talk but we don't talk like we used to, and I think that is because I am getting older and stuff. Now I feel more comfortable talking to my friends and I know that my mother doesn't understand that." Likewise, it is also about letting go of some of the maternal ties. "I want to live on campus but my mother told me that I should stay at home. I don't know why she wants me to stay home. I am old enough now to leave the nest . . . She always tells me that kids in Haiti don't leave their parents at 18 . . . To me, being 18 is the right time to try to be on my own. I am not leaving because I don't want to be with her anymore. I want to experience life."

## Parents' Results

### *Introduction*

The all-encompassing theme that emerged from the girls' interviews was "making sense of it all." For the girls, this "making sense" had to do with the manner in which they attempted to understand the potentials of the Haitian and American cultures. That involves learning about and navigating the differences between the two cultures. Making sense of it all was also a way of attaching meaning to their aspirations, managing their emotions, understanding their dual identity, dealing with issues of culture and feminism, and establishing independence on their way of becoming and evolving as young women.

Correspondingly, Haitian mothers were caught in this entrenched way of attaching meaning to their migration and acculturation as they raised their children in a country other than their homeland. In a way, they too are trying to make sense of that phenomenon. Similarly, they are trying to make sense of their ethnic culture as they know it. They are navigating between such knowledge and the concession of what needs to be changed about themselves as they try to function within American culture.

These interviews capture these mothers' efforts to pass down what they've deemed "good" about the Haitian culture. At the same time, they are constantly sorting out behaviors and values that were problematic for them as children in an effort not to repeat what they perceive as lacking in the Haitian culture. It was evident that many of the

negative patterns were being repeated, and some of the mothers openly talked against their own behavior in this respect.

Three main themes evolved in this section. The first one speaks to the importance of *Passing Down Of Haitian Values* to their children. This passing down of Haitian values to their children is the most important aspect for these mothers. By doing such, they can assure that they will pass down aspects of Haitian life that will assure their children success when it comes to family and societal expectations. To these mothers, the success of their children rests upon making sure that they take in and apply these values. Within that theme four different categories became apparent: (a) *Staying Close To Roots* speaks of the importance of understanding the culture and expectations. It deals with history and an attempt to capture the meaning of migration for these mothers. (b) *What I Expect From My Daughter* deals with conformity and expectations about values, behaviors, goals, and aspiration. (c) *What Will People Think or Say* addresses the intense preoccupation with conformity as a means to stay true to the culture and avoid being judged by peers. Hence, it depicts the interrelatedness between the mother and the daughter as well as the reciprocity of protecting each other's name by acting appropriately. (d) *Ethnic identity and Pride* deals with the manner in which these mothers deal with their Haitian identity and for some, their dual identity. The issue of pride fell under this category, as it was one of the driving forces for both mothers and daughters.

The second theme, *In Search of the American Dream*, speaks to the reasons that led these mothers to come to the United States in search of a better life. Within this theme, four categories emerged. The first category, *The Crossing Over*, deals with

managing their emotions as these mothers attempt to place meaning on their crossing. Issues like courage and sacrifice, parent-child relationship, exposure to the American culture, and reflections about their own upbringing are looked at as ways to have some meaning in their own lives.

*Never Thought It Would Be Like This* addresses the ways by which these mothers face incompatible feelings of helplessness as they cope with the challenges of parenting, and often racial discrimination. They've had to come to terms with their feelings of disconnect, losing their sense of community, and their attempts to recreate a support system. This particular category perhaps was one that came as a shock to these mothers because in their search of the American dream they did not expect to face these challenges.

*The Shift—Learning from America* speaks to the changes that take place within the mother because of her migration. These changes usually happen in relation to the mothers' comparison of the two cultures while they simultaneously decide what they want to adopt and reject from both cultures. It forces them to look at issues of childhood at times with victory and at other times with cynicism.

*It Is Not Time Yet to Let Go* speaks specifically to the struggles of these mothers who must lose their jobs as their daughters' external control as the girls leave home and go to college.

*The Payback* addresses the culmination of their voyage here in America by harvesting the fruit of all the sacrifices that they have made for their children and for themselves. This last category wraps up and gives meaning to coming to the United

States. The success of their children gives the mothers the sense of having accomplished something rewarding.

Three categories have emerged from the theme of Payback. *Daughter's Success and Mother's Pride* captures all the preparation and the web that mothers and daughters go through with the common goal of achieving success for the daughter and pride for the mother. *The Taking In* deals with the ways in which the daughters have taken in the teachings and expectations of the mother and acting upon them. This category is tied with mother's pride as it is one of the aims of the daughters. *The Gift* is the final result as the daughter ends up well-bred, spiritual, and educated, which translates into a gift to the mother that the mother's voyage was not in vain. Most of all, the mother has done a good job raising her child. Hence, this is the meaning of the payback as it relates to the first category and how it is a culmination of everything that has been taught and acquired by the daughter.

### *The Passing Down of Haitian Values*

We [Haitians] have a "double whammy" here. Raising children is hard enough; and we're raising them in a new setting. No wonder many Haitian children here in Miami have a lot of problems.

I went to this wonderful workshop put on by the Haitian women's organization at the university and they were talking about how lower socioeconomic class Haitians are not doing so well because of cultural issues stemming from feeling displaced and not being able to adjust to the new system. I believe that to make it here, you have to be able to take something from both cultures. People should not hold on to Haiti and everything that Haiti is about, because they are no longer in Haiti. They are in a totally different setting and they must move on with time.

Haitians have an unbending sense of values that seems to guide all the principles within the family relationship. The passing down is about cultural teaching of what they have known as their truth and what they want their children to emulate. Typical statements such as, “It is not in my custom. I did not learn it, I wasn’t raised in it, and I don’t know what it is . . . because I don’t know it, I am not going to allow you to do it,” are common between Haitian mothers and their daughters.

Their culture mediates their experiences, as people need their experiences mediated. Like their daughters, the parents also are attempting to make sense of being. The importance of passing down cultural values becomes more urgent because of their fears that they are losing their children to the American culture, and that their children have not taken in Haitian cultural values. For that reason, they want to make sure that their native values are upheld, understood, valued, and practiced. This phenomenon is perhaps more critical since these parents are immigrants. Having left their country already represents a loss of what they know as familiar and they have had to embrace all that is unfamiliar and different. “I worry about my daughter not knowing our ways. I don’t want her to only know things about here [America]. That is my only worry about raising my children here.” Since their children are being raised in two cultures, they believe that it is a matter of ethnic survival to teach them about the Haitian culture. “If she doesn’t learn about her ethnicity, she won’t know how to carry herself as a Haitian girl and when she goes back home . . . she won’t know what to do . . . As her mother, I feel that it is my job to make sure that she knows what we are all about.”

They bring with them their customs, values, and manners with the hope of passing them down to their children.

I try to teach them about how we [Haitians] do things . . . Just the other day, someone asked my daughter for a glass of water. She was walking upstairs with the glass, and I told her at least if you are not going to put it on a tray, get a napkin . . . She asked me why, because she was not going to spill it. So I don't think they get it but I have to keep on trying to teach them that we don't do things like that.

For these mothers, the first teachings happen at home as it is the first place to mold their children to become ready to be part of the larger community. "I am always telling my kids how to do this, that, and the other. Sometimes, they would say to me, 'Mommy, we are at home,' and I would tell them that is exactly why they have to learn to do it right — at home—because if they don't, they will do it elsewhere. Your habits, you carry with you everywhere you go."

Likewise, the passing down also means making a concerted effort to differ from the way they were raised. One mother said, "Either I consciously copy the way I was raised, or consciously do not copy the way I was raised. I think and reflect about these things, like what was good about the way I was raised . . . I try not to repeat the things I did not like about my culture . . . You know, the way Haitian parents see kids, but not really see them."

On the other hand, there are unresolved and unsettled feelings when Haitian values are not passed down to the children. A mother, whose first husband was not Haitian, talked of her regrets for not having exposed her children to the Haitian culture.

On the other hand, the situation of her family took a different turn when she married her second husband, who was Haitian.

I do not necessarily feel good about how I raised my two older children. Their father is not Haitian. And so they are not really too accustomed to the Haitian way of life. They know about Haiti intellectually, but they don't really experience it, or they have not experienced Haiti the way I think that they should have. I did not want my daughter to grow up like that. I like being here in South Florida because there is a different feeling about being Haitian . . . My daughter is now in a world where everyone is from someplace else, and very often they are from Haiti. So she needs to know what it is — she needs to experience it — other than the kind of experience I have given her so far.

Her comment speaks to the importance of personal and community support when it comes to the passing down. The fact that they live in a Haitian community makes it also more possible to achieve cultural transmission of values and identity.

### Staying Close to Roots

My daughter is very Haitian. She can cook Haitian food, she speaks Creole, she has manners, and she knows how to act in public. She knows what we expect of her.

*Staying Close To Roots* deals specifically with gaining an understanding about the Haitian way of life that addresses knowledge about Haiti, its culture, and a set of cultural expectations that include loyalty and duty, having a sense of community, maintaining ties, having a strong work ethic, and understanding the meaning of spirituality.

*Staying Close to Roots* means that while the children gain an appreciation of all the benefits of the United States, they ought to remain mindful of the plight of the Haitian people. That awareness comes as a teaching about issues of dignity and perseverance.

Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere and one of the poorest in the world. Like our former president said, “There is no indignity in poverty.” There are things in us, in all of us, that I think are valuable. I want her to know that although things seem easy here . . . Things are rough for Haiti and Haitians living there . . . So I teach her not to be wasteful and to appreciate what she has here.”

Part of that teaching is to ensure that the children understand the scarcity of resources in Haiti. “Oh, by telling her she cannot wash or take a shower that lasts for an hour and empty the water tank like you do here . . . You cannot do this and that. That you have to be careful about this, that, and the other.”

This teaching has an empowering effect for the mothers as well as their children. The mothers’ messages to their children are that they can withstand hardship and be victorious, by not giving up and striving for excellence. It is like a moral tale going to Haiti by implying that one must work hard in order to make it.

I want them to see the country where I grew up. You know, if I can make it there, I want to believe that they can actually make it here. It was not easy but we made it. Most of all I want to teach them that in life, nothing is easy. Here, two parents who are professionals are raising them. Everything they want, they get easily. I want to show them that they have to aspire to make it.

Staying close to one’s Haitian roots is also about educating their daughters about family duty and loyalty. Since the family is seen as an entity that provides the necessary elements for one’s survival, it is crucial that one’s family is held in a place of honor and reverence; hence, the importance of teaching about roots. “Family comes first. You have to respect them and put them before friends. I tell my daughter that her family is like the eyes in her head.” This metaphor is quite interesting as the eyes represent sight, and

without sight, it is difficult to find one's way around; this speaks of the importance of familyhood.

Such teaching about the family also addresses the need to respect privacy. "I tell my daughter that when we go somewhere, she has to honor our privacy; that when she goes somewhere she should not tell people our business." Family devotion and a sense of duty toward one's family is a cherished value among Haitian families and that is seen also as part of this sense of community that is instilled in their children.

Another aspect of staying close to one's roots is instilling in their daughters a sense of community. This is about preserving the sense of support that one feels from the community as well as being an active participant in one's community. Thus, to many of these mothers, banding together does add strength and instills hope for its members.

"We have hopes and we live with hope . . . that things can be done through togetherness even though things can be hard sometimes. We also believe in hard work and in working with adversity. Patience is a virtue for us." Likewise, having a strong sense of work ethic is another area that gives their children a sense of community.

The third aspect of the communal way of being is duty and camaraderie toward others within their surroundings.

I like the fact that friends would call me and say, "Can I bring you something to eat?" If I am not feeling well . . . They'll invite me over to their house just because . . . I like all of that . . . That is what we do . . . This whole notion that Haitians are always talking is so true. We talk all the time, whether we are arguing or fighting we are relating and interacting all the time. The 'people connection' stuff . . . I really like that. Besides family, I want my daughter to know that it is important to be loyal to her friends.

Maintaining ties is another area that these mothers celebrate their roots. Accordingly, visits to Haiti are encouraged as a means to experience the culture “en vivo.” All the mothers say that they want their children to be and remain familiar with relatives to hopefully gain some type of appreciation about Haiti, and a clearer understanding for who they are as young Haitian girls.

It’s important that they see where we are from . . . We just tell them about the culture, but seeing and experiencing it is a different thing . . . We have lots of family in Haiti and it’s good that she knows her family.” Furthermore, maintaining those close ties and relationships give their children a sense of belonging as well as gaining a better understanding to where the mothers grew up. Vicariously, they might gain a clearer understanding of their mothers.

It’s important to have my daughter visit Haiti because she has to see where I came from . . . That’s the only way she will know who she is . . . I talk to her about Haiti and how I grew up. Because she does not live in Haiti, I think that it is more important. She is aware of our history, that we are proud people . . . We may be poor but we are proud.

These mothers have employed many avenues through which they teach their children about their roots. The visits to Haiti are usually in that spirit. Another method is through formal teaching about Haitian history. “When they were young, I taught them about Haitian history . . . They know important people in our history like Dessalines, Toussaint L’Ouverture, and Christophe.”

Teaching their children about the Haitian way of life is important to these mothers. “I tell them that Haiti was a good place to grow up. How parents and families work together. You know, how the aunts, the uncles, the grandparents, and the neighbors

help raise kids together. I really miss that . . . I tell her these things because I want her to know how we do things and, in a way, what we expect of her.”

The passing down addresses the manner in which these mothers encourage their daughters to maintain their religion and spirituality. “I want her [daughter] to go to church because she needs to continue to make God a priority in her life . . . I don’t know what she will do when she gets older, but while she is a child, I need to make sure that she knows that it is something that I expect of her.”

Having their daughters attend church on a regular basis is an important ritual and a means to obtain strength and show gratitude for God’s blessings. “We have a lot to be thankful to God and I want to make sure she knows that . . . I want her to pray because that is how we get our strengths.”

Although religion and spirituality play an important role in Haitian communities, they were not the main driving force to value and morality; rather, cultural forces were the main factors in the way these Haitian adolescents and their mothers function. Surprisingly, most mothers hold the following view: “I don’t think I should not do things because I am afraid of punishment [from God], but because I think it is wrong . . . I think that is how I raised my children . . . I try to reflect on them and live with my own conscience. Not because I am afraid or ashamed but because I can’t live with myself when I am not my best.”

*What I Expect from My Daughter*

In this section, *What I Expect From My Daughter* deals with parental and cultural expectations of the mother to the daughter. This category is an extension of the previous category where the parents were passing down the main teaching about the culture. For Haitian parents, part of this passing down is to teach their children about certain Haitian values that basically deal with expectations about conduct and achievements. Such values are rooted in cultural beliefs that children are to be *obedient*, that they have *self-respect* and *respect* for others, that they remain *sexually chaste*, that they are honest and hardworking, and lastly, they understand the need to *achieve academically*.

*Obedience* means that the child must unconditionally listen and follow her parents' directives. One of the difficulties that parents have is when their daughters do not provide this unconditional acceptance of directives and suggestions. Many mothers admit that they have difficulties when their children demand some sort of information when they give them a suggestion. For a child to ask why, or to say to the mother that she does not particularly want to do something is grounds for this dialogue to be called talking back, disrespectful, or disobedient. Those types of exchanges are usually met with disapproval, anger, or chastisement.

One mother said,

One thing that gets me angry is when I ask her to do something and she asks me why . . . I ask her why she asks me why . . . To me, it is clear if I tell my children to do something, the only thing I expect is that they will follow and do it . . . Sometimes my daughter tells me, "You don't want me to express my feelings." She always has something to say, blah, blah, blah. I always remind her that where

I come from, when your parents talk you are supposed to listen; you are not supposed to talk back. She likes to talk back. She always talks back.

Those types of reflections are usually followed by their memories of their own childhood and how they themselves did not challenge their parents.

As much as I wanted to say something, I couldn't. Sometimes when I was outside playing, and my mother would call me and I felt real bothered, and I'd say to myself, "Stop bothering me!" I had to learn to keep those urges and feelings inside because you cannot respond to your parents any way you want. But here, they stand up and say what they have to say. I understand that a child may want to talk back, but the proper thing to do is to give your response under your breath. You cannot talk to your elders like that . . . I would get beat if I acted the way my daughter acts. [Laughs] I was tempted to defy my father, but I learned to deal with my urges to defy him.

The mothers expect their daughters to demonstrate respect for themselves and others. This is one of the most important values in the Haitian culture. Having self-respect means that one's comportment needs to be exemplary. Thus, a person who respects him/herself watches or monitors their behavior in relating to the world. Those behaviors include being polite, exercising sound social skills, displaying appropriate mannerisms, and the way one dresses. It is only by having self-respect that the person will receive respect from others. To these mothers, if their daughters do not respect themselves, others will not give them respect.

One mother says,

To me, piercing and self-respect go hand in hand . . . The thing is, you should not do anything that is going to give people a bad impression of who or what you are . . . So, no, you can't have a bigger tattoo. Especially on certain parts of your body because that will send a signal that you might not want sent . . . You have to respect yourself and you have to understand what message you are sending out by certain behaviors . . . You see what I am saying? If you want others to respect you, you have to respect yourself. You can't wear a skirt that is up to here [short] like that. Oh, then we will have to negotiate on that . . . As for the tattoos, I told

her that she would have to wait until she is grown and then she can make that decision . . . When she is done with college and she is on her own, then she can tattoo away, but right now, I am not doing that. Self-respect means behaving in ways that people don't have to think badly of you.

Social skills are considered necessary to conform to societal expectations and as a set of guidelines to be transmitted to children that will support being part of the community.

As one mother said,

My kids are tired of me telling them about that kind of stuff. Sometimes they think that I am too strict but I am the first to remind them when they are not showing good manners. They are girls, and they must know how to sit, have good table manners, and distinguish themselves. I hate it when she stands in one side of the room and yells out loud to get my attention. She knows that I will not answer . . . It's just not what we are teaching her.

Another mother speaks of the way that her daughter dresses.

I told her that the way she dresses, talks, and behaves tells people whether she respect herself or not. I teach my child about respect and the way she carries herself. I told her that she couldn't be loud when she is in public because that is impolite. Sometimes she tells me that I am old-fashioned because I told her that there are certain ways that I want her to dress. I always remind her that she is Haitian and not to act like American kids.

*Respect* is also a value that is expected unconditionally by the parents and elders in Haitian communities. "Respect means that you have to respect yourself in order for people to respect you. That means a lot to me because the way you carry yourself is the way people will treat you. I told her that if she doesn't respect herself nobody is going to respect her."

As the word respect does not always carry the same significance to the children as it does to their mothers, a discrepancy was noted as to whether certain exchanges between

Haitian children and their parents are deemed disrespectful. While many parents see their children's outspokenness as disrespectful, their children nonetheless claim that they are only expressing their views and demonstrating their biculturalism. This creates conflict between parents and children. As a mother states,

These kids think that it's a free country and they can talk back . . . Give their opinion . . . When I was growing up in Haiti, I could not tell my mom that I did not like so and so . . . I never asked why . . . Can you imagine asking our parents why? They call it self-expression; I call it being rude and disrespectful . . . I remember the first time my daughter talked back to me; I think she was about eight or nine. . . I felt [Pause] I was so hurt that I went to my bathroom and cried. . . That was one of the most painful experiences in my life . . . That was my oldest child — now she is thirty years old.

This moment in this particular mother's life reflects the reactions of many of the mothers. Some of them only have one child, and for the ones who have more than one child, it seems like similar encounters with other children in the family did not provide as much of a narcissistic blow as the first child. As I talked to these mothers, I did not have the sense that their children were blatantly disrespectful; only perhaps expressing their contempt or anger when they were displeased with their mothers. These exchanges were exacerbated by cultural differences, between the way the mother was raised and the daughter's exposure to American culture.

Respect and self-respect are areas in which parents are concerned with how others will view them if their children do not practice self-respect. In essence, if their daughters do not practice self-respect or respect others, they will be judged along with their daughters. From the parents' point of view being judged about their daughter's lack of self-respect means that they did not do a good job raising them, for example.

I always tell her that she has to respect herself . . . Yes, it's important to me that people see her as a very nice girl, and that she is successful by being educated. I am raising her the way I am supposed to." During the interviews, I had a sense that many mothers would see their daughters' misbehavior as a personal failure. It would be as if she did not do a good job as a parent. "My daughter knows that if she were to do that [sex], that would hurt me a lot. For sure, people would think that I am not a good mother.

Sexual chastity is another area in which the parents expect their children to conform. Because of the urgency to achieve in school, most parents expect that their daughters to refrain from dating until they are attending or finish college.

To many of these mothers, having a boyfriend will detract their children from their studies. "She needs to keep her head in the books . . . I had my first boyfriend when I was 16 years old and I got married at 19. It was not good for me . . . That is why I did not finish school . . . I had to go back to school after I had her.

To ensure that their children remain sexually chaste most of the mothers agree that they are vigilant at providing strong external control for their daughters by making sure that they are closely monitored—meaning that their daughters' whereabouts and the quality of their friendships are closely scrutinized. Sexual chastity is a virtue that is expected of their daughters by all mothers. As one said, "She gets angry with me because I don't let go out just for the sake of going out . . . I have to know where she is and who she is hanging out with. I told her that I am responsible for her, and it is my job to make sure I raise her right . . . that I know where she is."

