

WORK EXPERIENCES OF PROFESSIONAL WEST INDIAN IMMIGRANT
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KYLA-GAYE SIMONE BARRETT
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APPROVED:

Karen Riggs Skean, Psy.D.

Nancy Boyd-Franklin, Ph.D.

DEAN:

Stanley Messer, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the work experiences of professional West Indian immigrant English-speaking women in the United States. Much study has been dedicated to the experiences and success of West Indian immigrant women and men in service and domestic roles (Bonnett, 1990; Waters, 1999; Foner, 2008). The study explores these professional immigrant women's experiences attaining career success in the United States racial society. Data was obtained from 12 professional West Indian immigrant women using semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher. These interviews explored: the participants' experiences with immigration, their employment experiences as immigrants, the challenges they faced in their work environments, their experiences in attaining career success, their experiences interacting with non-West Indians and with individuals born in the United States, their social support systems, and their experiences attaining work-family balance in the United States. Major findings include migration motivated by financial and educational improvement, mixed experiences with West Indian cohesiveness and general job satisfaction. Challenges at work included cultural differences, ethnic/racial tensions, being excluded by Americans, and low expectations for professional West Indian women. Some participants also experienced slower career progression, had limited professional and social interaction with non-West Indians, and expended greater efforts in balancing work-family demands, had weakened family relationships with relations back home, and limited use and reliance on mentors and professional networks and associations. Qualitative analysis revealed a high level of career success among these West Indian women, attended by significant psychological, emotional, financial and professional costs. The challenges faced by these Black

professional West Indian women in the United States mirror those encountered by some African Americans. Due to their meritocratic outlook and socialization to de-emphasize race some of these West Indian women appeared to be initially unprepared to maneuver these challenges and expended greater efforts to attain career success. Despite participants attempts to develop strong professional and social relationships with non-West Indians many were rebuffed. Participants who established stronger relationships with non-West Indians and West Indians (for example mentoring relationships and professional networking) appeared to experience higher levels of career success in the United States.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

From the end of slavery to present West Indian women, as well as men, have emigrated in search of a better life to various countries such as Britain, Canada, and the United States, among others. Men dominated West Indian migration for several decades, and emigrated to work on agricultural and construction projects abroad (Foner, 2008). This male-dominant migration trend continued after World War II, but changed once the destinations shifted from Britain to the United States and Canada in the late 1960s (Foner, 2008).

A common theme in earlier West Indian immigrant literature is the great success they have achieved in the United States, particularly in small business, which has been discussed by writers such as Sowell (1981). West Indian immigrants are known for their hard work ethic and resourcefulness, and strong educational focus. In fact, much of the literature depicts Black West Indians as attaining greater economic, educational, and financial success than African Americans (Waters, 1999; Henke, 2001; Deaux, 2006). According to Green and Wilson (as cited in Palmer, 1995), West Indians were also noted for being an influential group during the 1930s in Harlem, which made them the targets of resentment by African Americans.

The majority of West Indians in Brooklyn, according to Foner (as cited in Palmer, 1995) tend to live in Black enclaves and rarely interact socially with the White population, while differentiating themselves from African Americans. They strive to maintain their 'West Indianness' and therefore separate their cultural identity (Palmer, 1995). While they distinguished themselves from the rest of the Black population, many were known to identify with the major civil rights issues that affect Blacks in American society.

Shirley Chisholm (as cited in Palmer, 1995) a West Indian and the first Black woman to be elected to the U.S. Congress in her autobiography 'Shirley Chisholm: Unbought and Unbossed', attributes West Indian success to the fact that slavery in the West Indies was a "less destructive experience than it was in the United States. Families were not broken up... the abolition of slavery came earlier... and there have never been the same race barriers" although, "there were class barriers" (pp. 21-22).

Due to the uncertainty of their ties to their host country, West Indians maintain connections with their home countries through relatives back home and associations (Palmer, 1995). Some of these associations include the Jamaica Progressive League, which raises funds for projects back home, hosts visiting politicians, and sponsors money for Jamaicans that experience trouble in the United States (Palmer, 1995).

In recent times, however, women have come to dominate major West Indian migrant flows (Foner, 2008). West Indian women have always worked since slavery days, through to emancipation in the 1820s, and have continued to be active in occupations outside the home (Foner 2008). West Indian women have always migrated in order to earn better wages. They came as private household workers, nurses, skilled

technicians, childcare workers, companions to the elderly, and professionals (Foner, 2008). “Occupational niches, (especially in nurses) “became self-reproducing as new arrivals learned about and got help finding jobs through personal networks” (Foner, 2008, p. 11). In fact, a large percentage of West Indian men and women who have migrated in the last few decades have a college education and are found in professional and managerial occupations (Foner, 2008).

However, this is not the complete picture; Model (2008) argues that West Indian immigrants are not more economically successful than African Americans based on empirical tests conducted. Based on her findings, many of the arguments and hypotheses presented by Sowell (1981) and other historians, are invalid today including the all-Black society, historical differences, and economic independence hypotheses (Model, 2008). Model (2008) was unable to prove that any of these hypotheses enabled West Indian Blacks to be more successful than African Americans. Model (2008) also emphasized that Black immigrants from Africa or the Hispanic Caribbean do not have stronger labor market outcomes than African Americans. Additionally, while West Indians may have higher labor force participation rates and occupational prestige, they do not earn more than African Americans until a decade after their arrival (Model, 2008).