Most of the mothers admit that they do not initiate conversations regarding sex and sexuality but are open to discussing those types of issues if their daughters were to ask them questions or had concerns. The mothers' anxiety regarding sex or sexuality is apparent as most of them became somewhat agitated by the discussion of sexual matters.

My observation is that the majority of the mothers interviewed avoided the question as to what they would do if they were aware that their daughters were being sexually active. “Let’s not talk about this now” or “This is too much for me right now” or “I can’t do that subject right now,” or “she is not” or “I can’t think about it,” were the usual answers from the mothers. It was rather difficult for these parents to imagine or even talk about what they would do or say if they thought their daughters were being sexually active. “It is difficult for me to answer that question because one, she is not there yet, and two, I am not there, and three [Pause]. Let’s go on to the next subject.”

Most of the mothers could not imagine their daughters being sexually active. Some would view such acting out as a personal affront against them and a difficult issue to overcome. That is why many of the mothers preferred saying, “She would never do that,” “I don’t think that will happen,” or “That will never happen.”

However, two of the mothers interviewed did not seem particularly anxious about the possibility of their daughters being sexually active. Although they didn’t want their daughters to become sexually active, they took refuge in the feeling that their daughters’ sense of maturity and responsibility would lead them to make appropriate decisions when it comes to sexual issues. When asked whether or not they would help their daughters obtain birth control if they thought that their daughters were being sexually active, the same two mothers said they would not personally get involved with that prospect, but they believe that their daughters would make smart and informed decisions about birth control.

One mother said, “But I tell you something—I have a feeling that I may not need to do that because she might know what to do. I have raised her in such a way that when it is time to make that decision, she is wise enough . . . [Pause] You know what I mean.”

As with similar issues discussed earlier, these mothers have a strong preoccupation with what people would think of them and their daughters if they were being sexually active. Sexual chastity, I believe, is encouraged as a way to protect the family’s reputation.

Another mother said, “I want her to remain a virgin because I don’t want others to see her as a *devergonde* (loose; easy). People will say for sure that I was not a good mother if she out there disrespecting herself.”

Sexual chastity is also closely tied to respect and self-respect. For example, if the daughter is being sexually active, that means that she does not respect herself and therefore will lose the respect of others. “If she is doing that [sex] people will lose respect for her. They will think that she is not a good person, and guys . . . well, they will think that she was not raised right.”

The issue of birth control brings even more anxiety to these mothers. Even if they knew that their daughters were sexually active, they would not put them on birth control. Their reasoning is that they would not want their daughters to think that they are encouraging them to be sexually active. For example, “What kind of mother would I be if I put her on birth control? I understand that kids might want to do that kind of stuff but they have to learn self-control first.” Interestingly, this stance was not due to their

religious beliefs but their convictions—their cultural convictions and expectations of sexual purity and chastity.

As mentioned in the girls' results, most parents wanted their children to wait until college before they are allowed to date. Although they are not permitted to date while in high school, dating is an issue that comes up occasionally from the girls. In those instances, the mothers have strong parameters about what type of young man is suitable as well as acceptable for their daughter to date. Issues like education, manner, and physical appearance make their way to the top of the list.

I tell my daughter that I will not allow her to date anyone who is dumb. He has to be in school and educated. I don't want anyone with braids, sagging jeans, no gold-tooth boy . . . Not that anything is wrong with them but they are associated with things that are not good, and that is how society looks at them. Why should I be different? . . . Manners count also. The boy has to have good manners and be presentable. I told them, don't even bother bringing those types of boys home.

All of these mothers say they truly believe that they don't have to worry about their daughter being defiant toward their rules and expectations because they believe that their daughters have taken in those values about themselves and their environment. Unanimously, they say, "I don't think she will go out with anyone like that because the people she is friends with are people like her." Most importantly, these mothers are self-assured and believe in the guidance that they are providing to their daughters.

Most of the mothers would prefer that their daughters date other Haitians because that is one way they can ensure some sort of compatibility with their culture. About two of the mothers were not specific with the boyfriends' nationality but found it as important for their daughters to bring home someone who is presentable, educated, and well mannered.

These mothers indicate that the type of boys that the daughters bring home is indicative of self-respect—meaning if the daughter feels good about herself she will without hesitation choose someone who suits her both emotionally and intellectually. “She cannot date someone beneath her intellectually . . . I have to guide her because it will not work out in the long run.”

Honesty and a good work ethic are other areas where parents expect conformity. These parents are living examples of that. Many hold several jobs to ensure the physical and financial safety of their children.

I am always after her because she does not want to do her chores at home. The way I see it, her studies come first and after that, she has to help out around the house. She thinks that I am not fair when I get after her but it is for her own good. If she knows the value of hard work, she will keep those values when she is older. If I allow her to be lazy she will remain lazy, when she is older. I stress honesty and hard work because that is the only way she will make it in life.

#### *Academic Achievement (Education)*

Academic achievement is another area where Haitian parents have strong expectations. During their children’s formative years, the idea of attending college and obtaining a professional degree has been nurtured as an ultimate goal for them. “Education and boyfriend don’t go together. That is why I don’t want her to get distracted with a boyfriend.”

Education is seen as a way to gain respect from others. “I always tell her that is important . . . If you don’t have education you are nothing . . . You get respect when you

have education . . . Everywhere you go, whatever job you got, when you have an education, people respect you more.” Another mother says,

We talk about college all the time . . . as a matter of fact, since she was little. She told us that she wants to be a lawyer; we told her that when she graduates as a lawyer in this country you don’t make any money. You are black, you don’t have a name yet, and so I try to explain to her that it works better usually if she follows her parents’ line of profession. Like, her father has an office, he is a doctor, and she will have fought half the battle. We try to give them ideas, but we don’t impose anything on them.

### *What Will People Think or Say?*

*What Will People Think or Say* speaks to the intense preoccupation that parents have concerning how others will view them in the community. The mothers expect their daughters to have a clear understanding of their responsibility to exhibit acceptable behavior when they are out in public. Exhibiting appropriate behavior will ensure that the family will be spared from judgment from others. These messages to the daughters are usually explicit as they pass down to them the responsibility to preserve their names as well as their families’ name by a show of appropriate behavior.

Being judged by the Haitian community is one concern expressed by most of these mothers. One mother says, “My daughter knows how to behave in public. It is disrespectful if she embarrasses me in front of people. If we are out in front of people and I tell her to go get me something and she asks ‘Why?’ that will embarrass me and that will lower me in their eyes because they will judge me. Don’t do that to me?”

This preoccupation stems from the fear that others will perceive them as not being good enough when it comes to the way they are raising their daughters. There is also a

fascinating intergenerational preoccupation that seems to guide the actions of all of its members. Although the girls did not seem as concerned as their mothers as to how they are viewed, they nonetheless refrain from certain behaviors because they strive to honor their mother's reputation. This sort of preoccupation has an entrenched generational flavor as the mothers themselves are safeguarding their own mothers' reputation by making sure that others know that they [the mothers] had a "good" upbringing. The next remark by this mother reflects that very idea about that issue.

"Nobody is perfect. I am not worried about being a good mom, but when they see me I want them to see the way my parents raised me, and that is the way I am also raising my daughter. Again, I don't want them [Haitians] to think that I am not raising my daughter right . . . To me, that would also mean that I was not raised right." This by and large creates a generational complexity of "proper behavior" that becomes the marker for expected behaviors.

*What Will People Think or Say?* Focuses in part on the type of clothing they allow their daughters to wear. "I told her that when she goes with her people [her friends] she can dress the way she wants, but when she is going to be around Haitian people she has to dress properly because they will be looking at her and will think that I am not raising her right. Things like tight pants and mini skirts—it's just not proper with Haitians."

A strong preoccupation with community perception of the mothers and their beliefs that their children's behavior is a direct reflection on them was evident. "I know

my people; I know that they will judge you. When they judge her then they are going to judge me too. They will ask her how come your mom let you do this and that.”

Although most mothers said that they did not worry too much about being seen as a “bad mom,” it was also obvious that besides honoring the way they were raised, they also had some anxiety about not being seen as a good mother. This supports Haitian beliefs that one’s behavior has a direct effect on family. The mothers are also concerned about what relatives do or say about the way that they are raising their children. As one said, “Her grandfather is after me all the time. He would tell me, ‘You let her wear this?’ He keeps on complaining, but I never say anything. I would tell my daughter to cover her back.” Mothers are, for the most part, the carrier of culture. By teaching her children proper behavior, etiquette, customs, and values of the Haitian culture a mother is showing her children how to be and act like Haitians.

### *Ethnic Identity and Pride*

I do not call myself African-American because African-American to me denotes an ethnicity. But it depends on what it is they are trying to elicit from me. If they are trying to elicit what race I belong to, I may write black. If they are trying to elicit what ethnic group I come from, I may then write Haitian-American. But I usually write black.

*Ethnic Identity and Pride* is the last category in this section. Identity and pride resonated throughout the interviews with both the mothers and the daughters. The subjects’ identification with the Haitian culture guided their actions and beliefs about themselves. This great emphasis flows from the mothers to the daughters as a means to give a past to their children. To these mothers, teaching their children about roots means

the survival of the whole culture and their identity as Haitians. Culture as adding to their survival becomes a way of mediating their experiences. Their identification with the Haitian culture allows them to fend off some external negative feelings because they can identify with something positive. To these mothers, the Haitianness of their children serves as an antidote to fend off negative feelings that could be associated with others.

As one mother expressed this, “It’s important to me that people see me as a Haitian woman because that is the only way they are going to see me for who I am. I am a Haitian woman who was raised by a Haitian family who is proud of being who she is. I don’t want to be mistaken for Black-American, although there is nothing wrong with that but they would not see me for who I am.” Another says,

I call myself Haitian but my children say that they are American because they were born here. I always tell them that I am going to pass on to them the education that I had. So they might as well call themselves Haitian—they are right because I don’t mind that they say that they are American . . . It’s not what they say it’s what’s being done. They are getting the Haitian education and that it the most important thing to me.

Part of their identity is about claiming their Haitian heritage and instilling pride about their ethnicity. “A lot of people think that I am from Jamaica but I want them to know that I am from Haiti. I know that some people don’t say that they are Haitian but I always tell my daughter everywhere you go make sure you let people know that you are Haitian-American. As far as the Haitian culture, I told her that Haitian people have a lot of pride. My daughter is proud to be Haitian-American and that’s how I like it.”

Culture is an integral part of the lives of these mothers and their children. To these mothers, it is not a matter of explaining their culture to their daughters but simply teaching by example.

I don't explain it [the Haitian culture], we live in. If something comes up that requires some kind of explanation, I will proceed with one . . . My father, being a very authoritative Haitian, has just some things that he doesn't want done and he is not going to explain it. So I have to tell my daughter about that type of stuff because that is just how things are . . . You know, being an authoritarian . . . For example, when they are sitting in their kitchen eating my father doesn't like it when people walk behind him . . . Now don't ask me why—he is not going to explain it. He gets angry, so don't walk behind . . . And he gets really angry if you walk behind his chair . . . I don't know why he is like that, but don't do it. My daughter calls me a punk and a daddy's girls [laughs]. I guess that is my way of telling her about the authoritarian thing in the culture . . . I just know that he gets extremely angry if people do that, so the way I've always dealt with it is not to push the issue. I don't walk behind his chair while he is eating. That is why my daughter calls me a punk because I never question my father . . . Of course, she says it jokingly, and not in front of anyone.

Conversely, there is a painful realization that when one does not follow the status quo one can be ostracized and deemed not good enough to be called Haitian.

It is either that they [other Haitians] find what I am saying so different or what I am doing is offensive, they are not embracing me or they don't want to embrace me as a Haitian . . . It is because I am not following through with the traditional values of being authoritarian, with my kids or dictating to them what they should do or be doing. I have a dialogue with my kids . . . I call myself Haitian-American, because Haitians think I am extremely American . . . Looking around, my taste, my lifestyle, I am very much an internationalist so Haitians think I am very American because of the way I raise my children. People are saying that I am not truly Haitian . . . That is what they say, but I don't necessarily agree with them . . . The Haitians and the Haitian culture are extremely authoritarian.

#### In Search of the American Dream

They always ask me why I came here. I say, “When you go to school in my country, sometimes it is hard to find a job, and my parents wanted the best for

their kids. All parents want the best for their kids. That is why they sent me here so I can have a better life and be able to work.

This quote is reflective of many of the parents as they retell the story of their voyage to the United States. Their primary reason to migrate to this country was in search of a better life and in turn, they passed that same dream and aspiration to their children.

*In Search of the American Dream* is the second theme that evolved from the discussions with the mothers. This theme addresses the immigration and migration of these mothers in search of having a better life. Although they were not cognizant of what that would entail, they nonetheless made the voyage to the United States in hope of a better future. From this particular theme, four categories emerged.

*The Crossing Over*, deals with mothers managing their emotions as they attempt to place meaning on their crossing. This category also deals the mother's reactions after leaving loved ones behind, the sacrifices they made coming to the United States, being exposed to a different culture, fear of losing one's child to the American culture, and reflections about their own upbringing.

*Never Thought It Would Be Like This*, addresses ways by which these mothers face incompatible feelings of helplessness as they cope with the challenges of parenting, face racial discrimination, come to terms with their feelings of disconnection, lose their sense of community, and attempts to recreate a support system. This particular category perhaps came as a shock to these mothers because as they searched for the American dream they did not expect to face such challenges.

*The Shift*—*Learning From America*, speaks to the changes that took place within the mother as a result of her migration. These changes usually happened with the mothers' comparison of the two cultures while simultaneously deciding what they wanted to adopt and reject from each of the cultures. This forced them to look at issues of childhood—some times with victory and some times with cynicism.

*It Is Not Time Yet To Let Go*, is the final category in this theme. This speaks specifically to the struggles of these mothers to relinquish their role as their daughter's external control to the girls leaving home and going to college.

### *The Crossing Over*

*The crossing over* also means having left behind people they care about. All of the mothers talked about their crossing over as bittersweet. On one hand they are glad to be here in the United States, and on the other hand, they have a lingering sadness about the realization they would not return to Haiti. They worry about political issues and safety issues, not only for their families but for other Haitians. As in, "I worry about Haiti a lot. Kids can't go to school, people are dying every day, and people don't have enough to eat. When I go to Haiti sometimes I just look around and I start to cry . . . I always say to myself that I would go back and retire there. Now forget it. It is no longer an option for me because things are worse now."

Haiti's deteriorating condition brings their dreams of returning home to live an impracticality that will not be realized. For that reason I believe that it is even more important that their crossing takes on a meaning of its own by making sure that their

children grasp a true understanding of upholding the Haitian culture through teaching and examples. “I would love to bring my daughter there [Haiti] but it’s just not safe. So it’s important that I teach her about the culture because I want her to know how things are in Haiti.”

The crossing over is about courage and sacrifice as the women reflect on what they had to endure coming here to the United States.

It was not easy obtaining a visa to come here. My family pitched in so that I could have enough money for the plane ticket to come here . . . I did not know anyone. . . . I came here as a maid . . . On my day off, I just went and sat in churches or the mall because I had no place to go . . . [Pause] I wanted to go back to Haiti because it was too hard.

These mothers traveled over the Atlantic Ocean to the United States determined to become more economically stable themselves and to improve the economic conditions of relatives left behind.

As one said, “I was the first one to come here, and then I sent for my mother, then my brother, then my sister . . . Later on, my sister sent for her kids . . . Now we are all here.” Being responsible and loyal to family is important. These women are living that expectation. This behavior/attitude is expected in the Haitian culture toward one’s family. Sacrificing for one’s family is one’s testimony of love and devotion. These mothers exemplify cultural expectations about collectivity and duty toward one’s family. “We are all in this together . . . Since I was the first one here, I had my chance to help my family.”

The crossing over entails being exposed to differences and when those differences are not explained and understood, that leaves room for fear and confusion.

I remember that my daughter refused to wear what I brought her because she told me that they were not “cool” . . . Imagine, I spend all this money on her and she told me that what I brought her wasn’t cool . . . She would hide the clothes I would buy for her and tell me that she doesn’t like my taste . . . She was angry with me because I would not give in. For a long time I thought that something was wrong with her.

From the mother’s explanation, it appears that her daughter was striving for autonomy, separation, and individuation. It was difficult for these parents because they had different experiences than their daughters. As one mother put it,

I don’t think that I ever told my mother that I did not like what she gave me . . . Even if I didn’t, I kept my mouth shut . . . Even as a grown up, I still watch how I talk to my mother. I had to wait until I left her house before I could really tell her things . . . As a child I learned to be satisfied with the little I had, and also understood my limitations . . . But here, kids will tell you that they make their own money and they will buy what ever they want.

Unlike their daughters, it took these mothers a long time before they could attempt to establish some independence and autonomy.

For that reason, some of the mothers began to feel that they were losing control or the ability to have influence over their daughters. In this crossing over, there is also fear that they are losing their children to the American culture.

For the first one [referring to her oldest child], I was really hurt and shocked. That was my first experience . . . I didn’t know when that big change happened . . . They go buy what they want and at that age I don’t want them to go to the store alone . . . That was a big problem for me, and I didn’t know what to do . . . I felt that I was losing my child because even as a grown-up with my own mother, I had certain limits . . .but when you see a child at 14 or 15 and their behavior changes so badly and you say, “Oh, my God,” you feel like you are losing your child.

This comment is perhaps typical of an anxious parent who feels ineffective, helpless, and scared, toppled by unfamiliar, irreconcilable and clouded cultural issues.

This particular mother echoes the sentiments of other mothers who often feel criticized by their daughters.

When they are not happy with me, they tell me that they are Americans. I allow them to have their opinion because that is one thing that I didn't like about Haiti — Kids could not talk to grown ups. They used to call me crazy in school because I would openly disagree and refuse to do certain things that my teachers asked me to do. I would get punished, but I did it anyway. They still think that I am crazy because I speak my mind. I don't expect them to be disrespectful, but I don't want them to be a yes-or-no kid.

The feeling of losing one's child is about the notion that one's authority and rights are being challenged by outside influences. Although these influences are well-accepted here and protected by the children's personal rights, they are nonetheless different from what the parents are accustomed to.

My daughter had been coming home unusually late from work and I told her that I was going to her job to let them know that they cannot keep you at work so late. I told her if the job does not let her out earlier, she is going to have quit the job. Do you know what my daughter said? She said, 'Well, when I am 18, what are you going to do?' It is as if I have no right to my kids. My son, when he was a sophomore in college, they sent his grades through the computer. I didn't see anything. So, I went to his school asking to see his grades. They told me that I could not have access to my son's grades. I could not believe what I was hearing. I left the school in a hurry. I almost passed out. Physically, my body went numb, my stomach was turning, and I felt as if my head was going to explode in the car. What does that mean—I can't have access to my own son's records? That was when I realized once again that this was not a place to raise my children.

The crossing over includes learning to deal with the many adversities of parenting. The mothers talk of their anxiety and worry when their children do not comply with cultural rules and expectations. During those occurrences, many of the mothers become anxious and awaited the worst. "My husband always tells me that I worry too

much . . . I just don't want her to fail . . . When she acts up, I can't sleep, I don't eat because I worry so much . . . I think she gave me an ulcer.”

Some of the mothers exercised and resorted to prayers when things got rough.

When I tell her [referring to her 17-year-old daughter] something, she would talk back and she would not back down . . . Sometimes I just pray for strength to deal with her.” Others see the phase as temporary and something non-Haitian. “When the child is in her adolescent crisis. . . What you go through with your child, and the type of changes that you see in them, you know that back home, things like that don't exist . . . So I said to myself, now I see why some people say not to have too many kids.

The crossing over also provides an opportunity for these mothers to begin to take in and reflect on such differences. Although unfamiliar, they were slowly relinquishing some of their thinking and beginning to view parenting in a different light. A needed dialogue was beginning to emerge as a means of understanding their daughters. Their exposure to the American culture was beginning to reorganize their thinking and their views on the parent-child dyad. Consequently, they began to create avenues through which their daughters' need for self-expression was cautiously encouraged.

I realize that I had to give in a little and give her some freedom, so we started to negotiate certain things . . . She [daughter] also knew that I would not negotiate on certain things . . . Instead of buying her clothes, we went shopping together.

### *Never Thought It Would Be Like This*

Coming to the United States symbolizes a pathway to a better future. In their view of this better future, these mothers did not envision facing certain obstacles. In this category of *Never Thought It Would Be Like This*, the mothers discussed their parental, cultural, and personal conflicts that they face in the United States. Lack of parental

control, discrimination, lack of connection and support from their community, feelings of helplessness and isolation often intensify their longing for Haiti and bring them to the realization that they are living in a different world.

Throughout the interviews, it became evident these mothers had a very strong presence in the lives of their daughters. The mother of a bicultural child is faced with the complicated task of simultaneously navigating two cultures. Their feelings are at times incompatible because of differences since there are some contradictions about the way things “ought” to be. Furthermore, the differences in ideologies may not always support many of their views and beliefs about parenting issues.

The first challenge being discussed is the mother’s reaction of helplessness when a child is not living to parental expectations.