One explanation for the challenges West Indians experience in attaining success in the United States comes from Vickerman (1999) and his studies on cross-pressures impacting West Indian immigrants. Vickerman (1999) asserts that there are a variety of forces producing cross-pressures on West Indian immigrants in the United States. One such primary force is the fact that West Indians were socialized conservatively in colonial societies to downplay race while emphasizing merit. On the other hand, as immigrants,

they are now immersed into a host society that provides many opportunities for upward mobility but which also views race as being a means of stratification (Vickerman, 1999). In other words, the West Indian focus on merit may enable them to achieve moderate success; however, like African Americans, they may encounter discrimination and racism, which will impact the extent of their success.

This poses the question, why do West Indians appear to experience success in the United States? Apart from Sowell's (1981) hypotheses, there are several others that account for the relative success West Indian immigrants have experienced in the United States, including high educational achievement, and geographic location (particularly Florida and New York/North East) (Model, 2008). Theoretical explanations that have been proposed for this occurrence include Selectivity, Segmented Assimilation, and World Systems. Model (2008) believes Selectivity best explains West Indian success. That is, the most economically and educationally motivated West Indian emigrants will perform better. Additionally, West Indians were recipients of opportunities to advance their skills, an opportunity not afforded to many African Americans (Model, 2008).

Given that: (1) many West Indians dominate service, private household, domestic and care-giving roles, as well as nurses and health care, (2) a large number of studies have been conducted on West Indians in the aforementioned groups, (3) West Indians also occupy managerial and professional roles, and (4) women currently dominate West Indian migration flows; further study should be done on West Indian women in professional roles to determine their work experiences and ability to succeed in these environments. With the exception of studies on teachers and nurses, there is a dearth of information on professional West Indian women's work and career experiences.

Additionally, gaining an understanding of how West Indians experience and navigate cross-pressures in professional settings in the United States provides a deeper understanding of how successful West Indians truly are in the United States.

This dissertation explores the work experiences of professional West Indian immigrant women, as well as the impact these experiences have on their family lives. It also assesses their immigration and employment experiences, social support networks, social interaction patterns, work challenges, attaining career success, and work-family balance in the United States.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

History of West Indian Migration

United States Immigration

The United States of America is a country with a history rooted in immigration. Oscar Handlin stated: “I thought to write a history of the immigrants in American. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history” (as cited in Henke, 2001 p. 12). Over the years millions of people have crossed every ocean and continent to emigrate to the United States. The first noted group of immigrants to the United States originated from Europe, and were primarily Anglo-Saxon, or White. Along with the Native American Indians, they were the only two ethnic groups on the land. Later on when the slave trade began in the fifteenth century, African Negro slaves were imported and the American mosaic began to change. Over the years, other ethnic groups have become part of the American population including Irish, German, Jews, Italians, Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, East Indians, Dominicans, Cubans, and West Indians, among others.

Caribbean Migration

The migration of Caribbean peoples in and through the Caribbean has long been a feature of the region. In modern times an extraordinarily high volume and diversity of people came to the region in search of a better life (Henke, 2001). According to Bonnet

(as cited in Palmer, 1995), the first major emigration of people from the Caribbean focused primarily on Panama, Costa Rica and Cuba, searching for work and economic security. Bonnet (as cited in Palmer, 1995) also states that later on in the 1950s to 1960s West Indian emigration occurred primarily to the United Kingdom, and later to the United States after the passing of the McCarran-Walter Immigration Legislation Act in 1952. West Indian women as well as men have also migrated to Canada in large numbers in search of a better life (Foner, 2008) As a result of this long history of migration, Caribbean people have developed a psychological mindset of “strategic flexibility”, according to Carnegie (as cited in Henke, 2001 p. 32), by which they make decisions in their everyday lives. West Indian males made up the majority of migrants to countries such as Britain and Panama and the United States in search of better paying jobs. It is only recently that women have begun dominating West Indian immigration (Foner, 2008)

History of the Caribbean

Migration to the region now known as the Caribbean formally began shortly after Christopher Columbus’ ‘discovery’ in 1492 of the New World and what he later called the West Indies. The Caribbean is comprised of several islands, divided into the Greater and Lesser Antilles. The Greater Antilles includes in order of size Cuba, Hispaniola (Haiti and the Dominican Republic) Puerto Rico, and Jamaica. The Lesser Antilles includes the smaller islands such as Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, Antigua and Bermuda, Montserrat, Dominica, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Anguilla, St. Martin, and St. Vincent. Guyana is also included in the Caribbean, even though it is not an island.

Prior to Columbus' 'discovery' of the Caribbean, the region was primarily occupied by the Amerindians, including the Caribs (for which the Caribbean is named), and the Arawak Indians. Columbus' primary goal at the time was the mining of gold and other precious metal, and his plans for the Amerindians was to either eradicate or subdue them for their labor (Henke, 2001). Due to their resistance of the Spanish invasion as well as their enslavement, most were killed.