When I first came, I didn’t have any problems, because my sister and I came to live with our cousins. After I got married and had kids, things became difficult for me. I had to do work at home, and go to work. Taking care of things around the house was difficult because of my outside work schedule. Things were the most difficult with my son. Things got even more difficult when he turned 13 . . . My son always gave me problems, like refusing to do his homework and talking in class. His school used to call me all the time about his behavior . . . We tried talking to him, my husband spanked him, and we did everything but he still talked in school . . . I said to myself the only thing I’m gonna do is to send him to Haiti. I always said that, and if I knew things were going to be like that I would not raise my children here. I am not saying that I am sorry for having children, but if I knew . . . I just would not have raised them here . . . That was when things started to bother me. I didn’t know what to do . . . I felt so helpless.

Not knowing what to do was a recurring feeling for these mothers.

Facing discrimination is an issue that came as a surprise to these mothers and echoed in their thoughts as they *never thought it would be like this*. The first type of

discrimination is coming to terms with the realization that others [non-Haitians] have a preconceived idea that all Haitians are uneducated.

They look at Haitians always in the wrong way. That's why many people don't want to identify themselves as Haitians. Once you are Haitian you have to be poor, you have to be uneducated, uncultured, blah, blah, blah. In fact many act surprised when they meet an educated Haitian.

It reflects the struggle of some of these mothers, as they feel unwelcome in certain arenas.

What I don't like about here is the way people think of you . . . At work, because you have an accent, they think you are stupid . . . They think you are nothing . . . That bothers me a lot . . . It's hard being here and people don't respect you . . . In Haiti, I would not have to worry about that . . . They don't understand me and that's why I don't associate with them . . . To them, they think we are here to take their jobs . . . They [Americans] don't like to do the jobs, but when we do, they don't like it . . . They get upset at us for taking their jobs. Like where we live now . . . They drink their beer and throw the bottle in front of our house. That means the way they act, they think we don't belong here and that we shouldn't have anything . . . We are hard workers.

This statement represents the mother's sense of isolation and feelings of disconnect. The sense of being different adds to her disconnect and her overall sense of isolation.

Another mother says,

For example, if you have an accent here in South Florida and they find out that you are Haitian, they say, 'Oh she is Haitian, she is nothing.' . . . It bothers me because in my country my skin color was never a problem . . . That is why I tell my daughter that she does not have to pay attention to these types of people because she is and will always be something . . . That is why I am trying to teach her about the value of a good education.

That feeling of being treated like nothing is a familiar one for the mothers who live in South Florida. Many Haitian refugees now reside in South Florida. These refugees,

commonly called “boat people,” are for the most part less educated than is typical of other Haitian immigrants.

In the same vein, the mothers from Florida discussed experiencing racism back when they first came to this country as teenagers. One mother recalled with difficulty the ways in which she was discriminated against as a teenager from Haiti. Although painful, her sense of Haitianness provided her with the strength to endure the discrimination and prejudices against her. “When I was a teenager in school around 1982-83, kids were not nice to Haitians. We were teased and mocked. People used to hide their ethnicity and I can understand why they had to do that. They would deny their Haitian roots. Some of my friends would cry. I never cried because being Haitian never bothered me. I knew who I was.”

An additional aspect of *Never Thought It Would Be Like This* speaks to the profound sense of disconnect and isolation that some of the mothers experience.

I had a group of African-American friends; I spent a lot of time talking to them . . . One day one of them turned around and said to me ‘So, what country are you from again?’ . . . See what I am saying? She didn’t see *me*. The whole group of women did not see me, and they didn’t know that I spoke another language, that I ate food that was different . . . so I think Americans tend to be like that.

One of the trademarks of the Haitian way of life is the area of communal or shared responsibility for its members in the efficacy of parenting. As the popular saying goes, “It takes a village to raise a child.” In *Never Thought It Would Be Like This*, this communal way of life or the “village concept” is scarce—leaving the parents with the feeling of further isolation. Some of the mothers stated that the absence of the village concept adds to breakdown or delinquency of children.

In Haiti, when a child runs to a neighbor for shelter, the child would not be allowed to remain in the home without permission of the parent. Here no one gets involved. In Haiti, no matter where you are, if an adult see you doing something that you should not be doing, they will reprimand you and they will also let your parents know what you are doing . . . The adults will ask the child, “Aren’t you so-and-so’s daughter?” . . . Here, teachers can’t even do their jobs because children have no respect for them . . . In Haiti, teachers have complete and absolute authority over the student. By complete authority, the child understands that he or she needs to show the same type of respect and courtesy they show at home and that the parents support that idea of respect.

Although the “village” may not be as large as these parents knew it in Haiti, they try to recreate that sense of community as a means of receiving support from their family members. When there were irreconcilable differences between them and their daughters, the mothers would elicit the council of either a trusted family member or friends. It should be mentioned that for the most part the husbands play the most significant role in attempting to help the mother-daughter dyad deal with their differences.

As far as support for these mothers, reaching out to others outside of their immediate circle is challenging and difficult. They consult trusted friends or family members who have earned their daughter’s respect. This person must be able to diffuse some of the tensions between her and her daughter. Such people become confidantes for the mothers and at the same time, ones that the daughter can relate to. Hence, such person becomes the daughter’s outlet as well.

I would talk to my daughter’s godmother who is someone I can confide in and someone I know who cares about my daughter . . . Sometimes she [the godmother] would remind me to give my daughter a break . . . I don’t tell everybody my business . . . My sister is one person I talk to, and also my friend.

It was intriguing to discover that the mothers similarly sought out an “important other” as both counsel and sounding board. Much like their daughters, this important

other provided support and guidance for the mother and served as translator to arbitrate certain aspects of the mother-daughter relationship.

The mother might also feel that she and this important other had a common goal when it comes to the daughters. That common goal must and should be an extension of the mother and a carrier as well as a supporter of the mother's value system and expectations. This important other would be ineffective in the lives of the mothers and daughters if he or she was seen as not upholding Haitian values and ideologies. Not following the dictate of the culture would mean that only American ideologies and customs were being upheld. For example,

I did not want to give my daughter a telephone, but my oldest daughter got her a telephone and she pays for it every month . . . Her father and I refused to give her a phone . . . I did not even know when she got the phone from my oldest daughter . . . She went against our wishes about the phone . . . I told her next time she has to tell me when she plans to intervene with my youngest daughter. I had to remind her that I am the mother and she is not.

Instead of being helpful, the mothers see exchanges such as these as meddling, adversarial, and intrusive. Furthermore, they feel that their authority as parents is being dismissed and undermined. This is a cultural mismatch and the violation of cultural rules.

Regardless of the availability of the village, single parenting seems to offer more challenges for the mothers in this study. This particular mother's feelings reflect those of other single parents in this study.

Sometimes it gets overwhelming for me, raising her by myself . . . It's a challenge raising kids here. You are all by yourself, the school is not helping you, and the community is not helping you . . . I feel so alone in this . . . Sometimes, I think it's harder because I don't have a husband to help me out . . . Here I am, always on the go . . . Parents truly don't have time . . . The family togetherness is just not there . . . We have different schedules, the kids sometimes eat by

themselves, and it's no life here . . . A bunch of families fail because of the life style.

Furthermore, the lack of support they receive from school in regards to helping mold their children to good behavior adds to the difficulties they encounter as parents. In Haiti, the roles that school customarily plays with their students are different from those of the United States. One mother says, "The school system is different . . . In Haiti there is a great emphasis on behavior and manners . . . Here they don't teach about behavior because it's really up to the family . . . In the United States, they focus on teaching about sexuality and I think that type of stuff should be left to the parents to do."

As I talked to these mothers, a nostalgic feeling about what they left behind and the way things used to be became apparent. There was also a constant comparison between what was and what they will never find. As these parents reminisce, they found themselves longing for many aspects of their childhood. For example, many talked about the differences in ways friends try to positively influence each other growing up. Compared to their own upbringing, for children today some of the mothers believe that negative peer pressure is often the norm.

They [kids] have too much peer pressure here . . . In Haiti, you could have any friend you want . . . Peer pressure is not the same . . . When your friends do something wrong, they hide it from you because they are not going to let you know . . . Peer pressure is positive in Haiti because your friends will not approve of you if you are doing something wrong . . . Your friends may not even talk to you if you are being disrespectful to grown ups . . . Here, if they do something wrong, they want you to do it too or you might get in trouble with your friends. . . . If other kids knew that you talked to you parents like that, they would not like you. They might not want to associate with you when you are disrespectful toward adults. They might lose respect for you.

*The Shift—Learning from America*

It's a whole different thing being here. . . As foreigners we learn that things are different . . . The culture is different and we have to embrace it as such . . . There is a lot of stuff that I like about the Haitian culture and things I don't like . . . Americans on the other hand give voice to their children and can admit their wrongs to their children by saying a simple "I'm sorry" should teach us something about how to treat children . . . That is one thing that I take from the American culture . . . And what I told you before, Haitians think that I am American and Americans think that I am Haitian . . . I say that I belong to both cultures. In essence, they are not wrong because I do behave like I am from both. I borrow from this one, and I borrow from that one.

*The Shift—Learning From America* is the third category that addresses the changes that take place on the part of the parents as they reflect on their views, feelings, and thoughts about the two different cultures. Part of this change involves learning about the American culture and gaining an understanding of the differences between the Haitian culture and the American culture. Those changes were most noticeable in the area of parent-child relationships. Discipline, self-expression, and gender issues made their way to the top of the list of the changes that took place with these mothers.

Taking on new perspectives about parental attitudes and practices is an area where the shift and the learning took place.

There are many parents who keep with their old ways. Coming here has not done anything for them . . . they have to realize that they are no longer in Haiti and they have to give their kids a little freedom . . . They still do things like they were back home . . . When a kid wants to do something, even if they are 18, they don't allow them to. They have to give the kids a bit of freedom . . . Let them go to the movies or do something with them . . . They don't go anywhere with their kids, they give you food, you go to church, you go to school and that's it . . . I really don't like this part about the Haitian culture . . . That is how it used to be for many of us back home . . . Our parents couldn't afford many of that stuff . . . It's different because financially we can do things with our kids . . . Some of them say that is

the way their parents raised them . . . Some of them say that they don't have time but they have to make time . . . That is how it was for me also growing up in Haiti . . . But when I came here I see how different things are, so I learn because I don't raise my kid like that.

This particular mother and many others felt that it was necessary to change.

Another mother said, "I think that they (Americans) raise their children differently. As a mother raising children here I take from both cultures actually. The notion that Haitians don't see children as individuals; that children don't have any rights; that their feelings are overlooked; that they don't have any voice . . . that is not good."

Part of the new parental attitude is to talk to their daughters about issues that are considered taboo and to give their daughters the opportunity to ask questions about concerns that they may have.

Actually, my daughter asked me what I thought of tampons. And I told her that I never used them because I was told that virgins don't wear tampons because it [tampons] will take away a girl's virginity. I told her that I believed it then but not anymore because it was 'BS.' . . . I will tell her my thoughts about sex and sexual behaviors. She doesn't say much . . . she just listens, smiles, or tells me 'OK mom, too much information.' . . . I am open to her about that stuff . . . I talk about everything. I have a captive audience every morning in the car, when I rant and rave [laughs] . . . that it is my time to tell her everything, and she can't walk away . . . She is in the car and she has to listen even when she pretends not to be listening.

Part of the learning is having an open dialogue with their daughters and to giving them opportunities they did not have with their mothers.

This shift allows these mothers to revisit and reflect on aspects of their own childhood.

Sometimes, I talk to my husband about my childhood and I must admit. [Pause] Haitian parents. [Pause] They are too hard on their kids . . . Really, I realize that

now . . . They are too strict and that is why many parents here have problems with their kids . . . Parents still don't see that they are in another country . . . The "Tonton Macoute" way of raising children is just not right . . . That is why when their kids go to college, they say they don't want to come back . . . They don't try to be flexible at all; they hold on to the same old ways.

This realization, although painful, still provides the parents an opportunity to do things differently.

This shift demands that the parents learn to live by new rules when it comes to the manner in which they discipline their children. They had to realize at least that corporal punishment of children is not the customary way of disciplining children and that there are consequences for adults when there is severe and/or abusive corporal punishment toward their children.

Although it [corporal punishment] worked for us [laughs] it doesn't work for them . . . Kids here have the backing of the police and other child protective agencies, but in Haiti the whole community gets together to make sure that you don't misbehave, and if you do you will get it [physical punishment] . . . Besides, we did not know if we had rights . . . but here, forget it, you can't touch the kid because if you do, you'll end up in court . . . The first time she told me that she was going DCFS, was after I took the belt to her . . . She was angry with me when she said that . . . I told her go right ahead . . . Although I told her that, I was concerned that they would take my child away . . . I was not afraid but concerned.

The idea that children are protected by child protective services often exacerbates conflicts between children and their parents. When the children felt threatened, many would threaten to elicit the help of the police or DCFS.

I don't care what they [police or DCFS] say . . . This is something I always say, I am gonna do what I have to do regardless as long as I am not abusing my kid . . . I will do what I think that should be done . . . A lot of people are afraid of doing what they should be doing as far as raising their children because they don't want social workers to be involved . . . I tell my kids that I love them and that I have to do what I have to do.

Some of the parents discussed interventions against corporal punishment by the authorities as an infringement on their rights as parents. “It’s my kid and I should discipline my child the way I see fit as long as I don’t go overboard.” To this particular mother, as long as she is not abusing her children, authorities should adhere from interfering in the way she chooses to raise her children.

One of the lessons learned is that physical punishment is not as acceptable in America as it is in Haiti. Although corporal punishment was used only rarely, some of the mothers still believe in corporal punishments of their children as long as the parent knows how to remain in control. “As the parent, you have to remember that you have to act like the adult and let go because if you don’t, you might hurt the child . . . Some parents just don’t know how to manage [their children] . . . It does not do any good to beat or mistreat the child.”

At the same time, these mothers are learning that corporal punishment may not be the only way to solicit appropriate behaviors. Many mothers are able to find new and acceptable ways of punishing their daughters for unwarranted behavior. These parents have learned that grounding or taking certain privileges away at times proves to be more beneficial. These parents seem to grasp an understanding that at least here in the United States, things ought to be different. The mothers who did use corporal punishment all discussed their conflicts in resorting to such methods. “I don’t really believe in hitting kids. I would spank them as a last resort. What I do mostly is take stuff away from them, like not watching TV, or they can’t go out . . . I don’t want you to get the idea that I hit

my kid all the time . . . It is truly on rare occasions I would swat them on their behind or something.”

Many of these mothers admit that corporal punishment was a common occurrence in their own lives and still, they all said they believe that corporal punishment was “a good method” of discipline because it was good for them. “I think it was for my own good whatever they did . . . It worked out for me.” After this very comment, that physical punishment was for their own good, what usually followed was a statement of the realization that their parents went too far and that they were punished too severely for perhaps futile reasons.

I admit that sometimes they went too far . . . But they did not know any better . . . Just the other day I was talking to some friends about that and we all thought that our parents went a little too far . . . But again it was for our own good . . . Because it’s love . . . because if they didn’t love you they would let you do what ever you wanted.

Some of the mothers, although they mentioned their severe abuse as children as having been good for them, appeared to have some conflicts about the notion that children ought to be beaten to compliance. Unresolved feelings appear to remain from this upbringing, which some Haitian adults described as a deep-rooted uneasiness. One mother said,

I am not as angry as my sister . . . [Pause] I am not as bitter as my sister is. Perhaps this is when the personality comes in. We are individuals born with something different from one another. Like this one sister, who is still angry and I am not, and she is still angry and still stressing on the whole anger thing.

A newly acquired parental attitude also includes being able to admit to their own wrongdoings as parents, something that was not part of the repertoire of the parent-child relationship as they were growing up.

I usually tell my kids that I am sorry, and talk to them when I am wrong . . . Yes, I say that I am sorry . . . Growing up, no adults told me that they were sorry, but that I learned over time . . . Every day that goes on in your life, you are constantly learning . . . Some people never change, they come here and they keep doing it the same way . . . Haitian parents will never apologize for what they have done. I think that communication is one of them. My mother still now would not apologize to me.

Self-expression was another area where parents have made a shift but it presents a fairly constant challenge to them. While they say they understand its necessity, they are caught by cultural constraints about expressing oneself.

When I have had it with her I would threaten to do harm to her. She tells me that she had DCFS's number on speed dial [laughs] . . . Can you believe she answers me like that? That goes to show you that these kids say whatever they want . . . My daughter has always been like that. She speaks what's on her mind . . . I think it's a good thing . . . However, she knows when and when not to do it.

This mother, like many other mothers, allows her daughter to express her thoughts freely. She has learned from American culture that having a voice or being assertive may be a good quality. In effect, these mothers are relishing their daughters' outspokenness. They are proud of their daughters for having a voice, for taking in American values. One mother says, "In that sense, she is truly an American . . . My daughter is something else; sometimes she calls me by my first name . . . I know she is fooling around but my husband gets on her for that."

During the interviews with the girls, it was confirmed that their mothers indeed allowed them to cautiously express their views, thoughts, and feelings.

I don't discourage her from expressing her feelings . . . Like I said before, it is really how she says it . . . Like in the Haitian culture, it is as if you are not supposed to have feelings of anger toward your parents . . . I don't believe that. . . . I allow her to speak her mind . . . But I have to remember that I am the adult and I have to control what I say . . . I wouldn't want to say something that I should not say, so I carefully pick my battles with her . . . I don't always succeed at these things. It sounds ideal but it doesn't always work . . . I will lose it with her once in a while. That is why when she goes to her room to cool down herself, which is a good thing."

Another mother says,

She gets mad . . . and when she does, she will tell me how she feels . . . she slams the door and goes to her room . . . It's just the two of us . . . I allow her to do that because she has the right to be angry . . . But she knows that she can't do those kinds of stuffs when I have company over . . . That I won't allow her to do and she knows not to do it

To me this finding was a surprise. I had not expected the adolescents to be as verbal as they were during the interviews. The mothers realized that it was in their daughters' best interest to be able to express their views on different matters, and that they found self-expression as one area in the Haitian culture that needed some revamping.

One mother said,

When I was a kid, I could not tell my mother when I was mad . . . This was not a good thing . . . In Haiti, kids couldn't tell their parents stuff like that because we were always afraid of our parents . . . I like the way American kids have freedom. They can say whatever they want to say. They feel free to express how they feel. But us we don't feel like that . . . Here [in the United States] people are open with how they feel and I think that's good . . . It's important to have a dialogue with your kids.

These dialogues are sometimes difficult to negotiate, which brings about unresolved conflicts between the mothers and their daughters. These conflicts are often exacerbated by the constant comparison between the two cultures by their children.

My kids are always complaining about the way I raise them. They always told me that so-and-so's mother does not do this or that . . . I am not those people. When I was a kid, I had to listen to what my parents tell me and I told them that I expect the same from them. Sometimes I put an end to the back and forth by saying "Enough," and no more negotiation. Part of life is knowing that it's not always a democracy.

Learning different methods of parenting is the mothers' ways of paying special tribute to the United States. They are caught between what they learned in Haiti and what they are learning here as a result of their migration. Their acculturation is strong enough that they are able to encourage their daughters to be part of their new vision about life. In effect, the girls are not only expressing what they want but also what their mothers want unconsciously. These mothers have identified lack of self-expression as one aspect about the Haitian culture they did not like growing up in Haiti. Consequently, they don't want to repeat that pattern of relating with their children. "The emotion part of it, we don't have that . . . The abuse, I did not like that . . . Not being able to express yourself or being emotional . . . That is why I grow up telling my kids that I love them . . . Its important for them to hear it."

Similarly, some of the mothers believe that being fearful of one's parents was not necessarily a bad thing as it served as a deterrent against misbehavior. They also acknowledge the importance of not being engulfed by that fear.

I think sometimes we have to have fear in order to listen. I did not think that there was something terribly wrong with it . . . It was not so much fear that I could not live because it would have destroyed my life . . . Too much fear is not good . . . It has to be in the middle . . . I knew if I did something that I should not have done, I would be punished really hard, and that kind of fear is not bad.

Interestingly, during this interview, this woman's 4-year-old child, who did not seem a bit fearful of her, was challenging her command to leave the area where the interview was being held. I commented on my observation that her child did not seem fearful of her, and she said, "I want my children to be free enough to express their feelings but at the same time know their limits . . . She [the 4-year-old] knows her limits."

The shift also requires the parents to acknowledge and accept the presence of conflicts with their daughters. The difference is that they are allowing their children to voice their contempt and disagreements with them. "Oh my God, when my mother got me angry and if I pouted she would always say that she will give me something to pout or cry about."

Part of the shift is making sense of gender issues in relationships with their daughters and their husbands. These mothers talked about gender inequality as a prevalent societal issue that is ingrained in the Haitian culture and detrimental to many women. These issues, according to the mothers, are inflexible as women and girls have prescribed cultural roles and expectations. Gender issues as they knew them before they migrated to the United States were that women are usually responsible for the maintenance of the home in regards to cooking, taking care of the children, and housekeeping. Men were expected to work outside of the home to provide financially for their families.