When it was discovered that the land was good for farming tobacco, and later on sugar cane, the importation of slave labor from Africa began. The British captured several of the former Spanish territories including Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Belize, the Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Montserrat, Suriname, and St. Lucia. The people within these English-speaking regions often refer to themselves as 'West Indian'¹, and this is the term that will be used in reference to them throughout the rest of this study.

A mixture of slaves from various African tribes were imported for the large plantations (mainly sugar growing) which were controlled primarily by White absentee owners living in London, through White overseers (Sowell, 1981). Slaves were treated more severely in the Caribbean, significantly shortening their lifespan, which was supported by the continual importation of slaves from Africa. Systematic exploitation of

¹ The term 'West Indies' originated from an error on the part of Christopher Columbus who believed he had found a western route to India upon landing in Hispaniola, the island of Haiti and Dominican Republic (Henke, 2001). Although there are more accurate terms used such as 'Anglo/English-speaking Caribbean', the people of this region are most commonly known as West Indian, hence the reason for its use throughout this study.

Black slave women by White men was also a pervasive characteristic of slavery in the West Indies (Sowell, 1981) giving rise to a mulatto group of slaves who were often spared from field work, and utilized as House slaves instead (Henke, 2001). The preference by Whites for lighter skinned Blacks continued after slavery ended in the Caribbean, in terms of hiring preferences for lighter skinned individuals in the commercial and financial sector and greater educational opportunities. This added to the perception, often times real, of economic stability associated with Whites or mulattos. A study by Gopaul-McNicol (1993) of Black children in the West Indies found that they preferred White characteristics and features (blue eyes, straight hair, et cetera) rather than Black characteristics (dark skin, curly hair, et cetera). Gopaul-McNicol (1993) theorized these children associated Whiteness or being light-skinned with beauty, wealth and power, and a legacy of the British colonial educational system.

Support for this comes from Sowell (1981) who stated that because the Caribbean population was predominantly Black, the British to some extent followed the Latin policy of divide-and-conquer by making distinctions among free Blacks based on color. Gradations of color, also known as 'shadism', continues to fragment the West Indian Black population. In fact, Gopaul-McNicol (1993) argues the reason why West Indians find it so difficult to articulate racism is because race and class are so closely interwoven it is difficult to separate them from each other. For example, Chinese, Syrians, Whites, Jews and mulattos are predominant in the upper classes in the West Indies (Gopaul-McNicol, 1993).

"Slaves in the West Indies were assigned land and time to raise their own food selling the surplus food in the market to buy amenities for themselves" (Sowell, 1981

p.218). Blacks in the West Indies under slavery had centuries of experience with buying and selling, which Sowell (1981) believes partly explains their success in the United States.

Slavery ended in the West Indies on August 1, 1838 after several years of active and passive slave rebellion. This gave rise to a desperate need for cheap labor, which was filled by indentured laborers imported in massive numbers from East India and China. Between 1845 and 1917 one-hundred and forty-four thousand Indians migrated to Trinidad, and 37,000 to Jamaica bringing with them a number of traditions, many of which became a part of the local culture (Henke, 2001, p. 12). Some of these customs include *bhaiacharaya* or cooperative brotherhood (Henke, 2001), similar to *susu*, or *partner* practiced by Blacks. Some of their cuisine also was adapted locally on a wide scale, including dishes such as curry, roti, sweet and sour, the use of coconut milk, etc. Indentured laborers were also imported from China in significant numbers to the West Indies and due to the gender imbalance in the migratory flow they intermarried with local Black women (Wilson, 2004).

Due to this racial mixing or ‘creolization’ of the West Indies, with Blacks still being the majority, West Indians while aware of the differences in racial background, are sometimes unprepared for the racial tensions they encounter in the United States. Many are accustomed to, and continue to define themselves based on their ethnicity, for example, Jamaican, Guyanese, et cetera.

Migration to the United States

West Indian migration to the United States started in the earlier part of the twentieth century and was facilitated by the growth of the banana industry in the United

States (Palmer, 1995). During the 1920s the United States implemented The Quota Act of 1921; this act favored the Northern and Western Europeans. These groups included individuals from Britain, and limited those from the Eastern hemisphere from countries like China, Japan, and other Asian countries, as they were deemed racially ineligible (Palmer, 1995).

West Indian immigrants were able to enter the United States under the British quota. Apart from immigrants that came directly from British colonies, others came from Panama and Costa Rica where they settled after construction of the Panama Canal and the Costa Rican railroad (Palmer, 1995). The average number of immigrants from the Caribbean was about 1000 per year from 1899 to 1904, and increased to three to seven thousand per year after that (Palmer, 1995). The number of Caribbean immigrants decreased only during the Great Depression (Palmer, 1995). Florida and New York City are two areas where West Indians are heavily concentrated.

According to Holder (as cited in Palmer, 1995) poverty in the Caribbean was the major reason West Indians emigrated, however, these immigrants included clerks and civil servants who were well paid and had servants of their own. Holder (as cited in Palmer, 1995) notes that the employment prospects for these individuals were limited in the Caribbean and they heard about New York City as a place where they could pursue a professional career. New York was viewed as a city holding greater economic opportunities and a more racially hospitable environment than the south (Palmer, 1995). Lowenthal (1975) also stated West Indians commonly believe that to leave the islands is to “better oneself” and this makes the prospect of emigration advantageous.

During World War II West Indians workers were recruited to replace American workers in agriculture and non-defense industries after 1942 (Palmer, 1995). The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act imposed a quota for the first time on immigration from the Western Hemisphere of 120,000 (Palmer, 1995). In 1976 this act was amended to include a seven-category preference system in order to regulate the flow of immigrants under the new quota (Palmer, 1995). A quota of 20,000 was imposed on each country, excluding close relatives of United States citizens.

During the 1980s the largest stream of economic immigrants came from the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Haiti, and Guyana (Palmer, 1995). Since 1961 Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and Guyana have supplied one-third of all Caribbean immigrants to the United States and the largest number from this group has come from Jamaica (Palmer, 1995).

Between 1962 to 1988 Jamaica had the largest number of professional workers as well as service workers that immigrated to the United States; this number was obtained comparing the largest non-Cuban suppliers—Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and Haiti (Palmer, 1995).

West Indian Goals for Migration

The hope of many West Indians who migrate to the United States, similar to many other migrants, is to get an education, have a decent job, and live their lives with less hardship. The United States is usually viewed as “The Land of Opportunity” prior to migrating. Even while living in their home countries, West Indians were socialized from their school curriculum, norms and value system, to believe that British (or first world) standards were the highest one could attain (James, 1966).

“Scarce resources, overpopulation, high unemployment, and underemployment, and limited possibilities for advancement have long spurred West Indian men and women to look abroad for economic security, better job prospects...” (Foner, 2008, p. 5)

Many West Indians migrate to the United States primarily to afford their children better educational opportunities (Henke, 2001). In fact, Sunshine and Warner, (as cited in Henke, 2001) found second generation West Indian children usually have more years of schooling and higher incomes than Whites in the United States. However, Foner (1975) in her study of the meaning of education to Jamaicans found in her Jamaican sample a strong concern for education; Jamaican migrants in England, however, did not place as much emphasis on education. Foner (1975) found that among other factors, prejudice against Blacks in Britain contributed to the relatively low priority given to education.

Due to the aforementioned goals, West Indian immigrants upon arriving to the US approach the job search process with a willingness to work in jobs that offer low-wages, low status, and poor working conditions (Henke, 2001). Henke (2001) went on to state that “the skilled, White collar, and semi-professional occupations others had hoped to secure because of their middle-class status and education did not materialize... in the beginning of the 20th century, and more often than not they had to accept work not commensurate with their education and skills,” (Henke, 2001 p. 57).

Lowenthal (1975) argued that West Indians from some of the major countries regard emigration purely as a temporal expedient, especially when the island’s language and culture differ from those of the receiving country.

Assimilation and Integration

Assimilation theorists purport that in order for immigrants to become successful they need to mix with and adapt to the norms of the host society. A common definition of assimilation is “the gradual incorporation into the new society via the adaptation of the customs and values of that society with a simultaneous relinquishment of traditional customs and values of the sending society” (Murphy and Mahalingam, 2004). While true or complete assimilation is not realistic or ideal, it is useful to study the extent to which immigrant groups do so because it may be correlated to their success. Integration refers to the immersion of immigrants into the host country’s mainstream society enabling them to gain access to all opportunities of that country. This is the approach Canada’s immigration policy uses, and is the more ideal goal for immigrants (Gilkes, 2007).

Ethnic Identity Theory. The concept of ethnic identity is useful for understanding situations in which two or more ethnic groups interact over time (Phineas, 1990). It is defined as the ethnic component of Tajfel’s (as cited in Phineas, 1990) definition of social identity—the part of an individual’s self-concept derived from knowledge of his/her social group memberships and the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Phineas, 1990). It is also associated with acculturation—changes in cultural attitudes, values and cultural behaviors resulting from contact between two distinct cultures (Phineas, 1990).

The two-dimensional model of acculturation assumes that minority group members can have either strong or weak identities with their own and the mainstream cultures, and a strong ethnic identity does not imply a weak identification or low involvement with the dominant culture (Phineas, 1990). This model also purports that

there are four possible ways of dealing with ethnic group membership in a diverse society. Strong identification with both groups is indicative of integration or biculturalism, while identification with neither group suggests marginality (Phineas, 1990). An exclusive identification with the dominant culture suggests assimilation, whereas identification with only the ethnic group indicates separation (Phineas, 1990).

Involvement in the social life and cultural practices of one's ethnic group can be used as an indicator of ethnic identity but is also very problematic. Indicators of ethnic involvement include language, friendships, social organizations, religion, cultural tradition, and politics (Phineas, 1990). The extent to which individuals are involved in or familiar with each of these activities or concepts can be used to indicate the strength of their ethnic identities, although not reliably.