With emigration from Haiti and immigration to the United States, there was a necessary shift in gender roles. Besides raising the children, women were part of the workforce. This shift provided a turning point for many Haitian mothers/wives in terms of relationships and expectations between the sexes. It provided an opportunity for women to

view themselves as well as their daughters differently in regard to prescribed role expectations and behavior. They were becoming more independent and self-sufficient. Their views of themselves and of their daughters changed dramatically.

This is America. We have to realize that they [girls] have to be independent. Things don't have to be the same as they were in Haiti. I work and I bring money home just like my husband. I want my girls to know that it is something that they have to think about also when they grow up . . . That they can grow up into strong, self-sufficient women.

Interestingly, the views of the husbands regarding their daughters according to the mothers also changed.

Their shift of gender issues leads them to transmit a message of achievement and personal power to their daughters. One of the mothers who has a married daughter talked about the differences in attitude regarding gender roles and expectations. For this particular mother, one of the benefits of living in the United States with her husband is being able to be part of such an evolution and new way of thinking about division of labor, and overall issues concerning gender. Consequently, she is passing this message to her four daughters when it comes to roles and division of labor. She says to her daughters, "Whatever you can do, your husband can do . . . don't let him [husband] enslave you."

This advice I believe is an example of some changes that have taken place with this Haitian born mother. As this mother conceded, her mother would not have given or did not give those messages to her as a young married woman. She believes that it is vital for the survival of her daughter's marriage to adapt to this sort of thinking; otherwise, her daughter will be miserable because things are just done differently here in the United

States. The first message, although encouraging and empowering in its own right, was followed by another strong and yet poignant message to the same daughter.

I tell her that she needs to once in a while set the table and wait on her husband especially when she has company . . . most importantly when her father-in-law is in town, not to let them [husband and father-in-law] serve themselves because it is in our culture not to do that . . . Her father-in-law needs to see that she treats his son well and that she is well-educated and that she was taught good manners.

While the idea sounded positive and resolved, I was aware that she had some remarkable conflicts concerning her thoughts, ideas, and emotions about gender issues and cultural requirements. The cultural pull is stronger in this particular woman because of her fear that her daughter will be judged as not being a good wife, which could have a direct reflection on this mother as to the way she raised her daughter.

This could be termed a “closet emancipation,” if it is being done only at the cost of not upsetting the status quo of the house, or cultural expectation and behavior when people are present. Whether this mother is concerned about her daughter being judged, not being accepted, or deemed to be a “bad wife,” the interrelatedness with her daughter makes it difficult to separate herself from her daughter.

Hence, her daughter’s failure becomes undeniably hers as well. She is adamant about giving her children the “right” idea about emancipation, but at the same time is giving them the message that they have to abide by cultural expectations when it comes to emancipation. It is perhaps because the essence of these beliefs is so ingrained in this mother that she appears to be aware of how mechanical her views are when it comes to gender issues. On one hand she is concerned about her daughter not being enslaved by her husband, and on the other, she gives her the message that she must “bite the bullet”

and act in a subservient role to her husband when the in-laws are present to keep up with the status quo.

The mothers themselves speak in favor of giving different messages to boys when it comes to gender issues. There is also the realization [unlike when they were younger growing up in Haiti] that their daughters would be assertive in questioning the difference in treatment between boys and girls if their expectations grossly differed from one gender to another. Speaking of her daughter, one mother said, “She would not let me get away with it”—meaning that her daughter would challenge her attitude and behavior if she did not treat them equally—“That’s why I expect her brother to do the same things I expect of her.”

These mothers were taught quite strongly about the differences in gender treatment of boys and girls in Haiti. One mother said,

In Haiti, boys are raised like saints or murals to be admired . . . They grow up into men and expect that type of treatment to continue . . . The best of everything goes to the men . . . As boys, they did not have to do certain things, and they carry it here in America . . . They are Mr. so-and-so and they don’t have to do this or that . . . That is a bad thing . . . That’s why we have so many problems with Haitian men in America . . . Why can’t you do it if I do it?’ We both have to work . . . Men are raised as if they were KINGS.

Issues of sex and sexuality are regarded similarly. The mothers also see this area as one that needs to change when it comes to our expectations for boys and girls.

They think that boys can do whatever they want; but girls . . . they are very tough on them . . . All the responsibilities about sex are on the girl. The girl has to guard her reputation and will be regarded badly if she is having sex. Not the boys. The girl has to worry about being a good Haitian girl while boys don’t have to worry about that type of stuff.

This mother's comment reflects a sort of feminine protest not only about themselves but also about the treatment of their daughters or women in general. This mother and many others believe that because family structure has changed, it is fitting that the roles of its members also change. Although this gender inequality is rooted in many generations of families, this is one change that they are striving to achieve. "I can understand how this needed to happen a long time ago, but things have changed for women and for the family. Now that we [women] are working, men need to change with time."

*It Is Not Time Yet to Let Go*

We talk to our daughters about college but we tell the kids that "nobody is going anywhere." I don't believe in going away. People have different idea when their kids are ready to leave the house. I think when you are 17 or 18, kids need guidance still, and if they are closer to their parents or trusted adults, they will do better.

*It Is Not Time Yet to Let Go* speaks of the difficulties of letting go of their parental duties and continued preoccupation with such duties, even when their daughters show the emotional maturation for such event to take place. *Cultural beliefs* about when children are ready to be on their own are the major motive hindering their acceptance of their children leaving home. Their difficulties are tied to their anxiety about the *safety of their children*, their inability to *protect their children*, their incapability to be their external control to insure warranted and acceptable behaviors, and fear of *negative outside influences* on their daughters. For these reasons, some of the mothers in this study have a

difficult time sanctioning their daughters going away to college; making this area the hardest issue for them to shift their thinking.

Many of the daughters interviewed are looking forward to go away to college. They anticipate that living on campus will actuate their anticipated emancipation or independence from their parents. Their mothers, on the other hand, do not see the need for their daughters to leave their home and go away to college. The difference in views about going to college is one area that remains unresolved between the mothers and their daughters. As one mother said, "I don't know why she is so strong on going on campus. She tells me that all of her friends are going on campus. I said good for them, but she will not go anywhere. Her three older sisters stayed at home while they were going to school and they did fantastic. So I told her that I expect her to stay at home. I don't know why she wants to do that to me."

*Culturally*, many parents are not accustomed to their children moving away when they are young. This milestone has been reached when the child is married and is ready to start his/her conjugal life. The parents' difficulties come from their belief that their 18- or 19-year-olds are not ready to be on their own. "In Haiti, even when you are 30 or 40 you can be in your parents' house, and people don't look at that as if there is something wrong with that. Here, when kids are 18, it seems that people expect them to be responsible for themselves. Yes, I want her to go to college, but she will not be allowed to live on campus."

The talk of going on campus brings not only anxiety to these mothers but also many fears that their daughters may not be safe and may run into trouble. Part of the

problem is their inability to keep a vigilant eye on their children and continue to provide guidance for them. “Because the child is 18 does not mean that she is ready to make sound decisions . . . As her mother, I still need to be around to help her make those decisions and that’s why I don’t think that kids are ready at that age . . . If she runs into trouble, her family won’t be there to help her.”

Child safety also brings anxiety to the mothers.

My daughter will ask me why mothers [Haitian] here are so fearful about letting their children go out . . . She notices that mothers here, they don’t let their children out, they don’t allow them to have friends and go out, they don’t allow them to go the movies or the malls, they are very fearful, they drive their kids around . . . They try to hold these children in because they are afraid of what is out there, because they don’t know what is out there . . . You don’t know how many Haitian women have told me that. I am not like that because I have a different understanding to the way things are here.

Another mother said, “I don’t let her go to sleepovers because I am afraid that something bad is going to happen to my daughter. She might get raped or something . . . She doesn’t understand my reasons but as her mother I have to protect her the best way I can.”

America is seen by most of these mothers as an unsafe place.

She gets upset with me because I make it my business to know her friends and everything that she does. I remember her telling me that she feels like she is in prison. There is a lot going on around here . . . You know, kids getting pregnant, gangs, fights, kids out of control, kids not having enough supervision . . . I don’t get parents around here . . . Just the other day my daughter’s friend was invited over to our house . . . Her parents just dropped her off and did not even bother to come in and meet me . . . The worst thing is that she [the friend] was at the house for over five hours and her parents did not seem to care at all . . . I just can’t have my daughter go over to someone’s like that who doesn’t show concern for her own daughter.

Some of the mothers cautiously concede to the idea but remain extremely anxious as they already anticipate some sleepless nights because of worries about the influences of their peers while in college.

Knowing my daughter, she is going to test every limit . . . My daughter is easily influenced and she likes the fast life, you know, going out all the time . . . I think that when she goes to college and if she goes to campus, I worry that she will be out all the time and not make her studies a priority.

As everything is tied to the Haitian culture, letting go of their children has its own proper place in the Haitian culture. To Haitian parents, one's chronological age does not automatically become a time to allow their children to go. As one of the mother said, "Eighteen does not mean a thing to me." Cultural teachings to their children go well beyond that age, and their involvement with their children does not come to a halt at that age. Customarily, in the American culture, it is the marker for many children to begin to think about their emancipation. Clearly, all of these parents recognize that it is part of life and development to let go of their children. They are also aware that letting go is not just about allowing their children to live on campus but about also not being their child's constant external control, feeling comfortable only when their children are in a controlled environment.

There is a continuous worry about their children's safety and trusting their environment. This anxiety may also be rooted in their fears of losing their children to the American culture.

## The Payback

I always tell them that where we are from we believe in respect. I don't need anything from them except respect. I told them, I do not want your money but I need respect. I spend my money for you and I need nothing else but respect.

*The Payback* is the last theme of the results from the mothers. The issue of a payback was a recurrent theme throughout the interviews and appeared to be the primary sought-after product between a Haitian mother and her daughter. The issue of payback was interwoven with cultural understanding of what the parents have passed down to their daughters and the manner in which such teachings have been understood, achieved, and emulated. Issues like roots, identity, conformity, and family loyalty were the essence of the payback experience. Payback has two main elements: An emotional payback and a concrete payback. The emotional payback is expressed in terms of the passion and the positive feelings one has about one's family and culture, while the concrete payback is conveyed in terms of actions i.e., being successful in school (the diploma) and being an exemplary person.

The payback becomes the mothers' gift from the daughters that the mothers had done a great job raising them. Having successfully adapted to family and societal expectations and abiding by them means that the daughters have taken in the important parts and most importantly cultural teachings. Hence, the daughters' success brings pride to their mothers. Another important factor about the payback is the daughters' demonstration of gratitude to their mothers. The end result is the belief that the mother

has done a good job as a parent and the daughter has done a good job as a daughter.

Hence, both mother and daughter are left with a sense of accomplishment and resolution.

Part of the payback is living up to the example of conformity.

I told my daughter just the other day that as she begins high school she will have a lot of challenges . . . I told her all she has to do is to remember all I have told her

. . . If she does, she will make herself happy and I will also be happy . . . I told her not to forget herself and who she is . . . Because if she remembers who she is she will say no to the pressures of sex, drugs, and other things that could lead to trouble.

Hence, the payback is having the daughter carry a mental representation of the mother that will guide the daughter.

The payback yielded one distinct category—*Daughter's Success And Mother's Pride*—that addresses the pride that the mother feels as a result of her daughter's successes. Whether it's from having taken in the cultural teaching by staying close to her roots and conforming to cultural norms and expectations, the mother will see her as successful and likewise, the mother would have been successful and proud.

#### *Daughter's Success and Mother's Pride*

The mothers have talked about the benefit of having been brought up with Haitian values and their efforts to pass those values onto their daughters. Part of the daughter's success and mother's pride has to do with acquiring those values that have been taught to the daughters. Knowing the value of what one receives from one's parents is another way of being successful. That is how the mothers know that they have done a great job raising their daughters. "My mom has taught me about hard work, honesty, and self-respect,

that's all I want to pass down to my daughter. If she turns out honest and a good person, I'll be happy."

When the daughters have taken in what has been passed onto them, the mothers respond with pride and a feeling of having accomplished something valuable. "She complains a lot about this, that, or the other. But at the end of the day, she knows why I do the things I do. She would say 'Yeah, yeah, yeah' . . . That's how it is in the Haitian culture . . . [Laughs] . . . I think she is getting it."

The mothers hold on to the notion that even when their children show discontent about the way they are being raised, they will eventually acknowledge or admit that something valuable was passed on to them. That vision keep them focused and at the same time resolved about their parenting abilities. The simple phrase, "I know that when she gets older, she will appreciate what I am doing" gives them the motivation to continue to provide the necessary guidance to their daughters.

One of the mothers who has several grown daughters reflected the following,

My oldest daughter who is now married said to me some time ago, 'You know, you did a good job with us and I want to raise my kids with the same way' . . . When she told me that I stood there speechless . . . I didn't know what to say . . . Since then, the other two have told me the same thing . . . It was like a confession from my children . . . I did not ask them to tell me that, they said it on their own . . . It was the same thing when I sent my oldest to an all-girls school. She was upset at first but I swear, when she graduated, she told me thanks and that was one of the best things I did for her . . . That goes to show you as parents, you have to do what you have to do.

Exchanges of this type make obvious the importance of the PAYBACK as they reaffirm the mothers' sacrifices and well-intended efforts on behalf of their daughters.

Those exchanges are like a stamp of approval from their daughters for a job well done. On

the same subject, another mother added, “Everyone would like to hear that she has done a good job and it’s great to hear it from my children.”

As proud parents who are trying to pass such pride to their own children, there is a great reward when their daughters become exemplary. Having pride and appreciation for one’s upbringing and culture is another way of paying back the mother for having done a good job. “My daughter is a good student. She has always been a studious child. I always tell her to make school her first priority and she understands that.”

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Findings

Five important findings are highlighted in this research. I believe they offer a rich understanding of cultural and psychological phenomena of the Haitian mothers and Haitian-American daughters in this study. In this discussion, it has been difficult to distinguish the findings of the mothers from those of the daughters because of the interrelation of the results. Thus, it was often a challenge to talk about them separately. In the words of Winnicott —“There is no such thing as a baby.” This parallels the finding that there is no such thing as a teenager. In this study, I found a strong vibrant mother-daughter dyad that works in reciprocal ways. It was hard to pull them apart because of their interrelatedness; they were intertwined in powerful, dialectic, and reciprocal relationships.

#### *Girls' Findings*

Making sense of what has been taught to them by their parents while navigating their understanding of the Haitian and American cultures, the first set of findings, is representative of a cluster of findings that deals mostly with the daughters making sense

of it all, making sense of what has been taught to them by their parents while navigating their understanding of the Haitian and American cultures. Hence, “making sense of it all” has to do with the importance of making sense of their unique bi-cultural identity, which in turn makes sense of their lives and brings everything into focus. Consequently, their strong bi-cultural identity gives them positive self-regard and self-esteem. It is also about the ways in which the girls’ identities are built around being Haitian-Americans.

This is the first result in this nest of findings that has to do with the importance of cultural identity. The first and most important finding of this study for the girls is their undisputed and powerful bi-cultural identity. This identity organizes and transcends key aspects of their lives in negotiating issues such as the importance of maintaining ties, conforming to rules and expectations, achieving academically, and their overall aspirations in regard to reconciling ambiguous components about their sexuality and womanhood. That identity becomes a vehicle to make sense of themselves and their relationship with the world.

There is evidence that the force of cultural transmission allows the girls to find meaning in their lives as they navigate their self-understanding. Therefore the first finding reveals how the culture of the participants (especially the girls) serves as a holding and facilitating environment for them. As such, their understanding of themselves is mediated through their cultures and conveyed through their attitudes, beliefs, and values. In the same manner, their identification with their cultures is one that gives them a strong sense of belonging, continuity, resilience, positive self-esteem, and

most of all immunity against negative forces such as school failure, teenage pregnancy, racism, and so on.

Their culture is a way through which they add meaning to their lives and dictate the course of their future. These results also show how both mothers and daughters embark on a joint mission maintain ties with family members and conform to expected values. These values address the expectations of solidarity, loyalty to family members, morality, social conformity, sexual chastity, and obtaining a good education, which is the glue that keeps the adolescents focused.

### *Passing it Down*

*Passing it down*, the second finding, brings to light the manner in which cultural identity structures the mother-daughter relationship. This is the way the mother is able to “pass down” something to the daughter, and provides the girls an opportunity to “take in” something of value from their mothers. The type of relationship between these mothers and daughters in this study was typical of other mother-daughter relationships. They presented fairly typical individuals, except they used their cultural identity as a way to structure distance and closeness. These two findings fit together as both of them exemplify the strong presence of cultural identity as they interrelate in the lives of the subjects. The strong Haitian identity of the girls with their culture comes through the mothers as they pass down cultural values and expectations through their interactions with their daughters, which provides a cultural space for the respondents.

The cultural space is used as a transitional space with the daughters inventing themselves in ways that are patterned after their mothers and what they can make out of being Haitians. This exemplifies how the mother-daughter relationship in conferring of identity is organized around accruing cultural values. In this relationship, the mothers are able to convey values, and expectations and the cultural transmission give the mothers a way to organize being a parent as well.

This cultural transmission is an organizer for the mothers and daughters to fulfill their respective roles. In this relationship, there is a mutual identification and a mutual mission of passing down from the mothers and taking in cultural values and expectations. There is this spoken message from the mothers to the daughters about what it means to be Haitian. It allows both of them to have this shared understanding about cultural expectations, conformity, limits, and responsibility in their roles as mothers and daughters. The mothers, most importantly, get to impart values as well as convey uniqueness to their daughters by constantly expecting Haitian-like behavior and reminding them all that entails being Haitian girls.

#### *Reciprocal Psychological Attachment*

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that a special type of psychological and cultural attachment defines the nature of the relationships between the mothers and the daughters. There was a strong presence of mutual protectiveness from the daughters and mothers toward one another. In addition, through that identification, the daughters have developed a sense of gratitude for their mothers that is captured by their efforts of

bringing pride to their mothers due to their cultural conformity and achievements.

However, the presence of the girls' ambivalent feelings toward their mothers was noted.

In this particular finding, there was an expectation of "payback" from the daughters to the mothers. This payback is the daughter's gift to the mother by the mother harvesting the fruit of her labor. That entails the daughter's educational, spiritual, sexual, humanistic, and social success. This payback shows that the girls have values, that they are valued as well, and what they do does count.

### *Bi-Cultural Identity*

The respondents' bi-culturality, the third finding outlines issues related to emotional management and ways in which the children navigate their feelings. Cultural identity is also evident in this finding as the girls' self-expression is mediated through their understanding of their cultural expectations. The finding also represents a cluster of findings that include the way the girls manage their emotions, navigate their dual identities, establish their independence, and challenge traditional gender issues. This finding speaks particularly to the way the girls managed their emotions with reference to cultural dictates as well as cultural discords. Accordingly, the girls find themselves at odds with conflicting feelings of self-expression versus self-silencing. While American culture is in favor of self-expression, Haitian culture encourages prudence in expressing oneself. The study reveals that most girls have chosen to express their views, which was an unexpected finding. As much as these girls identify with the Haitian culture, their American culture was just as evident.

Another yet more surprising element in this area is that the mothers in the study report encouraging their daughters to express their views. There is evidence from the data that the mothers do give way to their daughters to show their individuality rather than only being traditional, but only to a certain degree. There were parameters in this self-expression, as long as it did not grossly deviate from cultural dictates. When it comes to issues of sexuality, however, the parents were very conventional—preferring their daughters to refrain from dating until they attend college. Consequently, the girls found other ways to deal with issues of sexuality through their relationships with peers and consulting and confiding in a trusted adult (the bridge) for guidance.

### *The Bridge*

The fourth finding is an offshoot of the third finding as it deals specifically with emotional management and the manner in which the teenagers seek out a trusted adult (primarily a family member for most) in an effort to manage and/or express their feelings as a means of making sense of their lives. The bridge is sought when the girls find themselves at odds with conflicting feelings they cannot entrust in their parents, or as a means to help close the generational gap between them and their parents.

This behavior is consistent with Haitian culture in which it is customary for various adults to make themselves available in guiding, mediating, and helping children negotiate certain aspects of their relationships with their parents. The bridge supports parents in providing them with appropriate guidance and support. The bridge serves as a way of fostering the differences between the mother and the daughter because the

daughters see the bridge as providing something they could not obtain from their mothers. In a sense, the bridge has a dual role of supporting both the mothers and daughters.

The bridge serves as the teenagers' observing ego, a sounding board in their attempt to make sense of their lives; a confidante when negotiating issues that may be frowned upon by their mothers; a mediator that serves as a go-between between them and their parents; a broker that give them sought-after advice; an interpreter of American and/or Haitian behaviors and beliefs; and a role model to emulate. Although the bridge has some authority, she asserts her authority in a way that encourages cooperation from teenagers. The bridge's intervention on behalf of a teenager gives her a sense of being supported, heard, understood, and most importantly mediating her wishes and emotions with her parents. Psychologically, this trusted person provides an avenue by which the youngster can emancipate herself into adulthood. Moreover, dealing with the bridge lessens her sense of disappointing her mother.

### *Mothers' Findings*

#### *Passing it Down*

The same marker for such identity exists with the mothers as they facilitate such identification with intense teaching of the Haitian culture to their daughters. In effect, what they have passed down to their daughters allows the making sense to be activated. The mothers' goals are to ensure that their children stay close to their roots, and that they

conform to the values and expectations of the culture, as they continuously instill Haitian pride in their children. This cultural transmission serves as a beacon as well as a platform for emotional contact and connection between the mothers and their daughters. Their culture is a way through which they add meaning to their lives and dictate the course of their future. The results also show how both mothers and daughters embark on a joint mission to maintain ties with family members and conform to expected values.

#### *Search for the American Dream*

The fifth and final finding highlights the mothers' integrative tendencies in the passing down of Haitian values to their children, in their search for the American Dream, and the success of their daughters. This finding speaks to the mothers' strength, courage, success, heroism, opportunism, and resilience as their daughters attempt to emulate those virtues from their mothers. These mothers have been successful, and their success is evident through the changes that they have made in their lives and through the success of their daughters. These mothers are found to be well-defined through their articulation of their beliefs, values, and expectations to themselves and their daughters. There was also evidence that generational boundaries are strong as the parents insist on the presence of a hierarchical system or understanding.

The mothers were not isolated because they all had some type of a social connection, which gives them a sense of community. The mothers in turn conveyed that sense of community to their daughters. That community binds the mothers to keep up with the expectations and the dictates of the Haitian culture. In the same manner that their

daughters are expected to conform, the mothers are also conforming to the dictate of their Haitian communities. Their communities serve as their observing ego or reflectivity as they feel scrutinized by their community. That scrutiny becomes an impetus for observing their own behaviors. This sense of community provides an important forum through which they watch or observe their own behaviors and those of their daughters because their daughters' behaviors are seen as a direct reflection on the mothers.

This finding also depicts the changes that have taken place with the mothers in their views about themselves and their parenting styles. The girls in the study are the way they are because their mothers have been able to negotiate a significant amount of change. This finding also reveals that the mothers have embraced the American culture to a great extent. They have also negotiated a tremendous amount of ambiguity — meaning, they love America and they love Haiti and they have been able to reconcile their feelings about both cultures.

The study's fifth finding depicts women who have endured many adversities and still come out to be successful. They have had to deal with matters being different from what they have expected, their new understanding of the American culture, and how it influences their parenting.

The results highlight both negative and positive changes. The mothers experienced the negative effects of discrimination, cultural disconnects, isolation, and helplessness, but also found opportunities to reflect on their views, feelings, and thoughts about the Haitian and American cultures. As have their daughters, they have taken in certain aspects of the American culture and slowly integrated them as part of their daily

repertoire. Issues like parenting, femininity, and self-expression are in constant revision with the mothers' continued evolution in the American context. Clearly, migration has given them the opportunity to redefine and learn about themselves as women, wives, and mothers. As they become acculturated, their views on the parent-child relationship take a new direction. As these mothers become more independent there is an overall shift in their views regarding gender issues and emancipation. These lead to changes in their behaviors and views about their relationship with their daughters.

## Discussion

### *Introduction*

This study explores the experiences and relationships of Haitian immigrant mothers and their American born daughters. This analysis presents my understanding of the adolescents and parent-child relationships. The mothers were asked "What is your experience as a Haitian-born mother who is raising an adolescent daughter born in the United States?" The daughters were asked, "What is your experience as a teenage daughter born in the United States and being raised by a Haitian-born mother?"

The author focuses on the interpersonal issues that dominate the mother-daughter relationship with respect to the adolescent-developmental task of identity formation and the role of the Haitian and the American culture in the lives of these subjects, broadening

the knowledge of a group of people whom the author considers understudied from a psychological perspective. Building on previous research on issues of psychological development, immigration, culture, and experiences of immigrant mothers raising American-born adolescent daughters we add some of the particular nuances of the Haitian culture, of which the author is a member.

Study findings illuminate aspects of adolescent female development, the role of culture in such development, the complexity of adapting to a new way of life, and the overall growth that took place because of the mothers' migrations. Ethnic identification is a multifaceted phenomenon that includes self-identification, one's knowledge about the culture, one's feelings about the culture, attitudes and values, social preferences, etc.

Psychoanalytic theories mention the importance of the relationship between an infant and his/her world. Object relation theory speaks specifically of how an individual relates to others and the world around him/her; accordingly, there is a great emphasis between the self (inner/subjective) and object (outside of the infant). Thus, the interrelation and interdependence of self upon object and object upon self is quite complicated as they evolve in association with one another. Theories on development have suggested that healthy psychological imprints start from the beginning of one's life, and that such imprints are needed to succeed along the natural progression from one stage of development to another. Such beginnings speak to the child's environment, which includes the child's relationship with her primary caregiver and other significant people in the child's life. The findings in this study are discussed in these terms. Culture (both the dominant and ethnic) in this study is seen as part of the girls' subjective experience

through which they explain their behaviors and understanding of themselves and the world.

### *Culture and Transmission*

This discussion begins with the issue of culture and cultural transmission, as they were revealed as the most influential factors informing the girls' attitudes, beliefs, and values. The strong influence of ethnic culture in the girls' lives dominates the discussion. All of the participants indicate being Haitian is important, personally defines who they are, and gives them status and resilience. The stories of these immigrant parents and children resonate with the stories of many other immigrants, but are distinct with a Haitian flavor.

The Haitians subjects interviewed came from a country with a rich sense of historical endurance. Their defeat of one of the most powerful armies of its time and having gained their independence at the beginning of 1804, remains with them and gives them a true sense that they as a people have accomplished something extraordinary. Haiti has a history of freedom from institutionalized racism. There was a true emancipation; there were no Jim Crow laws, there was no lynching. Skin color did not determine how people were treated. Haitians historical past gives them different perspective on themselves and other people. They do not have a history of racial oppression that gives them residual fears. Consequently, the subjects being studied come with a different kind of historical "groundedness" that gives them some immunity from the racism of this

country. I am not suggesting that they are shielded from racism, but their responses may be different from others without similar background.

Positive historical memories are useful in the experience and interpretation of events. Generally, this resonates positively in their self concept and life experiences. Phinney's (1989) studies of ethnic minority groups indicate that positive feelings about one's ethnic or racial group lead to a higher self-esteem.

### *Bi-Cultural Identity*

These interviews reveal how these girls construct an identity for themselves as Haitians and/or Haitian-Americans and the benefits of their identification with both cultures. They join their parents in their strong ethnic/Haitian identity and find some protection against institutional racism and/or indicate that it gives them a chance to have dreams. Their Haitian identity keeps them connected with Haiti, their nuclear families, and their extended kin. Many of them indicate wanting to learn Creole in order to further claim their Haitian identity. Making Creole personal is a special adaptation for these teens.

Parents, extended family members and others within their Haitian communities have become facilitating environments for cultural transmission. Those elements also convey a great deal of immunity to negative elements of American culture. Their sense of being empowered is directly related with identification as member of a valued community, having a strong ethnic identity and connection, and knowing and valuing their historical identity of having come from heroic and strong leaders. This historical

ethnic context is a secure frame of reference for them. Maintaining identification within this frame helps shape their development and adds to their sense of competence. Owning that frame adds to their sense of self-worth. This is explanatory of their lack of preoccupation with issues relating to racial discrimination and primary identification as “Haitian” or “Haitian-American.”

The mothers know that racial discrimination exists in America, but it is not dwelled upon. They mention preparing their daughters to face the obstacle of racial problems or prejudice, but do reported such issues to have been too challenging. Interestingly, the mentions of prejudice were was not from a racial perspective, but rather cultural—coming from misconceptions between Haitians and African-Americans. The mothers’ and daughters’ strong cultural identification serves as a shield, helping them to cope with any negativism associated with discrimination and oppression. This is an example of what Phinney (1990), for instance, has alluded to as the powerful impact of positive ethnic and racial identity as a buffer in dealing with prejudice, discrimination, or stigmatization.

Haitians are not unique in valuing re-creation of aspects of their homeland. Ethnicity, background, and history create continuity for mothers and daughters in this study. These girls in this study communicate how their parents “pass down” aspects of their Haitian culture and the manner in which they “take in” such teachings.

*Culture as a Holding Environment*

Culture is here considered as a portion of these girls' holding environment. The manner in which culture has become a holding force for these girls and their mothers is perhaps portrayed uniquely in this study. The interrelatedness of the mother passing on her culture to her daughter and the daughter's way of taking it is evident. The holding environment becomes a sort of doctrine that dictates the girls' behaviors, attitudes, and values, by which they arrive at making sense of their lives and who they are as individuals.

Many examples illustrating the role of the culture and the role of the environment in the lives of the respondents are presented. These girls, their mothers, their fathers, extended families and their communities strive to preserve their culture and what it "means" to be Haitian. Their traditions are being renewed and reinvented continuously as they shape them in ways that provide avenues where they arrive at a certain self-understanding. The subjects are constantly inventing and reinventing what it means to be Haitian or Haitian-American. That work is progressive as it gives way to a complex evolutionary fashion. This sort of evolution I believe is not unique to the subjects in particular but is a way to understand the evolution of all human beings as they keep inventing and reinventing certain aspect of their lives, the inherited tradition that is the common pool of humanity, into which individuals and groups of people may contribute, and from which they all draw (Winnicott 1971). Their self-understanding is negotiated from this perspective of culture and cultural transmission.

The girls in this study typically have come to describe who they are from this venue. As one girl said, “All my life, that is what I have known. I have been around family members who have strong ties to the Haitian culture . . . They know who they are and they are proud of who they are.” Their ethnic culture is all they have known. Strong ties with family members solidify those ties not only with each other but also with their culture. Their sense of “knowing who they are” in essence dictates their behavior and solidifies their sense of self.

I like calling myself Haitian because it’s different being Haitian than Haitian-American . . . but my mother would call me ‘Ti-Americain’ (little American) whenever she thinks that I am not acting like a Haitian . . . I have always been proud calling myself Haitian because it helps me understand who I am.

Being Haitian gives these teenagers a set of behavior and attitudes they can draw upon and explain why they do what they do. Phinney (1960) and Tajfel (1981) believe that ethnic identity is that part of an individual’s self-concept, derived from his or her knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership. Phinney (1997) also asserts, “During adolescence, the need to identify strongly with a sense of peoplehood or a shared social identity is heightened by consciousness of belonging to a specific group that is characteristically different from other groups” (p. 420).

As previously discussed, literature on development stresses the important role environment plays in individuals. Many theorists such as Winnicott (1965), Erikson (1950, 1963), Stern (1985), Blos (1962), and Kegan (1982) support the supposition that an understanding, supportive, caring, and secure environment is important for growing

individuals. All imply that a holding and supportive environment is intrinsic to growth and evolution. Such environments are required throughout the different stages in a person's life. A holding environment is a product of one's primary caregivers, parents, family, friends, community, and ethnicity that create an embedded culture, which defines such individuals and maintains self-esteem, self-perception, and self-identity.

Erikson (1968) further states that the development of identity is located in the core of an individual but also in the core of one's communal culture (p. 22). Erikson's developmental model of identity speaks to the role of the environment, rituals, and culture in the development of personality. The identity formation and claims described in this study speak to the subjects having received support from their communities. Erikson posits that one's personality is developed in relation to predetermined steps in what he refers to as the epigenetic lifecycle. For Erikson, identity formation is the primary task of adolescence, enumerating "identity versus identity diffusion" as the crisis of adolescence. (Erikson, 1959). In the same vein, he describes the stage of moratorium as a time of experimentation in an effort to find a place within society. Identity diffusion is directly linked to the difficulties in the moratorium stage (Erikson, 1959, 1968).

This sense of identity comes from knowing who one is and what is expected, as well as being a way to preserve what one has been taught. One of this study's subjects described her identity in the following manner: "To my parents, I am what they are; I am what they created. If I go on the street, I have to have manners . . . If I don't, it's like *they* have no manners, because they taught me my values." Chodorow (1978) likewise observes that mothers encourage societal values in their girls, which promote and support

attachment and identification with the mother. Chodorow believes that the infant ends up defining herself through her relationship with her mother via internalization. This particular quote from one of the respondents I believe speaks to her cultural connection with the passing down, taking in, and understanding of cultural teaching and expectations. The girls had their own distinct identities and they presented themselves as outspoken girls who were skillful at steering cultural demands from their parents and communities and preserving their own sense of individuality. This excerpt speaks to issues of needing to conform and preserve positively the family's name through the way one carries oneself in accordance with cultural principles and the realistic fear of being a subject of gossip.

*Making Sense Of It All*, the set of first findings is representative of a cluster of findings that deals mostly with the teenagers involved in the importance of making sense of their unique bi-cultural identity, which in turn makes sense of their lives as it brings everything into focus. The girls' strong bi-cultural identity gives them positive self-regard and self-esteem. The first finding outlines the impact of cultural teachings in the girls' lives. It speaks to the degree of cultural transmission and how these girls deal with, understand, and acquire values that are mediated and organized by the taking in of their cultures. In turn, these cultural teachings in essence become a blueprint for the girls' existence, actions, and feelings. The "taking in" of their cultural teachings gave the girls a sense of resilience and resolve about their Haitian roots. It sorts out key aspects of their lives in negotiating issues of maintaining ties with their culture and people, conforming to rules and expectations set by their parents, being academically successful, and managing and reconciling ambiguous components about their sexuality and womanhood.

The idea of culture as a holding environment helps explain how these girls come to be who they are. It was apparent for mothers in this study that their teachings to their daughters were about “passing down” part of the mother that would sustain cultural hardiness— giving them a “tough skin” to endure the outside world. One mother said, “I want them [her children] to see the country where I grew up. You know if I can make it there [in Haiti], I want to believe that they can actually make it here . . . I want to show them that they have to aspire to make it.”

It is evident that the adolescents in this study seem to have developed a tough skin to endure the outside world by their resilience and their ability to ward off negative forces. Although most of the participants live in inner-city neighborhoods, they did not exhibit the typical inner-city malaises. They were all studious, obtaining average to above-average grades; there were no teenage pregnancies, and no reported drug or gang involvement.

Regarding gang activities or involvement, Tolleson (1996) wrote, “Gangs, after all, are mirrors of the surround . . . until the lives of inner-city children are altered, gang membership is likely to remain one of their most invaluable psychological commodities” (p. 242). This finding supports the notion of a facilitating environment as an antidote against gang involvement. The facilitating environment for the girls in this study includes their immediate families and their Haitian communities. The cultural teachings and expectations of their parents, which in turn provide them with a sense of effectiveness and hope, alter the lives of the girls.

This study revealed cultural transmission of value and identity and how such transmission anchors these girls in a complex situation. The girls in this study have a secure sense of their ethnicity, which adds to their sense of selfhood. Phinney (1990) says for adolescents of color, the successful transition to healthy functioning in adulthood requires the achievement of a secure sense of their ethnic and/or racial identity. Pride can give a sense of acceptance and resilience that could yield internal strength and confidence in one's courage, self-esteem, self-determination, and overall how one navigates different relationships.

This study also reveals how both mothers and daughters embark on a joint mission to maintain ties with family members and conform to expected values. These values address the expectations of solidarity, loyalty to family members, morality, social conformity, sexual chastity, and obtaining a good education, which keep the adolescents focused. Likewise, relationships are created and maintained within this cultural context as a means to remain connected. It was evident through discussion with the girls that their nuclear and extended family relationships are the center of their very being, and the lifeblood of their feelings of belonging and connectedness. These relationships become a sustaining presence through which they come to an understanding of self, world, and culture.

In any discussion of culture, issues of ethnicity must be included, especially with members of ethnic minorities. Phinney (1997) asserts that ethnicity is central to the psychological functioning of members of ethnic and racial minority groups. Phinney says that a poorly developed ethnic identity, can lead to maladjustment, as opposed to a

positive ethnic identification that leads to positive self-esteem and an overall sense of belonging. The girls in this study have positive ethnic identification, which contributes to their sense of belonging and positive self-esteem.

“It’s a package, being Haitian. I accept the package and that’s that.”

The acceptance of what being Haitian entails and their identification with the Haitian culture makes it easier to take in or accept what the culture expects. Similarly, one could posit that if the girls had a diffused or poor identification with their culture they would experience conflicts with the expectations of their culture.

An achieved identity, Phinney (1990) asserts, serves as a buffer against the negative impact of prejudice and discrimination. Similarly, she stressed that adolescents who have not examined and resolved issues regarding their ethnicity would be at greater risk for adjustment problems. According to much of the literature, positive ethnic identification is vital for the development of positive personal identity and feelings of self-esteem, especially for adolescents (Waterman, 1985; Pinderhughes, 1989; Ponterotto & Pedersen, 1993; Phinney, 1960; Tajfel, 1981) Arce, 1981; Phinney, 1990). This supports the results in terms of the girls’ ethnic identification and their positive outlook on life. As such, their sense of efficacy remains intact as well as their hope for a brighter future—all negotiated in a cultural context.

The girls’ immediate and extended families have provided them with strong ethnic identification that gives them refuge, safety, belonging, and most importantly some sensitivity to understanding cultures. One particular girl said the following:

I've hung around Haitians all my life . . . We are proud people because we know who we are . . . I just say I am Haitian. Some will say you are black; I will be like OK and . . . I may appear black but being black is not what is important to me. I consider myself black also because Haitians are black. But being considered Haitian—that is the only thing that I care about. Black is only a color. It doesn't say anything about you, but being Haitian tells a lot about you and your people. Being Haitian means that there are some behaviors that are understood. If I see a black person on the street, it is just a black person. But when I began to talk to the black person and find out she is from Belize, the United States, Canada, Jamaica, Haiti, Nigeria—that would already tell me a whole history about the person, and each of their experiences will be different. I am an American by birth but I have no American blood running through my veins. I have pure Haitian blood. I love this country also but I am not American.

The feeling of self-worth was clearly presented by both daughters and mothers.

The adolescents displayed a strong sense of pride and acceptance of their Haitian heritage. One of the beliefs that is passed down from the mothers to daughters is that Haitians are hard workers, a hopeful and proud people—a type of people who persevere under adverse conditions. These beliefs resonated throughout the interviews. The implication for these girls is that they must work hard and be proud Haitians. For mothers and daughters, pride about their ethnicity, their “Haitianness,” is the guiding force that predominated the whole study. Although religion and spirituality is a strong force with Haitians, their attitudes on morality were not rooted in religious beliefs; rather, in cultural expectations.

Thus far, this discussion has been about positive cultural transmission and how the subjects have internalized their cultures. One must note that researchers such as Stepick (1988) and Bachay (1998) found Haitian adolescents from South Florida to be less accepting of their cultural heritage. They believe that the prejudice they have confronted as Haitians has deterred most of them from expressing their Haitian heritage

in an effort to survive a certain stigma associated with being Haitian. A stigmatized self is most likely repudiated, and an esteemed and achieving self will be embraced as it represents hope and a degree of mobility (conversation with Thayer Lindner, Ph.D., 12/17/2004). In a way, those children who are denying their Haitianness may be responding to the devaluation of Haitians in South Florida. Because of such devaluation, they may feel a push to disassociate themselves from their Haitian roots. Consequently, the developmental process of those teenagers who have not worked through their cultural identity issues will be more difficult.

The conclusions here differ from those of Stepick and Bachay. Pinderhuges (1989) stresses that societal definition and assigned value are factors that help determine whether ethnic meaning for a given group or individual becomes positive, ambivalent, or negative. This, of course has great significance for how they behave. When people internalize negative societal definitions of themselves and their ethnic group, they experience insecurity, anxiety, fear, confusion, and psychological conflict. Minority children may find it especially difficult to resolve ambivalence and integrate good and bad images because of the socially shared devaluation of objects of identification. The subjects in this study are hopeful about a brighter future. For them being Haitian is a way of maintaining hope. Their hope is structured by a set of expectations that organize them.

As stated earlier, the subjects in this study did not reveal any conflicts about their ethnic identity. They had a great sense of pride and felt positive about their Haitian identity. Some, however, indicated that some of their Haitian counterparts did not readily admit to their Haitian roots. The girls in the study all had mothers and family members who

were proud and most importantly upwardly mobile. The sense of pride from the parents has been passed down to the daughters. This appears to have had a great impact on the way these respondents feel about their ethnic identification.

“If she doesn’t learn about her ethnicity, she won’t know how to carry herself as a Haitian girl, and when she goes back home she won’t know what to do . . . As her mother, I feel that it is my job to make sure that she knows what we are all about.” This is another example of the holding environment and how it provides a platform for their children to understanding themselves. Having a positive ethnic identity mobilizes their growth and gives them resilience.

“Family comes first. You have to respect them and put them before friends. I tell my daughter that her family is like the eyes in her head.” This metaphor is quite interesting as the eyes represent sight and without sight, it is difficult to find one’s way around. It speaks to the importance of family and at the same time is suggestive that the eyes represent the Haitian culture. Since all the girls talked of a supportive network in their families, this message is symbolic of the intrinsic availability of the family in terms of giving the girls a strong facilitating environment.