West Indian American Ethnic Identity. With regards to West Indian immigration in the United States, researchers such as Waters (1999) point out that “some immigrants and their children do better economically by maintaining a strong ethnic identity and culture by resisting American cultural and identity influences... remaining immigrant or ethnic-identified eases economic and social incorporation in the United States.” (Waters, 1999, p. 34). Giving up their values and perceptions of themselves is perhaps even more difficult for West Indian immigrants in the United States due to the racial tensions they encounter in this country. They recognize that Blacks occupy the lowest ranking in American society. Support for this comes from Waters (1999) “...when West Indians lose their distinctiveness as immigrants or ethnics they become not just Americans, but Black Americans... this represents downward mobility for the immigrants and their children.” (p. 35).

Murphy and Mahalingam (2004) pointed out that West Indian immigrants have an identity that emphasizes their country of origin, and that while they do have a Black racial identity, it enables them to have a different kind of consciousness than that of African Americans. They also argued that immigrants with transnational ties tend to have a stronger ethnic identity, which serves as a potential buffer against racial prejudice (Murphy & Mahalingam, 2004). However, Waters (as cited in Murphy & Mahalingam, 2004) suggests that this immigrant identity of West Indians may be weakened the longer they live in the United States and experience racial discrimination.

This resistance to racial or ethnic categorization West Indian immigrants encounter in the United States is highlighted in their responses on one U.S. Census. West Indian immigrants will not answer the question of race as U.S. Census takers want them to, choosing the 'other' category instead of African-American/Black (Waters, 1999). The major problem West Indians encounter when living in the United States is that they are from a society that does not attach as much significance to "race" as the United States society does. They attach more importance to hard work, delayed gratification, or personal austerity. However, once they land on American soil, as dark-skinned people or East Indian origin, they are placed in the category of Black (Waters, 1999), with all the prejudice and stigma Whites attach to this category.

Bryce-Laporte (as cited in Vickerman, 1999) also supports this view and argued that, Black immigrants in the United States operate both as Blacks and immigrants and under more intense cross-pressures, multiple affiliations, and greater inequalities than either African Americans or European immigrants. Bryce-Laporte (as cited in Vickerman, 1999) believes that this is the result of several factors, West Indians

originated from racially discriminatory, colonial societies that never fully downplayed the idea that race is important to social advancement. They have an 'exotic' yet discriminatory status as Blacks in the United States, they are being torn by their desire to return to their homelands, fully recognizing that the economic, political and social conditions make that desire unfeasible (Bryce-Laporte, as cited in Vickerman, 1999).

Lowenthal (1975) points out that many West Indians in America distance themselves from American Whites and Blacks and celebrate their specific ethnic or national identities. West Indians in Britain and America are increasingly resentful of discrimination and hostile toward authority (Lowenthal, 1975). However, Lowenthal (1975) goes on to state that West Indians in North America are "able to both share in the larger Black cause and at the same time capitalize on their own distinctive cultural and multiracial background."

Saunders Thompson (as cited in Hackshaw, 2007) in examining Black ethnicity and racial community discusses racial group identification among African Americans being associated with a mental attachment based on skin color, common history, race, common history of oppression and discrimination to a social category attributable to race. Dawson (as cited in Hackshaw, 2007) also stated that African Americans have cultivated a distinct political identity in response to systematic social, economic and political exclusion in the United States. Incorporated into the distinct identity of African Americans is the shared perspective that the racial group's status is intertwined with the individual's interests (Hackshaw, 2007). African Americans have a shared sense of racial interdependence that defines the basis of their racial community and political solidarity (Hackshaw, 2007).

Hackshaw (2007) also looked at West Indian immigrants in her study and argued that their diverse experiences of colonization, independence and incorporation in their respective Caribbean societies overlaps with but does not mirror the experiences of African Americans. West Indians knowledge of distinct social norms in the Caribbean tends to influence how they make sense of what it means to be Black in the context of United States society (Hackshaw, 2007). In the United States West Indian immigrants must now grapple with what it means to be a minority, something they are unaccustomed to in their home countries (Hackshaw, 2007). Unique values and practices that define West Indians as Black and West Indian reinforce a sense of distinctiveness from other Black groups including African Americans (Hackshaw, 2007).

First generation West Indian immigrants do not express a highly cultivated sense of racial group consciousness and Rogers (as cited in Hackshaw, 2007) believes that this is due to their belief that African Americans' concern about slavery is not as relevant in contemporary times. However, Hackshaw (2007) went on to argue that because West Indians have a strong sense of ethnic distinctiveness it does not necessarily mean that West Indians do not recognize racism or that they do not identify with Blacks.

Hackshaw (2007) also found that African Americans with regard to racial exclusion believed that racial progress was something all Blacks should strive toward together. Participants of Hackshaw's (2007) focus groups expressed the need for Blacks to be their brother's and sister's keepers. Hackshaw (2007) also found that African Americans are very concerned about other Blacks not taking "ownership" of racial progress. They believe that Blacks who are indifferent to protecting the bonds of unity

and community among Blacks creates dissidence and a bigger burden for other Blacks to carry (Hackshaw, 2007).