Referring to one girl’s comment that “It’s a package, being Haitian. I accept the package and that’s that” speaks to her cultural understanding about expectations. In this understanding, the girls are aware of their mother’s stance on education. As part of this package, education is usually pinned against sexuality. It is seen as an element that would endanger a girl’s obtaining a sound education. Consequently, their daughters’ sexuality is one of the great preoccupations for these mothers. Early pregnancy, having boyfriends,

and venereal disease are possible of negative consequences that could result in school failure. With these in mind, the parents had many concerns about their daughter's sexuality and made dating a forbidden element until college. The parents say that it is only then that the parents believe their children will be mature enough to make sound decisions about their sexuality and sexual behaviors. However, the strong tendency to demand that college-age daughters live at home is one of the findings that tend to cast doubts about exactly when the parents might feel their daughter is mature enough to make such decisions. This certainly is at much later age than the norm for the American-born that they associate with. Since this attitude is intertwined with other aspects of the cultural message and is a positive rather than negative transmission, it perhaps results in these girls feeling less pressured into premature sexual acting out. In a sense, they are being held back by their mothers, which gives them more space to find out who they are before they engage in sex—a protective environment that gives the girls resonance.

#### *Ambivalence and Conformity*

Sexuality is a topic that brings frustration to most of the girls in the study. One girl talked about her monthly agony over her mother's presumption that she is being sexually active. Referring to her mother, this particular girl said, "Every month, she asks if I had my period . . . Now before she asks me, I would tell her not to worry . . . She always has the wrong impression of me . . . One thing I know is that my virginity is the only thing I have now."

The following excerpts were from several girls referring to their mothers: “She won’t allow me to date . . . She tells me not to get pregnant . . . I don’t know why she keeps thinking that I am having sex; she knows I don’t have sex . . . She says boys are interested in one thing . . . My mom thinks that if I have a boyfriend that I won’t be able to pay attention at school.” The mothers’ views on sexuality give conflicting and frustrating messages to their daughters. As many theorists reminds us, puberty and menarche also represent an upsurge in drive and an intensification of both sexual and aggressive urges, accompanied by a reawakening of incestuous fantasies and a more infantile tie to the parents (Blos, 1962; Dahl, 1989; Burgner, 1988).

For the adolescent girl, menarche also presents a special situation with the mother. With the onset of menarche and puberty, Anthony and Benedek (1970) believe that mothers in general find a greater need to protect their daughters (more than their sons) against the “dangers” of sexuality. Their findings concur with the findings in this study in regards to the mothers’ needs to protect their daughters on the “dangers” of sexuality as well as the girls’ upsurge in sexual drive. In this study, many mothers referred to their own childhood during that same period. As Benedek (1973) suggests, during adolescence the thrust of the child’s development activates in the parents beyond memories of the parents own adolescence, mainly the repressed conflicts of the Oedipal phase are activated. As literature on mothers’ development also suggest, the perceived danger from the mothers toward their daughters is an anxious reaction provoked not only by the chronological age of their children but also by their own (Benedek 1973, p. 403).

The mothers in the study were preoccupied with their daughters' sexuality and the "dangers" that would be associated with their daughter becoming pregnant. A daughter's pregnancy would threaten the family's communal survival and most importantly their daughter's chance of obtaining a sound education. That burden is too difficult to fathom for the mothers because of how they would be perceived by their community. Both they will be the subjects of gossip, and the mother perceived as not having raised her daughter right. The mothers anticipate the shame that their daughter's pregnancy would bring upon themselves and the entire family. For that reason, the mothers respond with anxiety and panic.

Although our primary focus on discussion of issues of sexuality is in developmental terms, cultural accounts reinforced the mothers' attitudes toward their daughters' sexuality. The additional elements impeding the mothers' attitudes have to do with their aspirations for their daughters as well as their preoccupation of how they will be viewed in their communities. These expectations concur with cultural values about the impact one's behavior has on the other members of the family. The following quotes illustrate how three different mothers' attitudes toward sex and their preoccupation with cultural conformity and expectations reflect these concepts.

My daughter knows that if she were to do that [sex] that would hurt me a lot. For sure, people would think that I am not a good mother,

I want her to remain a virgin because I don't want others to see her as a *devergonde* (loose). People will say for sure that I was not a good mother if she is out there disrespecting herself.

If she is doing that [sex], people will lose respect for her. They will think that she is not a good person, and guys . . . well, they will think that she was not raised right.

The thought of their daughters not conforming to sexual chastity brings to these mothers not only anxiety but also fear. Consequently, they are, by American standards, overprotective and at times critical of their daughters' views and attitudes about sexuality. Anthony and Benedek (1970) have identified two types of mothers. (a) Those who feel positively about their femininity and sexuality tend to be less fearful and are more trusting of their daughters. (b) Those who feel negatively about their femininity and are resistant to sexuality tend to be intrusive, insecure, overprotective, and critical of their daughters as they project their own sense of sexual constriction onto them. Their daughters as a result feel inhibited and insecure about sexuality.

Again, observations by Anthony and Benedek about mothers' reactions as "intrusive, insecure, overprotective, and critical of their daughters" is not an appropriate interpretation of the cultural context of the mothers in this study. Our findings indicate that their cautiousness is culturally rooted and not the result of negative feminine views about themselves. It is evident that their concurrence with cultural dictates and expectations of the girls leads them to by and large successfully transmit the incentive for the daughters to curtail their wishes and/or desire for future intimate relations with members of the opposite sex.

Although the girls do not agree with their mothers' stance that they should refrain from having boyfriends, they do not challenge or rebel against their mothers' views about dating. Sexuality remains a topic that brings ambivalence about conformity on the part of

the daughters. It is important to the girls that they “appear” to conform for the sake of not upsetting their mothers. Their ambivalence is often managed through support and guidance from the bridge person as their feelings about sex and sexuality are normalized—giving the girls a sense of normalcy.

Many of the girls were candid and uninhibited about their curiosity in sexual matters and admitted that while they may privately disagree with their mother’s view that they wait until college, they also admitted they will not reject the prospect of having a boyfriend before college. The only difference is that they would refrain from telling their mothers if they had boyfriends. When I asked them if they had boyfriends, only two admitted they had boyfriends, and those two had the support of their mothers. However, many of the girls in the study who did not admit to having boyfriends passively smiled and chose not to answer.

Support from their friends and other trusted adults allows them to explore their feelings and views about sexual matters. There was a sense that these girls trusted the adults to keep private any inquiries or questions they may have regarding sexual concerns. The level of trust and support they had in the bridge was apparent. I found the girls to be in touch with their sexuality and interested in sexual matters. The only difference is that they do not discuss sexual matters with their mothers and keep their sexual interest private.

*Passing Down*, the second finding illustrates the manner in which cultural identity structures the mother-daughter relationships. It is a way for the mother to be able to “pass down” something to the daughter, and the girls an opportunity to “take in” something of value from their mothers. This finding speaks to the issues specifically related to the mother-daughter relationship and the manner in which cultural identity structures the mother-daughter relationships. In these relationships, the mothers are able to convey values and expectations. The cultural transmission gives the mothers a way to organize being a parent to these adolescents. In agreement with current literature on female development, these girls seem to define themselves through their relationships with their mothers. Jordan (1991) wrote, “The special quality of the early attachment and identification between mother and daughter profoundly affects the way the self is defined in women as well as the nature of their interpersonal relatedness” (p. 35). There is a sense that these girls feel positive about themselves because of their strong connections with their mothers and their culture.

In discussing the issue of connection, Miller (1991) believes that such preoccupation runs the danger of being misinterpreted by scholars in the field as dependency. Miller says, “It is not about wanting or needing to be dependent or independent, but about wanting to be in relationships with others, and, again, to really comprehend the other; wanting to understand the other’s feelings; and wanting to contribute to the other” (p. 22). Surrey (1991) sums this up by implying that it is probable that for women at all life stages, relational needs are primary and that healthy dynamic relationships are the motivating force that propels psychological growth. Accordingly, a

woman's sense of self is enhanced, interpreted, defined, empowered, refined, and strengthened not through separation with others; rather, in connection with others through mutuality of empathic sharing and resonating and maintaining those relationships and connections. Literature on women often indicates that connectedness is the most important factor to women when it comes to relationships. Although this theory is controversial to many, the findings in this study support this concept.

What is common in the mother-daughter relationship is their continued preoccupation with one another. That preoccupation is clearly defined in their relationships with one another. Consequently, there is an intense mutual sensitivity and the need to protect one another, mixed with a deep sense of gratitude toward their mothers. Gratitude is an integral part of the findings in this study. It is a way through which the girls demonstrate a sense of appreciation for their mothers and the cultural values that were passed on to them. Gratitude has to do with their sense of the sacrifices and efforts on the part of their mothers that their mothers have made toward them. Equally, these issues are captivated in the *payback*. The issue of a payback appeared as the primary sought-after product between a Haitian mother and her daughter. It is part of the cultural transmission from the mothers to their daughters. Demonstrating the understanding of the teaching, achieving certain expectations and emulating cultural ideals, communicates that mothers have done a good job raising their daughters.

Part of the mother's self-worth and self-esteem depends on having done a good job as a mother. The daughter in turn has taken in the cultural expectations and acted upon them by living to the expected values from the mothers, giving them a common

goal and keeping them in connection with each other. The payback and the strong identification with the mother have to do with having values that work. In a sense, the mothers and the girls feel valued and it works because there is a reciprocal affirmation and consolidation of values.

For these mothers, the payback was an all-encompassing theme that gave meaning to their goals and efforts to parent and guide their daughters. In effect, the payback is the barometer by which successes are measured. Roots, identity, conformity, and family loyalty were the essence of the payback experience. The payback is also about cultural and family pride, as gratitude becomes another gift to the mother for a job well done, which gives both mothers and daughters a sense of accomplishment and resolution. Having pride and appreciation for one's upbringing and culture is another way of paying back the mother for having done a good job.

The presence of mutual mirroring between the mother and the daughter was evident as they look to each other for validation and support. The daughter mirrors the mother's courage, which turns into a great sense of gratitude toward their mother, and the mother mirrors the daughter's evolution by bringing hope to the daughter for a better future. In a sense, the mother is passing down the values and the daughter passes up (learning from the daughter) some of their values to the mother (Conversation with Arnold Levin, Ph.D., dissertation chair October 12, 2004).

Research findings on the mutual reciprocal process in which mothers and daughters become highly responsive to the feelings of each other (Dahl, 1995; Surrey, 1991) were supported by this study, as evidenced by the subjects' reciprocal

responsiveness to one another. This speaks to the notion that the girls feel that they “must protect their mothers’ reputation” as their concerns mostly center on their mother rather than other members of the family. Since the mothers’ main goals are to be seen as good mothers, the girls in turn remain good as they unconsciously identify with their mothers by being good.

The girls need to protect their mother’s and family’s reputation. To be seen as being "bad" has the potential of creating both internal and external conflicts for the girls, which at times can be problematic. This latter becomes evident as many girls in the study were brought to tears and sadness when the prospect of disappointing their mothers emerged. Fascinatingly, the girls presented themselves as strong individuals although they are struggling with cultural expectations. Like their mothers, there is a sense of panic when they not following the status quo of their cultural dictate. Their bi-culturalism, their exposure to another culture, their friends, and the bridge, I believe make it easier to normalize their feelings and behaviors. There was no sense that the girls were “sacrificing” in order to remain or be “good” in the eyes of their mothers. They seemed to possess an indubitable internal strength that allows them to continue to thrive.

#### *Aspects of Mother-Daughter Relationship*

Surrey’s (1991) explication of the different aspects of mother-daughter relationships applies here. She enumerate three crucial aspects, with the first aspect being the girl’s ongoing *interest in and emotional desire to be connected to her mother*. This was evident with the girls in the study. According to Surrey, this process allows the child

the opportunity to explore her own feelings. As a result of that exploration, the child begins to know “the other” and the “self.”

The second aspect is the *expectation of a mutual empathic process* with the sharing of experience. This is necessary as it allows the girl to reach a heightened sense of self and of others. This phase in the mother-daughter relationship leaves the girl feeling empowered because of her feeling of being validated, understood, being responded to, and supported through caring for each other and taking care of the relationship between them. This is depicted through the mutual understanding about cultural sensitivity, expectations, and understanding. Hence, through cultural transmission and values, the mothers and their daughters share a mutual terrain that has empowering results.

The third aspect of the mother-daughter relationship is the development of and *expectation of interaction and relationship of mutual sensitivity and mutual responsibility* that leads to greater self-knowledge and growth. “I feel more comfortable with my mom. She is another woman like me and I feel like she can understand me better. Like when I got my period. I am glad my mother was around.”

Most of the girls talk about how support from their mother gives them a sense of security in their relationship with their mothers. Because the girls and their mothers are female, this gives them another avenue through which their femininity can be understood and celebrated; and if their mothers are positive about their femininity, it makes it easier for the girls to accept their own femininity.

All of the girls in the study were intensely watchful of how gender issues are negotiated within the family system. Issues about femininity become conflictual because of clashes between Haitian values and American values. Issues of respect and equality are highly scrutinized by these girls, as it is important for them to want to make sure that their mothers get the respect from others, especially males, in their families. When they notice a discord, they become their mother's advocate and show contempt. In their identification with their mothers, they are in effect thinking about themselves. Likewise, they were quick at pointing out any inequalities that they or their mothers encounter within the Haitian culture. Ironically, the mothers themselves seem to be aware of such inequalities but are not as forthright as their daughters in discussing gender issues.

In terms of gender roles, the daughters seem to be well aware of their mother's struggles to truly feel emancipated as the mothers give them conflictual messages about role expectations. On the other hand, the mothers give the message of self-sufficiency as a way to become productive as adults, and this self-sufficient attitude comes from obtaining a good education. These girls were being raised to be freestanding and be in charge of their lives.

This sort of mutuality, empowerment, and relatedness apparently leads both the mother and the daughter to mutual self-esteem because of the value they put on their responsive and good relationship. Such value becomes fundamental in a woman's sense of self-worth, which continues to evolve through other relationships throughout the life cycle. Self-esteem then becomes synonymous with the degree of emotional relatedness, a

shared sense of connectedness and mutuality within relationships for the girls and their mothers.

By far, their mother is the most influential person in the lives of these teenagers who guides their development. “When things go wrong, I can count on her. I don’t really talk to my mom but if I had a problem I know she would be there for me.”

All the respondents seem to have a genuine attachment to their mothers. Their sense of groundedness seems to be threatened by the prospect of a falling out with their mothers. Even those who rely on another adult—“the bridge”—still understand the importance of the support and presence of their mothers. Blos (1962) expresses that idea in the following comment:

The fact that a girl’s first love belongs to the mother predestines the mother always to be considered a refuge in times of stress . . . *Still, the girl’s early love for the mother is highly ambivalent, a characteristic quality it never loses; in fact, whenever regression brings this early relationship to life again, we find that an excess of primitive ambivalence is always characteristic of it.* (pp. 27-28).

Dahl asserts the following: “The process of the psychic integration of the tie to the mother as an aspect of the self is never fully complete. The hallmark of adult female psychic organization lies in the daughter’s capacity to permit continuing reverberations within herself of the representations of the tie to the mother in her ongoing intrapsychic dialogue with her mother.” (p. 201)

Surrey (1991) contends that a girl’s most basic sense of self is formed in identification with the primary caretaker of the preadolescent period, and those qualities that the mother values and devalues in herself as a “mother” are transmitted in a powerful, unconscious manner. These particular quotes from Blos, Dahl, and Surrey serve as a

reminder of the importance of the relationship between a developing girl and her mother. Likewise, this researcher believes that the mothers' sense of pride and resilience are values that are being transmitted to their daughters. As the daughters internalize their mothers' culture and the mother-daughter relationship, it gives them a way to understand them-selves through the process of identification and psychic integration.

Correspondingly, researchers in the field also recognized the struggles of the adolescent girls in terms of their ambivalent feelings toward the mother. Dahl (1995), for one, spoke of this. Dahl argues that during this stage, the adolescent girl is quite ambivalent about her unconscious infantile ties to her mother and her need for differentiation. Those ties and need for differentiation are mediated by the conflict of two types of mothers: A mother remembered during infancy—a fantasized omnipotent, affect-regulating, and soothing mother (the one she wishes to remain tied with); and the other being the one in reality (the present mother—the one she wants to differentiate from). Hence, during this phase, there is a reawakening of longing for the active, omnipotent, caregiving mother of infancy, leaving the adolescent girl in constant conflict between external reality and the psychic reality of her inner world. While the daughter longs to surrender to these infantile wishes and longings, she is cautious not to be taken over by her mother, which creates another layer of conflict for her. Consequently, “the daughter is caught between her longing to surrender to the mother for gratification and her fear that she will be forced to submit” (Dahl, 1995, p. 191).

It is here suggested that the daughter's fear of being engulfed by her mother in order to preserve her physical and psychological integrity is at the forefront of adolescent

development. This phenomenon was exhibited by the girls in the study and characterized through the mixed feelings about surrendering to their mothers and their verbalization to be different from their mothers.

My mom has to understand that I am my own person and I do think for myself . . . Haitian women don't seem to speak their minds . . . I think that you should speak your mind . . . I could never live like that . . . I could never *not* speak my mind, or have my life revolve around a guy . . . I am not going to let my male friends tell me whatever and just agree with them . . . My role is not to wait on them and make them happy. Today's women are different. There are different guidelines to what a woman is supposed to do. I am not less of a woman I am just evolving with times, with what a woman is supposed to be.

In problematic relationships, however, Surrey (1991) warns that both the mother and the daughter can become overinvolved in feeling responsible and overprotective toward each other, which makes it harder for the daughter to reach her own identity. This is illustrated in their attempts to emancipate by moving away to college and their pull to remain with their mothers. Although most girls in the study talk about their wishes to move on campus, most also worry about not being in close proximity to their mothers and under her protection and watchful eyes. On one hand, they complain about their mother's watchfulness of them and on the other hand, they feel at a loss when their mother's vigilance is not readily available to them.

Referring to her mother, one girl talked about her ambivalence about going away to college by saying, "I don't know what she [her mother] is going to do if I go away." It is more what the girl was going to do rather than her mother. What was evident in the study was the manner in which the adolescents employ different schemes to remain close to their mothers.

Likewise, the adolescents were typical in their efforts to differentiate themselves from their mothers. Surrey (1991) referred to this process as “stepping out” of the mother-daughter expectation or relationship—a necessary step for the daughter’s psychological growth. This involves the complex process of the daughter differentiating from her mother by creating newly defined self-images. For example, Mahler (1975) discusses the phase of toddlerhood where the child separates from the mother. Erikson (1963) discusses the need for adolescents to separate from the family, and Levinson (1978) talks about the need to separate from teachers and mentors in adulthood. According to these theorists, these types of separations are thought to be necessary for healthy psychological growth in order for individuals to form their distinct and separate identities.

Winnicott’s theory on adolescents concurs with Blos’ findings about the need for strong environmental support. Winnicott understands that adolescents go through a difficult time. Winnicott, as a way to capture the adolescent’s struggle to create an identity and feel real, uses the term “doldrums.” Again, Winnicott’s work puts a great emphasis on the provision of “good enough” environmental factors as a necessary element to help the child’s growth. A good enough environment will help the child weather through the tumultuous times that Winnicott sees as normal, healthy, and inevitable. In effect, the usage of the bridge provides these adolescents with a good-enough environment to help them weather through turmoil in their lives and with their families.

*That self-expression is mediated through cultural transmission*, the third finding, relates specifically to the way the girls managed their emotions.

The respondents' bi-culturality is present and at times creates some conflicts for the mothers and the daughters. Accordingly, the girls find themselves at odds with conflicting feelings of self-expression versus self-silencing. While one culture is in favor of self-expression, the other encourages prudence in expressing oneself. The study reveals that most girls have chosen to express their views, which was an unexpected finding. As much as these girls identify with the Haitian culture, their American culture was just as evident.

#### *Movement Towards American Values*

In the area of self-expression, there was evidence that the mothers and daughters in the study behave atypically of their cultural dictates. Contrary to what I thought to be the "truth" about the relationship of Haitian-born mothers and their American-born daughters in terms of the daughters not being able to express their thoughts and emotions, these findings were the opposite. For the girls, although there was and still is a constant pull between the desire to "express" their feelings and the need to "keep" their feelings to themselves, most still manage to express their feelings and opinions to their mothers. Some react with anxiety and others with sadness as the risk of being seen as disrespectful. However, most of the mothers on some level do encourage their daughters to express their feelings.

There were countless accounts from the parents about the importance of self-expression. One mother says,

I don't discourage her from expressing her feelings . . . Like I said before, it is really how she says it . . . Like in the Haitian culture, it is as if you are not supposed to have feelings of anger towards your parents . . . don't believe that . . . I allow her to speak her mind.

Another mother recalled the way she was raised in Haiti:

When I was a kid, I could not tell my mother when I was mad . . . This was not a good thing . . . In Haiti, kids can't tell their parents stuff like that because we were always afraid of our parents . . . I like the way American kids have freedom . . . They can say whatever they want to say; they feel free to express how they feel . . . But us, we don't feel like that . . . Here [in the United States] people are open with how they feel and I think that it's a good thing . . . It's important to have a dialogue with your kids.

A third mother said,

She gets mad . . . and when she does, she will tell me how she feels . . . she slams the door and goes to her room . . . It's just the two of us . . . I allow her to do that because she has the right to be angry . . . But she knows she can't do that kinds of stuff when I have company. That I won't allow her to do and she knows not to do it.

These mothers, whether they are drawing from their own experiences as children growing up in Haiti, or have learned about the importance of self-expression in America, now find it acceptable for their daughters to be angry with them and have created an atmosphere where it is more or less permissible for their children to express their opinions and thoughts.