Participants of Hackshaw's (2007) study did not see birthplace as a distinction among Blacks and expected Black immigrants, including West Indians, to share the vision of racial progress and common fate with African Americans. However, West Indian immigrants in Hackshaw's (2007) study saw personal success as the result of their individual efforts and described progress in terms of individual economic accomplishments or through improvements in the well-being and achievements of family members. West Indians tend to focus on personal successes (including educational, financial and social) as a strategy for confronting and circumventing discrimination in the United States. Many of the West Indian participants in Hackshaw's (2007) study believed that focusing on past wrongs presents a self-imposed barrier to success and progress in the United States.

West Indian immigrant participants of the study conducted by Hackshaw (2007) stated that race was not the only cause for discrimination they experienced in the United States. They believed they experienced discrimination from Whites and African Americans because they were immigrants (Hackshaw, 2007). This in turn reinforces a sense of cohesiveness among West Indian immigrants (Hackshaw, 2007). They described being treated as "interlopers" or accused of coming to "take away what belongs" to African Americans or thinking they were "above" African Americans (Hackshaw, 2007). Hackshaw (2007) also found that West Indian immigrants do confront and negotiate the inconsistencies between the meaning of race and ethnicity in the context of U.S society.

West Indian Families

West Indian Family Structure

The West Indian family does not only include the nuclear or blood family members but also extended family including godparents, and may sometimes include friends (Gopaul-McNicol, 1993). These extended family members function to offer support and help in child rearing and in times of crisis (Gopaul-McNicol, 1993). The extended family is a source of strength for West Indian parents and without this additional support stress and tension may result (Gopaul-McNicol, 1993).

Additionally, West Indians traditionally were socialized to adhere to family obligations and little emphasis is placed on self-reliance; people are taught that they are who they are through the efforts of other family members (Gopaul-McNicol, 1993). Children's first obligation is therefore to their parents, then to his/her teachers, employers, et cetera (Gopaul-McNicol, 1993). Gopaul-McNicol (1993) also emphasized that when West Indian children migrate to the United States and encounter its culture of self-sufficiency they may experience much stress and conflict.

Transnationalism and West Indian Families

West Indian American adults believe it is their responsibility to work as many jobs as is necessary (sometimes two or more) to provide for family members in the United States and back home in the West Indies ((Gopaul-McNicol, 1993). Even though millions of immigrants live in the United States and have not returned to their countries of origin, many recent immigrants have been observed to retain ties to their home countries while attempting to settle and develop in the new country (Murphy and Mahalingam, 2004). They define transnationalism as "the maintenance of occupations or

activities that necessarily require regular social contacts over time,” (Smith, 1998; as cited in of Murphy and Mahalingam, 2004). Transnationalism has been shown to play an increasingly bigger role in the lives of immigrants (Murphy and Mahalingam, 2004). This transnationalism can be familial, cultural, economic or political (Murphy and Mahalingam, 2004). Prepaid phone cards, the Internet, television and videotapes have broadened the range and intensity of transnational ties.

With regards to familial transnationalism, immigrants’ contact with relatives abroad usually involves communication and the provision of money and goods by the immigrants to the people left at home (Murphy and Mahalingam, 2004). Murphy and Mahalingam (2004) stressed that transnational ties can produce desirable social and economic effects among immigrant groups, including West Indians. They also stated that social support, ethnic identity, and perceived discrimination, which are impacted by transnationalism, have been linked to psychological outcomes (Murphy and Mahalingam, 2004).

Work-family Balance and West Indian Women

Despite their growing numbers in the labor force, the primary responsibility of West Indian women is child rearing; they take care of the home and are the nurturing figures and therefore, matters involving their children impacts their self-esteem (Gopaul-McNicol, 1993). According to Powell (1989) Caribbean women have always worked a triple shift in raising children, doing housework, and ‘hustling’ for a living. Osirim (1997) also supports this view and argues that Afro-Caribbean women have been involved in work outside the home for centuries in order to make material contributions

to their families. Senior (as cited in Osirim, 1997) states that even after emancipation West Indian women remained on the plantation for wage labor.

Despite their long history in the labor force one study on working and professional Jamaican women found that a significant number of them experienced general work-family conflict, and a greater proportion specifically experienced family to work conflict as opposed to work to family conflict (Barrett, 2005). The same study also found a correlation between work role and family stress, as well as large number of working mothers who felt they put lot of effort into their family lives (Barrett, 2005).

Another study on work-family trends in Trinidad and Tobago found that parents utilized a variety of means for balancing work and family demands including paid help for preschoolers such as daily or live-in domestic help, placing children in the care of neighbours or relatives, and using private or public child-care services, choosing flexible jobs to manipulate their work time around hours for childcare, and establishing their own businesses (Reddock and Bobb-Smith, 2008).

West Indian Success

Meritocratic Beliefs

West Indians believe in the idea of meritocracy, that is, being hardworking, doing good work, ‘pulling oneself up by the bootstrap’, and eventually being rewarded for your hard work. In fact, a major decision factor for West Indians who migrate to the United States is their perception of meritocracy as a core value in America. Additionally, West Indians tend to put the onus on themselves to succeed and not on the system, which is racialized in the United States. Gopaul-McNicol (1993) also argued that success in the

West Indies is defined by family values and educational attainment. West Indian American success, however, includes level of educational attainment, material possessions, ability to travel, and the ability to entertain friends (Gopaul-McNicol, 1993). Gopaul-McNicol (1993) also found West Indian Americans replaced their family/educational definition of success with American notions of success regarding material possessions. Do professional West Indians experience this meritocracy when they migrate to the United States? Or is more required to become successful in the professional realm in the United States?

Explanations for West Indian Americans Success

Research done on West Indians in the workforce has focused primarily on those in the working class, particularly due to the socioeconomic success they managed to achieve in comparison to low-income African Americans (Waters, 1999; Deaux, 2006). Two factors have been noted for their success in the United States. First, West Indians have been noted to possess a different attitude toward employment, work and American society than native-born Americans. Their background characteristics, including human capital, social networks, having English as their first language, and an extensive network of contacts facilitating their entry into low-level jobs also helps them in their transition (Waters, 1999).

Secondly, West Indian immigrants possess a unique understanding and expectation of race, that is, they tend to have a low anticipation of negative race relations, which allows them to have better interpersonal interactions with White Americans. Also due to the fact that they are from a society of majority Blacks with Blacks in many high positions, they have high expectations for themselves (Waters, 1999). However, when

they experience blocked economic mobility, due to race, their strong racial identity leads them to challenge racism/prejudice in a very militant fashion when they encounter it (Waters, 1999).

West Indians are also perceived as being successful because many of the Black luminaries in the United States were children of West Indian immigrants, including Colin Powell, James Weldon Johnson, Claude Mckay, Malcom X, Harry Belafonte, and Sidney Poitier. Sowell (1981) pointed out that first and second generation Black immigrants have higher incomes, occupational status, and rates of business ownership than native Blacks, and also have lower crime rates.

Sowell (1981) went on to state that “second generation West Indians in New York City who were unlikely to have an accent that would enable a White employer to distinguish them from native Blacks exceeded the socioeconomic status of other West Indians, African Americans, and the rest of the US population as a whole—in family income, education, and proportion in the professions among other areas. Additionally second generation West Indians were found to make great efforts to appear West Indian by either wearing/carrying items related to their parents’ home country or asking their parents to teach them the West Indian accent (Waters, 1996; cited in Model, 2008).

Hintzen (as cited in Model, 2008) presents another aspect of Americans’ perceptions of West Indians and used the example of Sydney Poitier who worked for months on losing his accent because it was viewed as a liability to his entertainment career. Whites are known to regard West Indians as better workers because they were seen as less demanding, more docile, and easier to satisfy (Waters, 1999). Their British

colonial background and good command of the English language were sometimes regarded as assets over African Americans (Waters, 1999).

West Indian immigrants buy into the notion that they are treated better than African Americans. Hintzen (as cited in Model, 2008) found that West Indians believed that if Whites knew they understood they were foreign, they (Whites) viewed them differently. Additionally, Hintzen (as cited in Model, 2008) found that West Indians felt that if they adopted American accents and cultural norms, that they would be viewed as a Black American. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Vickerman (1999) found in his study on Jamaican immigrant men in the United States that the longer they had lived in the country, the less likely they were to believe that Whites favored West Indians over African Americans. Vickerman (1999) believes this is due to their experiences of racism. Vickerman (1999) also found that West Indians begin to develop a 'panblack identity' the longer they live in the United States and emphasize more of the similarities they share with African Americans, due to the fact that they recognize they are not immune from anti-Black sentiments.

Examining Hypotheses for West Indian Americans Success

In examining the assertion that Black immigrants have more favorable social and economic outcomes than African Americans, Model (2008) argues that the reason this assertion has garnered so much attention is because Black immigrant success suggests that racial discrimination is not really a handicap for African Americans. Additionally, Black immigrant achievement suggests that Black American economic shortfalls are the results of Black American behavioral shortfalls (Model, 2008). Finally, if racial

discrimination is not the reason for the disadvantages African Americans face then affirmative action programs is not the solution (Model, 2008).

Model (2008) found using survey data that there is little support for the claim that Whites in the United States favor West Indians over African Americans. One survey on attitudes toward new immigrant groups asked participants to rank social standing of Negroes, African Americans, and West Indian Blacks (Model, 2008). West Indian Blacks had the lowest ranking of these groups; the survey shows that the American public views African Americans more highly than Blacks from any other country (Model, 2008). Thomas (as cited in Deaux, 2006) in a study of White Americans, Black Americans and Black immigrants from two West Coast universities, found that 21% of White Americans students stereotyped of Black immigrants as lazy, 18% viewed them as hardworking, 12% viewed them as intelligent and educated, and 12% had a stereotype of Black immigrants as unintelligent and undereducated. In the same study by Thomas (as cited in Deaux, 2006) found that 52% of Black Americans viewed Black immigrants as hardworking, 24% viewed Black immigrants as unintelligent and undereducated and 19% viewed Black immigrants as dangerous. Deaux (2006) in her study of favorability of ethnic immigrant groups found that West Indians ranked second lowest of four groups—44% positivity towards Hispanics, 48% had positivity toward West Indian, 50% positivity towards East European, and 66% toward West European immigrants.