Winnicott (1960) believes that it is crucial for parents to be able to survive the aggression and rageful stages of infancy as a prerequisite for the child to be able to feel confidently assertive and secure in the knowledge the parents survived the child's murderous feelings. In the same light, Winnicott believes that a mother of an adolescent needs to be able to survive the aggression and rageful states of the adolescent without

retaliation, or the adolescent fearing being disowned. Winnicott (1960) believes that the parents also become the first objects of the infant's wishes and hopes, fears and aggression, love and hate. Throughout life, we are looking to interject objects that will contain us through their regard for us. In this way, human beings can feel held, as the baby does in its mother's arms and in her eyes. It is through this holding and relationship with others that one's life has meanings.

The fact that these girls are able to express their angry feelings toward their mothers suggests that the mothers at least tolerate self-expression, and, in turn, the girls have taken in cues to self-express. Between the adolescent girls and their mothers, a spoken and at times unspoken dialogue encourages the girls to be assertive. Though limited at times, it is nonetheless a dialogue that seems to be improving by the mothers' own "taking in" of the American culture. This is a particularly important finding as it offers a brief glance at change as it is taking place within the parent-child relationship in a bicultural context.

Perhaps the changes that are taking place with the mothers explain the absence of tremendous anger or rebelliousness on the part of the teenagers toward their mothers, even though there are many cultural constraints from the parents that would be expected to dictate otherwise. The fact that the girls' mothers are able to survive their ragefulness as suggested by Winnicott has been a prerequisite for the child to be able to feel confidently assertive and secure in the knowledge their parents survived their murderous feelings. In addition, the strong holding environment present for these girls may explain the lack of rebellion and anger. Within that, the parents may grasp an understanding of

their daughters' dual identity to emerge without compromising their Haitian values.

The parents cautiously encourage American values of assertiveness, self-expression, and competitiveness. In their acceptance of their daughters' dual identity, there is evidence of ambivalence and anxiety for these parents about the fears of losing their children to the American way of life. As immigrant mothers, they embrace and celebrate certain aspects of the American life and other aspects are not too palatable, bringing about some conflicts between them and their daughters. Conversely, if they allow their children to exclusively embrace the American culture there will experience strong feelings of loss and disconnect for not being able to "pass down" Haitian values and expectations as a means keep to insure survival and continuity of their culture.

*The manner in which the girls seek out a trusted adult, the bridge, to talk to, confide in, and obtain their guidance as a means to manage their emotions, is the fourth finding. This bridge helps ease their conflict and gives them a place of refuge when dealing with conflict with their mothers. Most importantly, the bridge serves as a way of fostering the differences between the mother and the daughter because the daughters see the bridge as providing something they could not obtain from their mothers. The bridge becomes their observing ego, a nurturer, a sounding board, and a negotiator dealing with discord. The bridge does not assert her authority, instead, encourages cooperation from the teenagers. The bridge gives the girls a sense of being supported, heard, and understood. Developmentally, the bridge has the important function of helping the girls deal with their regressive pull toward their mothers. Likewise, psychologically the bridge*

helps the girls to successfully emancipate and disengage from the infantile ties to their mothers.

Blos (1992) and others in the field talk of the ambivalence experienced by girls in this process. Blos believes that in an attempt to individuate or disengage from the mother, an adolescent girl may adopt many schemes. Being critical, de-idealizing the mother, and idealizing other females may well be part of the attempt to individuate. Just as an infant may attempt to split the mother into a good and bad object, the adolescent is involved in the same sort of splitting and/or projection, where the mother and home represent bad and the extrafamilial world represents good (Deutsch, 1925).

Waldinger (1986) asserts the necessity of this de-idealization as a means for the adolescent girl to prepare for future intimate relationships, not only with her peers but also with members of the opposite sex. These theorists suggest that the finding of new identifications, loyalties, and intimacies outside of their family dependencies permeates the progression of an evolving self, closing the adolescent phase; hence, allowing the adolescent to move forward to other relationships as an adult. Blos (1958) further posits that the study of adolescence demonstrates with abundant clarity that the final decline, the mastery or resolution of the positive and negative Oedipus complex, is not totally accomplished in early childhood but is the task of adolescence as well (p. 161).

I did not find these girls to be overly critical or de-idealizing toward their mothers. Perhaps it may still be in the spirit of cultural expectations that they do not allow themselves to feel negatively about their mothers. I did find a high level of idealization for another female, the bridge. The adolescents think of this person as

understanding, accepting, and noncritical. The girls are “stepping out” of their mother-daughter relationship not only by making use of the bridge but in their wish to go away to college. These adolescents frantically seek refuge of these trusted adults who, in effect, are more or less an extension of the mother. The bridge often will serve as a go-between the mothers and the adolescents. I believe that, psychologically, the bridge serves as a way to help the adolescents disengage from their mothers as they use the bridge to launch their individuality.

Interestingly, these mothers seem to understand the purpose and the importance of the bridge, especially when the bridge works cooperatively with the mother—a practice supported by the Haitian culture. It is only when there is a blatant divergence in ideologies that the bridge becomes problematic. Most importantly, the bridge often helps negotiate aspects of the mother-daughter relationship or issues that at times seem incompatible.

Blos (1992) considers parental acceptance, support, consistent attachment, and a sense of security as key elements in promoting a healthy developing self and self-esteem. Recent studies have demonstrated that lower levels of adolescent self-esteem and self-competence may be directly linked to troubled relationships, particularly those within the family. However, Blos contends that when societal support is not readily available to the adolescent, the youth discards the family and makes her peer group serve as her sustaining developmental force. Findings from these studies are consistent with conceptual models that indicate a critical influence by the parent-child relationship on the child’s adjustment and perceptions of the self (Ohannessian, p. 621). Again, this is an

example of a well-defined facilitating environment. The self-esteem of the adolescents is due to the support they receive from their environment that includes the use of the bridge.

*The fifth and final finding* highlights the changes that take place with the mothers as the result of their migration. Schneider (1992) posits that migration can have both a positive or negative impact on a person and that it does not upset one's equilibrium as long as things do not drastically change. It is only with changes that one feels the disruption in identity equilibrium. For most of the mothers in the study, there was much evidence that things changed for them drastically and threatened their equilibrium. The changes experienced by these mothers were both positive and negative. In the context of raising their children, those changes naturally affected their views on themselves and their parenting attitudes. Just as they experienced the effect of cultural discrimination and disconnect, isolation, and helplessness, they also found the opportunity to reflect on their views, feelings, and thoughts about the Haitian culture. Issues like parenting, femininity, and self-expression are in constantly revised along with their continued evolution within the American context.

In effect, the results show that migration has also given the mothers the opportunity to redefine and learn about themselves as women, wives, and mothers. Moreover, as they become acculturated their views on parent/child relationships also take a new direction. Consequently, these mothers wind up being more independent and there is an overall shift on their worldview regarding gender issue and emancipation. These changes have direct relation to the mothers' behaviors, which in turn affects their relationships with their daughters. Moreover, parenting seems to give these mothers a

deeper understanding of themselves. Surrey (1991) contends that mothers often report a profound deepening of self-awareness in their ongoing experience of relating to a growing child. “They report learning in tandem about themselves and their daughters through their relational connection in infancy and all through life” (p. 56). Surrey’s observation supports the finding in this study, as many mothers seem to have learned and continue to learn about themselves in conjunction with their daughters’ growth. This reiterates Benedek’s observation that mothers have the opportunity to rework or work through issues about their development when their children reach adolescence.

The results about the mothers highlight developmental changes in the mothers vis-à-vis issues related to womanhood and parenthood are an important finding. Benedek (1959) describes parenthood as “a developmental process that does not end with adulthood . . . it continues throughout maturation of the individual and is reborn in the context of becoming a parent.” Likewise, Benedek (1973) suggests, “Parenthood means change . . . This entails continuous adaptation of the parent to physiologic and psychologic changes within himself, parallel to and in transaction with the child and his changing world” (pp. 401-402). Benedek also suggests that during adolescence, parents have to learn to respond to the evolving complex personality organization of the maturing individual. How successfully the mother responds to the demands of parenthood, and how she perceives herself, strongly contributes to her confidence and her self-worth as a person and more importantly, as a mother” (p. 389). Benedek asserts that such a view will also affect the quality or the way in which the individual parents her offspring.

Likewise, she also believes that unresolved parental conflict most likely will manifest itself when the daughter herself becomes an adolescent.

Benedek (1973) suggests that adolescence is a time during which “the parents remember their own behavior and the responses of their parents” (p. 403). Benedek’s supposition offers one explanation of the mothers’ difficulties in regards to the behaviors of their children.

### Fatherhood

Although this study focuses on mothers and their daughters, it should be mentioned that the lack of focus on fathers is not in any way to undervalue the role and importance of fathers in these girls’ development. Directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, within the realm of these interviews, the fathers’ presence, attitudes, beliefs, and values were felt and experienced by the girls. The decision to only interview mothers and their daughters was not an underestimation of the great importance of fathers in the lives of their daughters but only to limit the focus of the study and satisfy a primary interest in the psychodynamic factors in the mother-daughter relationship.

Obviously, the father-daughter relationship could lend itself its own research topic. Although the results did not yield much material regarding the fathers of daughters it is clearly evident here that the fathers play an important role in the developments of their daughters. From these interviews, the researcher came to understand that these fathers are powerful within the family structure and in their daughters’ formation. These fathers were shown as also influential in shaping the girls’ views on femininity and

relationships in general. In addition, the father often served as a mediator between the girls and their mothers.

For some of the mothers, the girl's father was their main support in parenting their daughters. Moreover, the fathers provided calm and comfort when the mother's emotional survival was threatened. Winnicott (1986), in his work with families, has talked extensively about fathers as having an important role in supporting mothers in their mothering endeavor. He believes that a father's empathic support adds to the healthy development of the growing infant, which creates a facilitating environment for the child. Winnicott is alluding to the need for fathers to create a safe and nurturing environment for mothers in order for them to be fully available to their children. The father's empathic response becomes a pillar for both the mother and the daughter and helps to break up the symbiosis between them.

This research was not designed to explore this relationship. The role of the fathers in this research project varied, no uniformity in the way of relationships between fathers and their daughters was noted. The fathers were seen more as "the holder of order," upholding hierarchies and expectations. In many instances the fathers were important in negotiating aspects of the mother-daughter relationship. Developmental research supports the importance of the father in the family dynamic. "Fatherhood and motherhood are complementary processes which evolve within the culturally established family structure to safeguard the physical and emotional development of the child" (Anthony & Benedek, 1970, p, 167). Parents' relationship to each other, and the family's beliefs and conflicts are postulated as internalized by the children and support the importance of the roles of

both parents within a family (Siegel (1992, p. 6, citing Scharff & Scharff). Most mothers in the study reported the support of their husband/partner. Those who did not have the support of their husband/partner relied upon a male in their extended family who could provide some of the empathic support that the mother needed. Whether it was a cousin, an older sibling, or a grandfather, both the mothers and the teenagers had some type of father figure.

Most of the girls reported some type of relationship with their fathers. Although they might not seek the fathers in times of trouble, they all insisted that they could count on their fathers if they need them. Whether the fathers lived in the same home as the girls or whether the girls were from a single-parent home, the fathers are still involved in their lives. Some of the girls made mention of their fathers in passing. Others viewed their fathers as having a great presence in their lives but understood the bulk of the responsibility of parenting lies with their mothers. The mothers in this study rely on their partners for support in their roles as mothers. Regardless of the proximity of the fathers, their roles were to support both mothers and the daughters. They also had the distinct role of helping separate the symbiotic bond between mothers and the daughters. In a way, the fathers helped the daughters maintain both closeness and distance. I understand that the father's role is complicated both in maintaining relationships and helping the daughter's individuation. I did not gather information that specifically spoke to this because the study focused more on the mother-daughter relationship.

Because there is an extended family available and the availability of the bridge, the father's role is not the only crucial element that helps launch or maintain the individuation of the daughter.

Although many of the girls admitted that they probably would prefer going to their mothers with problems, they thought that their fathers were calmer, less emotional, and most of all less nagging than their mothers. The girls conveyed similar feelings about their mothers when it came to their relationship with their fathers. This perhaps can speak of their identification with their mothers. For example, in the mother-daughter pairs that I interviewed, if the mothers were relaxed about their relationships with their fathers, the girls displayed similar attitudes. The mothers who did not feel supported by their spouses had daughters who reported the same lack of support from their fathers. Where the mothers expressed they had support from the father, their daughters also indicated they felt support from their fathers.

Contratto (1996) indicates that the daughter's observations of the father-mother interaction contribute significantly to the daughter's psychological development. The daughters in this study are, I believe, attuned to their parents' relationship. For example, it was clear that all of the girls showed a keen interest in their father's treatment of their mother. Their interest in this matter is not an altruistic one; rather, a self-interest endeavor during their developing years that will be a precursor of how they view the relationship between men and women, and ultimately how they view themselves as girls and later in life as women. Because of the important roles fathers play in a developing child, it is vital that the father's presence, involvement, views, and activities within the

family are not overlooked—rather, understood as an ever-progressive and evolving phenomenon that needs continued attention.

In addition, there are noteworthy observations between an adolescent girl and her father that need attention, especially during the girl's sexual development. As noted by Stiver (1991), men have difficulty learning how to relate to their daughters, especially during adolescence when the daughter's sexuality begins to develop. Stiver suggests that when it comes to their daughter's sexual development, some fathers become overly involved with their daughters by being openly sexual or overly possessive and restrictive, stating the need to protect them from sexual dangers. Other reactions by fathers may include withdrawing or distancing themselves from their daughters to ward off their own sexual impulses. The girls in the study reported more of a withdrawal from their fathers rather than over-involvement. It is the sense of this writer that the fathers have historically taken a passive role with parenting but they support the mothers in their mothering roles.

From what the mothers reported, it was clear that they and their daughters' fathers felt proud of their daughters for their show of self-expression because they can vicariously experience something they could not as children—having a voice and expressing their thoughts and feelings. The role of the father in this instance provides a sense of refuge for the mother. The husbands make them feel understood and become a bridge between their wives/significant others and their daughters. To some of the girls, their parents are one unit with a deep sense of mutuality based on support, respect, understanding, camaraderie, friendship, playfulness, and togetherness. To others, gender

roles within their households are ones that bring out contempt within the girls about their fathers or gender attitudes in general. It was also evident in this study that strength of a parental system between mothers and fathers gave these girls a sense of stability.

### Limitations of the Study

Some limitations are inherent within the qualitative approach in a research project. As Atkinson has suggested, the life story interview itself is primarily an art form endeavor and should be interpreted as such (1997, p. 21). Denzin posits that a life story is a narrative with a fictional flavor or account of happenings in someone's life (1989, p. 42). Therefore, a life story interview has its own standards of reliability and validity because of one's own psychic reality. This, according to Freud's thinking, is everything in the psyche that takes on the force of reality for the subject "when the subject's psyche presents a consistency and resistance comparable to those displayed by material reality; fundamentally, what is involved here is unconscious desire and its associated fantasies" (Laplanche & Pontalis, p. 363).

Qualitative research is an accepted method which must be determined to be reliable or valid on its own merits. "A personal narrative is not meant to be read as an exact record of what happened, nor is it a mirror of a world 'out there'" (Riessman, p. 64). Because of gaps that always occur in retrieving memories or the possibility that stories may change as missing pieces are recovered, the application of reliability becomes difficult (Resin, 1993, p. 65). Meaning making is something that is personal rather than universal. This study is not seeking facts but rather interpretations of facts, and the

meanings attached to these facts and/or the thought process by the narrators. The nature of this research relies on the notion that there is no one reality out there; rather, different realities arising from one's own personal experiences yielding personal meaning making. As Denzin (1989) puts it, "A preoccupation with method, with the validity, reliability, generalizability, and the theoretical relevance of the biographical method, must be set aside in favor of a concern for meaning and interpretation."

This writer believes that there are a number of limitations that impede generalizability of this study. Although this study offers a rich understanding of cultural forces within the lives of these teenagers and their parents, it is based on a very small sample. The results are sufficiently intriguing that it would be interesting to do follow-up studies with larger or differently selected samples.

Another limitation of this study was the issue of the social status of the participants. All of the participants were upwardly mobile, highly motivated, very successful, and all lived within a Haitian community. One cannot know whether the findings were the norm for a more general population or whether they were particular to the sample in this study. Future studies of a larger number of Haitians and Haitian-Americans with different attributes could lesson the limitation of the study and add to its generalizability.

Although the study did not start out with this premise of success, the participants are representatives of success stories in transcending issues of parenting and mother-daughter relationships. The results are meaningful as examples of successful parenting

mothers and their daughters, which supports the testimony to the resilience of these mothers.

Another limitation is that the participants were self-selected or acquaintances of the subjects being interviewed. Some of the subjects were connected in that they were good friends or colleagues, giving the sample more of a fairly uniform flavor.

The fact that the researcher is Haitian is both strength and limitation. The researcher's Haitian identity sense of keeping true to cultural expectations undoubtedly influenced the study. Her familiarity with cultural issues such as conformity, privacy, and respect is an asset. This study is in a sense ethnographically autobiographical, as this researcher has had an opportunity to capture and develop these voices in a way that others who are not from the culture could not. This has become an interesting way to understand the culture from the inside out.

Limitations are inherent within the methodology used. My own Haitianness might have lead the participants to minimize the role of conflict because of their concerns about conflict, thus the issue of privacy in the Haitian culture as Haitians practice it could be a limitation. There are strengths and weaknesses with respecting limitations in using any ethnographical approach. In terms of validity, the research relies on issue of verisimilitude. According to Denzin, verisimilitude has been the most important criterion of traditional validity. "It rests on the assumption that reality can be truthfully, faithfully, and accurately captured" (1997, p. 10). Also, verisimilitude is about meaning making as it permits naturalistic generalization. The subjects in this study have captured a resonance that is conveyed—a feeling of the richness of their lives. As the researcher, I was aware

of my own attitude during the interview process, especially with the parents. Some of my Haitian values may have given me greater access to the participants. In spite of the constraints it is my belief that a good rapport was established which is evident by the rich contents of the interviews.

### Implications for Clinical Social Work Practice

The field of social work has historically placed great emphasis on the relationship between an individual and his/her environment, while adhering to certain principals that respect the rights and dignity of all people. This study of Haitian-born mothers raising their adolescent American-born daughters offers social workers and others in related fields a snapshot of Haitian mothers and their adolescent daughters experiencing one another through cultural transmission. At a glance, clinicians can familiarize themselves with the nuances of the Haitian culture through the viewpoint of these immigrant mothers and their daughters.

DSM-IV recognizes the importance of incorporating an awareness of cultural-bound issues. It also discusses the challenges that clinicians may face if they are unfamiliar with their client's culture and customs. DSM-IV also posits that clinicians who are unfamiliar with the nuances of an individual's cultural frame of reference may incorrectly judge as psychopathological those normal variations in behavior, beliefs, or experiences that are particular to the individual's culture (p. xxiv). For clinicians to work effectively with clients from a culture different from their own, it is crucial for them to possess didactic and experiential knowledge of the client's culture, and the correlation

with the majority culture. Through various theoretical foundations, social workers attempt to gain a clearer understanding of their patients and their environments and the relationship between the two.

This study hopefully will provide a clearer understanding of the influence of cultural issues in our work with clients. This understanding of cultural issues will aid in the delivery of culturally based services, which has always been of great importance to the field. Since culture defines humans and dictates human behavior, gaining some knowledge about the Haitian culture will foster a greater understanding, tolerance, and appreciation for it. It could also serve as a tool for sound prevention programs and intervention by helping gain a clearer understanding of their intrapsychic world through the understanding of the meaning attached to the clients' cultural issues.

It is important for clinicians to help their clients find meaning in their lives with the aim of reaching personal power and freedom. This empowerment can generate positive selfhood and self-actualization, which are at the core of emotional health. If clinicians can understand some of the impediments that exist for Haitian-born mothers and their American-born teenage daughters, they will be in a much better position to help them.

This research can also serve as a channel in the reconstruction of meaning. Information from this study also can be beneficial when dealing with clients from other immigrant groups whose cultures resemble that of the Haitian population. It can enlighten and sensitize clinicians and help them understand the cultures of others and their differences. Should a client or a group of people not be understood accordingly,

there is much room for misconceptions, misdiagnosis, and misguided dialogue, to the end that patients may be left without the appropriate and necessary intervention. Ideally, this study will encourage others in the field working with Haitians to take the lead in learning about the Haitian culture as a means to gain a clearer understanding of the culture and its people. This knowledge and understanding will enhance the delivery of mental health services to Haitian mothers and their children. Hence, the first implication for clinicians is to understand the role of culture in the lives of their clients—particularly in the case of Haitian clients but also with others.

The amazing sense of pride that resonated with cultural identification coming from their Haitianness rather than from the color of their skin has great implications for the field in understanding the correlation between positive cultural identification and self-esteem. This finding should not be construed as the respondents' lack of readiness to see themselves as black; it just illuminates that being Haitian is the primary way through which the subjects in this study define themselves. They know they are black, but what makes them who they are is their claim of their Haitian heritage.

The implication is that positive cultural transmission and internalization yield positive self-regard, which encourages a greater sense of actualization. Haitians and their history of resilience provide the girls and the mothers a type of resilient identity. Such resiliency and pride was evident throughout the interviews. Further studies of this phenomenon could prove beneficial for Haitians to gain a clearer understanding to their pride and resiliency.

One Haitian-American girl commented that once she had spoken with blacks she met she would know whether they were from “Belize, the United States, Canada, Jamaica, Haiti, Nigeria” and that would already tell her a lot. Since these immigration from the countries and others is increasing in this country, members of the social service professions must increase their cultural sensitivity to and knowledge about these cultures.

The results from this project highlight the relationship between self-esteem and ethnic identity. This study population’s strength may be drawn on the fact that the girls, the mothers, and their ancestors before them have gained their freedom in a particular historical manner by having defeated one of the greatest army of that time. Another key variable may be that Haitians, as part of a homogeneous race, have not been exposed to institutional racism such as blacks in America have experienced by in for decades—separate but unequal, basing the worth of humans on the color of their skin. Discrimination as I know it in Haiti is based on class rather than race, and this type of discrimination is not as deeply related to the core identification of the individual and is more easily dealt with.

It seems safe to assume that not having been discriminated against because of one’s skin color would yield one to have a less vigilant racial attitude, an attitude which one would more likely pass on to one’s offspring. Lastly, is it because of their holding environment and their strong cultural identification that these participants are able to deal with race issues in different ways? Phinney’s (1990) position on positive ethnic identification as a buffer against the negative impact of prejudice and discrimination is

one explanation. The findings of this study serve as a reminder of the importance of positive ethnic identification in working with people in the minority.

Although the subjects in the study attributed their high self-regard to the related factors of knowing who they are as “Haitians” or having a strong network of support and values, they may not be particularly representative of other Haitians, and the reasons for such pride are not clear to me. The hypothesis here is that there is a high correlation between Haitian history and Haitian culture that yields high self-esteem. No causal relationship has been demonstrated here. A study of a larger and more diverse group could help sort out the reasons for this finding. Hopefully this would include field study of Haitians who live in Haitian-dominant communities and those who have more diverse exposure. Certainly geographical location, particular cities, and so on would all be factors effecting the level of change and adjustment in the psychological factors of interest here.

Another issue is the importance of development and the role of cultural transmission within a holding environment creates a facilitating environment for growth. In this study, the facilitating environment can be transcribed as the girls’ culture and their immediate environment. This study provides ample examples of this facilitating environment to show how the taking of culture works in transmuting values.

The girls in this study have obtained some resilience from their values and seek to emulate their mothers. This cultural transmission is mostly apparent in the adolescents’ observation of their mothers’ Haitian pride. This particular implication to clinical work is important, as it addresses a connection between mothers and daughters in self-perception. These findings support the need to understand the significance of this phenomenon and

create a facilitating milieu through which their clients can explore their cultural understanding of themselves. Phinney (1997) reminds us that ethnicity is central to the psychological functioning of members of ethnic and racial minority groups. She believes that poorly developed ethnic identity can lead to maladjustment, while a positive ethnic identification leads to positive self-esteem and an overall sense of belonging.

As Pinderhughes (1989) posits, societal definition and assigned value are some of the factors that help determine whether ethnic meaning for a given group of individuals becomes positive, ambivalent, or negative, which then has great significance for how these individuals behave. Pinderhughes' research indicates that when people internalize negative societal definitions of themselves and their ethnic group, they experience insecurity, anxiety, fear, confusion, and psychological conflict. It would be helpful for social workers and other psychotherapists to gain a greater awareness of how negative identification can impede one's cultural identification. They should also note the advantage of positive identification by making themselves available to become familiar and attuned to the complexity of a client's cultural background; in this case, of Haitian mothers and their daughters, and their relationship.

The results outlined hierarchical issues that are at the heart of the culture. It is important for parents to be given their proper place within the family structure where hierarchy is upheld and understood. Therefore, clinicians should be cautious how to proceed in helping a Haitian mother-daughter pair. They should abstain from imposing their views on the parent-child relationships prematurely. What may seem normative psychological tasks for clinicians will look differently for Haitian families, mainly in

dealing with hierarchical issues. In interpreting and understanding such cultural matters vigilance and cautions are recommended.

Most importantly, it is not customary for Haitians to use mental health services, in part because family privacy is sacredly guarded by family members as a means to preserve the honor and the integrity of the family. Thus clinicians must keep in mind that Haitian families will be extra cautious about discussing family concerns or issues and accordingly be certain to take extra care in carefully explaining their right to privacy.

The findings have demonstrated the mothers' fears and ambivalence about allowing their daughters to move away and attend college. Hierarchical mandates in the Haitian culture encourage daughters to conform to parental expectations. In order to deal with the discrepancy between parental views and adolescent needs, such issues need to be understood within the particular cultural and family context. Immigrant groups pose different issues, and if their cultural values are not understood and celebrated for what they are, the existence of discord and constraints may be misinterpreted and most likely will impinge on successful outcomes.

Arnstein (1979) argues the importance of understanding the cultures of others. Arnstein believes that maturation and identity formation might be defined in a different way. While independence from family and the formation of separate identity may be a marker for maturation in Western cultures, we must keep in mind that the same markers may differ in other cultures. In the Haitian family system increased independence is not what is being sought after; rather, a continued interrelatedness through which family members exist and decisions about family members is valued. For example, most of the

mothers in this study did not favor their daughters dating until college. By American standards, dating among high schoolers is more acceptable. Clinicians should not judge these mothers as controlling and suffocating; instead, they should know that their views are being driven by their wish for their children to obtain a sound education as well as preoccupation with being seen as “good enough” within the community.

By and large the mothers’ migration here poses some concerns of “losing” their children to another culture. It would be beneficial for clinicians to be aware of such anxiety and cautiously help their patients maneuver through their feelings regarding their anxieties. The results of this study show that the girls’ parents (their mothers specifically) are the most influential entity in their lives. Clinicians can help bring assurance to the mothers by helping them see that indeed cultural transmission is most likely with a facilitating environment. Helping the parents understand their children in psychological terms, I believe, will lessen the mothers’ anxiety. Most importantly, the fact that these mothers are not advocating autonomy as prescribed by Western culture does not make their attitudes and behaviors pathological. Instead, it is another way to understand their differences in their culture and help them manage them in the context of their milieu.

The girls, for the most part, consider themselves bicultural and their biculturalism sometimes creates some problems between them and their mothers. These problems are more evident when the girls diverge from certain cultural dictates. This divergence often causes some panic on the part of the mothers because they fear losing their daughters to the dominant American culture. Results from this study emphasize the importance of the bridge in helping the daughters and their mothers navigate certain aspects of their

relationships. Clinicians I believe may also serve as bridges in helping to negotiate, mediate, and most of all facilitate features of their relationships that will improve their functioning. Thus, the effectiveness of the clinician as a bridge lies on the clinician's familiarity with the culture, the willingness to be a bridge, and the willingness to learn from their clients.

### Conclusion

During this project, I was aware of my own Haitian pride and at the same time hopeful about the future of Haiti and Haitian-American children living in the United States and their mothers. As a Haitian mother and daughter, I am humbled by what the subjects have taught me. When I first decided to study at the Institute, my own first reaction was my mother's anticipated joy in my obtaining a degree of doctor of philosophy. The girls' results and the idea of a "payback" to their mothers put into perspective my unconscious motive about my own "payback" to my mother for a well-deserved "thank you". For all her hard work, resilience, and heroic efforts she made as she crossed over to America. Just as for the girls, it is also my own testimony to my mother, something that became apparent to me because of the results from the girls. The girls' articulation of a wish to pay back their mothers made me realize my long-awaited aspiration of a payback to my mother who had migrated to America in search of a better life for her family. What was astonishing and impressive was the girls' astuteness and awareness of their vision of a payback.

As a mother of three, I also realize that I am seeking the same results as the mothers in the study. My recompense is in the works and is well achieved by the types of children they have become. The mothers' ideas of passing down Haitian values to their daughters also resonate with my own aspirations for my children. For the mothers, the idea of generational boundaries and the importance of respect and self-respect crown their successes with their daughters. The results highlight the notion of expectations, cultural identity and transmission, mutuality, successful parenting, and the passage of adolescence.

I have come to realize also that the study provided for the girls and the mothers a facilitating milieu through which the girls were able to reflect and make sense of their lives. During the interviews, many stumbled upon feelings and reactions that had not been noticeable to them. These revelations support the notion that they gained some understanding about themselves in the process.

Through the girls' attitudes and knowledge about both cultures, they will be great ambassadors to both countries. For the parents, I was glad to see that some were flexible in raising their Haitian-American children. For those who were more dogmatic in their thinking, I am also hopeful that time will soften their understanding of their bicultural children. For these mothers, the ambivalence and conflicts were clear and at times they anticipate a menacing future for the survival of their culture. It was evident through their children that their cultural values and attitudes have and will continue to have a place in their lives, their children, and future generations. The results clearly model successful ways of raising children. The mothers negotiated many differences and changes in their lives, they were clear about their values, and they were not isolated. Most importantly,

they allowed themselves to change. The parents let their children know that they are being watched over, and they have clear expectations of them, thereby upholding clear generational boundaries.

The words of one mother, “It’s what’s being done,” keep echoing in my mind that these mothers are indeed doing something to ensure the survival of their cultural beliefs and values by teaching them to their children. Because these parents are doing what needs to be done in terms of teaching their daughters about the Haitian culture, I believe that inevitably, “it” — meaning their Haitian culture—will become part of their children with a long-lasting effect. Their humor, apprehension, fear, love, anxiety and the many other ways they present themselves make it clear that, with perseverance, they will harvest the fruit of their hard labor—meaning that their children will achieve and succeed. The mothers in the study show that they have high expectations of their daughters. The parents remained strict in their demands for conformity and achievement, and yet a noticeable balance between those demands and the daughter’s creativity and playfulness was also evident.

This study came to life from the perspective of cultural intake and cultural transmission. As stated earlier, literature on healthy development shows a remarkable connection between self-esteem, healthy adjustment, healthy emotional growth, high ego functioning, efficacy, and a greater sense of self-actualization with positive object relations and ethnic identification.

Theories on culture provide a platform through which the results of this study were discussed. This study has demonstrated the influence of positive cultural

transmission and the affirming impact it has on developing children. It also confirms the need to celebrate one's diversity and culture, as well as the importance of a sound, facilitating milieu in which one can grow. These girls have learned to locate themselves and who they are within a cultural context of their nuclear and extended families and their communities.

This research also confirms that positive ethnic identity is necessary for these adolescent girls who are in the minority to succeed in America. Due to their triple-minority status (female, black, and immigrant), I believe it is beneficial to them that they are surrounded with a sense of belonging, protection, and direction. It supports the notion that growth and integrity can flourish with the right environment, and the girls and their mothers show evidence of that notion.

Winnicott suggests a good enough environment has proven to be fitting for these Haitian girls and their families. The girls' ethnic identification has provided a platform for growth as well as some immunity against negative exposure. Their sense of direction and expectation from their mothers who represent their Haitian culture give them the appropriate idea expectation, conformity, value, and most of all the need to strive for their optimum potential. These girls and their parents are hanging on to their ethnic cultural identity because it provides them with a history or roots. This root sustains their individual identities, which in turn gives them an integrity that becomes an excellent springboard for adulthood.

It is safe to conclude that the "passing down" and the "taking in" of the Haitian culture is at the core of this study as it has demonstrated its influence in defining the girls

in this study. It is also in that spirit that the girls and their mothers embark on a joint mission to cultural resonance and discovery. The “passing down” and the “taking in” articulate that both the mothers and daughters have a shared dream.

The mothers pass down something that is valuable and positive, and the children take it in and use it accordingly. These mothers and daughters have been able to speak valuably in a way that has given them a voice and power that is real. The result is that they are able to articulate and negotiate their needs because they have the identity, the value, and motivation that pull them toward growth. Clearly, these girls have a voice and their voice is evidently echoed in all their endeavors. Their parents are allowing them to have a voice even though at times there are conflicts for the mothers when the children force them to face their pasts as hierarchies of challenge. These mothers have experienced a past where they themselves could not express their thoughts and feelings when they were growing up in Haiti. Nevertheless, the parents are proud of their children’s achievement and assertiveness.

It is clear that these girls are Haitian and American. The fact that they are Americans means that they are not exactly like their mothers. The girls are vibrant individuals who have responded well to firm limits and their parents have allowed them enough space to be their own selves. Most importantly, they are not falsely compliant which gives way for their true self to emerge. The girls’ identities as Haitians are a way to instill positive self-esteem and belief in themselves. To these girls, being Haitian entails believing in themselves. It is clear that the notion of having something to believe in, like their Haitian heritage or being Haitians, is a powerful organizer. There is also a

powerful expectation of roles, with the hierarchical structure being well defined. The results revealed the phenomenal ego strength of the mothers that reflected the way they raised their daughters, instilling values, virtuosity, and strength.

## APPENDIX A: LETTER TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Date

Name

Address

City, State, ZIP Code

Dear

I am a social worker and a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Clinical Social Work in Chicago Illinois. I am conducting a research on the experience of Haitian-born mothers raising American-born teenage daughters. Your (your daughter's) name has been given to me by \_\_\_\_\_ as a prospective participant. I will be asking a small group of Haitians mothers and Haitian-American teenage girls to participate in this project.

The purpose of the interviews is to learn about the experiences of Haitian-born mothers raising their teenage daughters in the U.S. It will explore parental attitudes of Haitian immigrant mothers raising their adolescent daughters in a bicultural milieu, and the way the American born daughters respond to their mothers. The aim of this study is not only to capture aspects of adolescent female development but also to understand the role culture plays in this developmental process, especially because Haitians and Americans have different viewpoints on cultural practices and rituals. I believe that the information you can provide during an interview will be a valuable contribution to the field of social work. As a social worker, I aim to use this study not only in my work with Haitian families but also with other immigrant families with similar issues.

Participation would include two to three audiotaped interviews and your review of the taped interview, and correct interpretations to assure accuracy. All information you provide to me will be kept strictly confidential and your identity will be disguised. You will be encouraged to ask questions throughout the interviews and after data collection. You may choose to withdraw your consent or participation at any time or may also choose not to answer certain questions if you decide.

If this project is something you or your child would like to participate in or if you have questions you would like to ask me directly prior to committing your time, please don't hesitate to contact me at (847)-662-7387. Attached is a formal consent form for your review.

Thanking you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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Michelle Yapo, LCSW

## APPENDIX B: PARENT CONSENT FOR DAUGHTERS TO PARTICIPATE

This study is being conducted by Michelle Yapo, LCSW, a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Clinical Social Work (ICSW) in Chicago. The finding will be made available as a dissertation to the ICSW as well as possible publication or other values.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, acting on behalf of my teenage daughter, agree to give my daughter \_\_\_\_\_ permission to participate in a research study entitled: Haitian-born Mothers raising American-born Daughters: An Exploratory Study of Their experiences.

### Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore parental attitude of Haitian-born mothers raising American-born daughters and the daughters' response to the mother's attitudes. As a Social Worker, I aim to use this study in not only my work with Haitians Families but also other immigrant families with similar issues.

### Procedures

This research will consist of 90 to 120 minutes of your time. The design of this study will be exploratory, using qualitative research strategies for data collection and analysis. The study will use an open interview format in which your daughter will be asked to share her experiences about mother-daughter relationship, parental practices, interaction, and attitudes. The interview will be audiotaped. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you and your daughter may withdraw your participation and/or involvement at any time or may refuse to answer any question (s) if so chosen.

### Benefits

There is no immediate benefit to you or your daughter as a participant other than the opportunity to reflect upon your experiences. This study will help Haitians girls gain a greater understanding of themselves via a clearer insight to their experiences, their culture, and behaviors. Another benefit is to help others in the helping fields gain greater insight about Haitians and others with similar upbringing. In that way, greater understanding of any population gives a greater assurance of the right type of services and intervention to that population.

### Costs

There are no costs associated with in this study.

### Possible Risks/Side Effects

There is no identifiable known risk to you or your daughter as a participant. However, discussing personal issues may trigger some unpleasant, uncomfortable, and/or painful feelings and memories. If at any point you or your daughter is experiencing these emotions, we may pause, allow you time to regroup or stop the interview altogether. A debriefing session will be made available to you and your daughter if a need is identified.

### Privacy/Confidentiality

All the information obtained from the participants will be coded and all identifiable information will be disguised to assure anonymity. All data concerning this project will be kept in a secured locked file cabinet in my office

### Assurances

By signing this consent form, you agree to allow her partake in this research study. You and your daughter may cancel your consent and refuse to continue or be part in this study (or take your child out of this study) at any time without any penalty. By signing this consent, you have not given up any of your rights or the

rights of your child. By signing this consent, you have not released this institution (ICSW) from responsibility for carelessness.

If your daughter or you have any questions or concerns about the research methods you can discuss them with me (Michelle Yap) at 847-604-8308 or the dissertation chair of this project, Dr. Arnold Levin, at 3120726-3396 or contact the ICSW – Review Board Committee at 312-726-8480.

**I HAVE READ THIS CONSENT FORM AND AGREE TO TAKE PART (OR TO HAVE MY CHILD TAKE PART) IN THIS STUDY AS IT IS EXPLAINED IN THIS FORM.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I CERTIFIED THAT I HAVE EXPLAINED THE RESEARCH TO  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(NAME OF PARENT) AND  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(NAME OF MINOR) IN ADDITION, BELIEVE THAT THEY UNDERSTAND AND THAT SHE AGREED TO PARTICIPATE FREELY. I AGREE TO ANSWER ANY ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS THE PARTICIPANTS MAY HAVE ABOUT THE RESEARCH DURING AND/OR AFTER ITS COMPLETION, WHEN THEY ARISE DURING THE RESEARCH OR AFTERWARD.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please put your initial in the space below to acknowledge receipt of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C: INDIVIDUAL CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

This study is being conducted by Michelle Yapo, LCSW, a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Clinical Social Work (ICSW) in Chicago. The finding will be made available as a dissertation to the ICSW as well as possible publication or other values.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in a research study entitled: Haitian-born Mothers raising American-born Daughters: An Exploratory Study of Their Experiences.

**Purpose.**

The purpose of this research is to explore parental attitude of Haitian-born mothers raising American-born daughters and the daughters' response to her mother's attitudes. As a Social Worker, I aim to use this study in not only my work with Haitians Families but also other immigrant families with similar issues.

**Procedures**

This research will consist of 90 to 120 minutes of your time. The design of this study will be exploratory, using qualitative research strategies for data collection and analysis. The study will use an open interview format in which your daughter will be asked to share her experiences about mother-daughter relationship, parental practices, interaction, and attitudes. The interview will be audiotaped. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw your participation and/or involvement at any time or may refuse to answer any question (s) if so chosen.

**Benefits**

There is no immediate benefit to you or your daughter as a participant other than the opportunity to reflect upon your experiences. This study will help Haitians adolescent girls gain a greater understanding of themselves via a clearer insight to their experiences, their culture, and behaviors. Another benefit is to help others in the helping fields gain greater insight about Haitians and others with similar upbringing. In that way, greater understanding of any population gives a greater assurance of the right type of services and intervention to that population.

**Costs**

There are no costs associated with in this study.

**Possible Risks/Side effects**

There is no identifiable known risk to you or your daughter as a participant. However, discussing personal issues may trigger some unpleasant, uncomfortable, and/or painful feelings and memories. If at any point you are experiencing these emotions, we may pause, allow you time to regroup or stop the interview altogether. A debriefing session will be made available to you if a need is identified.

**Privacy/Confidentiality**

All the information obtained from the participants will be coded and all identifiable information will be disguised to assure anonymity. All data concerning this project will be kept in a secured locked file cabinet in my office.

**Assurances**

By signing this consent form, you agree to allow her partake in this research study. You may cancel your consent and refuse to continue or be part in this study at any time without any penalty. By signing this consent, you have not given up any of your rights or the rights of your child. By signing this consent, you have not released this institution (ICSW) from responsibility for carelessness.

If you have any questions or concerns, about the research methods you can discuss them with me (Michelle Yap) at 847-604-8308 or the dissertation chair of this project, Dr. Arnold Levin, at 312-726-3396, or contact the ICSW – Review Board Committee at (312) 726-8480.

I HAVE READ THIS CONSENT FORM AND I AGREE TO TAKE PART (OR TO HAVE MY CHILD TAKE PART) IN THIS STUDY AS IT IS EXPLAINED IN THIS CONSENT FORM.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I CERTIFIED THAT I HAVE EXPLAINED THE RESEARCH TO \_\_\_\_\_ (NAME OF PARENT) AND \_\_\_\_\_ (NAME OF MINOR) AND BELIEVE THAT THEY UNDERSTAND AND THAT SHE AGREED TO PARTICIPATE FREELY. I AGREE TO ANSWER ANY ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS THE PARTICIPANTS MAY HAVE ABOUT THE RESEARCH DURING AND/OR AFTER ITS COMPLETION. WHEN THEY ARISE DURING THE RESEARCH OR AFTERWARD

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please put your initial in the space below to acknowledge receipt of this consent form.

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