Model (2008) also used data from the 1999 Immigrant Second Generation in Metropolitan New York study to illustrate Whites' perceptions of West Indians. Twenty-six percent of West Indian respondents experienced prejudice looking for work (Model, 2008). Model (2008) believes this study allows for the entertainment of the possibility

that White favoritism may be more prominent in New York, as that is the setting where Whites are more familiar with West Indians and where Whites would be more familiar with the differences between the two Black groups.

Model (2008) pulled data from a field experiment in Toronto on members of several ethnic groups responding to telephone advertisements to challenge the notion of White favoritism. The study found that employers were most likely to reject South Asians (44%), followed by Black Caribbeans (36%) (Model, 2008). In answering the question of why West Indians accept White's negative depictions of African Americans Model (2008) offers a few arguments. First, she states that Caribbean immigrants need to believe that they possess an unusual work ethic and that their approach to racism is the more productive one. If West Indians immigrants cannot influence their destiny, their journey to the United States would be for naught (Model, 2008). Second, possessing a West Indian identity has been associated with enhancing academic achievement (Waters, 1999; Deaux, 2006).

Third, there are emotional benefits associated with perceiving oneself as superior (Model, 2008). Hunter (as cited in Model, 2008) explored West Indians' and African Americans' experiences with discrimination and concluded that West Indians not perceiving racism may be a form of denial enabling them to continue working hard while living in a society that categorizes them on the basis of race rather than an ethnicity. Model (2008) argues that West Indians grasp the notion that Whites favor them in order to prevent anxiety, anger, and depression associated with being a victim of racism.

Theoretical Explanations for West Indian Success

Selectivity Theory. There are a few theoretical explanations regarding West Indian immigrant experiences in the United States. The first is Selectivity Theory proposed by Everett Lee in the 1960s (as cited in Model, 2008) which purports that economically motivated movers (migrants) are more skilled than those they leave behind, and politically motivated movers are less so. Lee (as cited Model, 2008) argued that intervening factors or the costs of migration (example financial, emotional and temporal costs) are attenuated to the extent that movers have information about their destination or know individuals who can assist their migration transitions. As a result, the immigrants who leave their family or community first tend to be more positively selected than latecomers (Model, 2008).

Segmented Assimilation. The second theory that applies to West Indian immigrants is Segmented Assimilation, which proposes that children of non-White non-entrepreneurial immigrants are at risk of incorporating the oppositional values of the most disadvantaged segment of the African American community (Model, 2008). However, Model (2008) asserted based on empirical findings that young West Indian adults are taking on the behaviors of the African American underclass. Model (2008) also found that American born West Indians did not fare much better than African Americans; these findings were supported by the data from the Immigrant Second Generation in Metropolitan New York study (Model, 2008). On the other hand, Model (2008) pointed to studies that revealed that Black immigrants from the British West Indies were doing much better than African Americans in terms of school, employment, and incarceration.

World Systems Theory. World Systems Theory developed by Grosfoguel (as cited in Model, 2008) is the third theory that is applicable to West Indian immigrants.

Grosfoguel (as cited in Model, 2008) purports that racial-ethnic hierarchy handed down from European imperialism brought to the Americas is as influential today as it was in the past. Grosfoguel (as cited in Model, 2008) believes that from the perspective of their mother countries, colonial immigrants are at the bottom of their racial-ethnic hierarchy. For Grosfoguel (as cited in Model, 2008), these immigrants (colonial/racialized subjects) are the targets of the pernicious stereotypes that were originally used to justify imperial power. Grosfoguel (as cited in Model, 2008) also believes that the oppressed groups (African Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans and Native Americans) that were incorporated into the United States empire are best understood as colonial/racialized subjects. Colonial immigrants fall a little higher on the scale than these colonial/racialized subjects; these include individuals from another former colony who migrated to another country other than their own mother country (Model, 2008). Grosfoguel (as cited in Model, 2008 p. 158) states, “The absence of a colonial history within a particular empire makes an important difference in terms of how the identities of migrants are constructed and thus perceived”. Grosfoguel’s theory is supported by the negative perception of West Indians received in London and the positive perceptions of West Indians in New York (Model, 2008).

Some African Americans view West Indians as defeatist and accuse them of lowering the work standards for Blacks, and some White Americans sometimes view them as rebellious when they decided to protest workplace discrimination (Waters, 1999). Many women who emigrated earlier took jobs under worse conditions and for less pay

than non-unionized enterprises, and they quickly joined trade unions which aided their economic improvement and guaranteed them continued access to the few available jobs in the garment industry or as nurses (Henke, 2001).

West Indian Enterprise

Many skilled/professional West Indians wanted to become economically independent and were able to open businesses in real estate, financial institutions (such as Paragon Credit Association, Carver Federal Savings and Loan Association, and United Mutual Life Insurance). Other small businesses include bakeries, small groceries, travel agencies, hair salons, et cetera (Henke, 2001). Currently, West Indians are very prominent in business ownership in the following categories: publishing, taxi companies, real estate, advertising, banking, insurance, and retail clothing (Henke, 2001). In 1970, the highest-ranking Blacks in the NYC Police Department were all West Indians, as were all Black federal judges in the city. For many years, successive borough presidents of Manhattan were all West Indian.

While there were stronger ethnic tensions between native Blacks, and West Indians, they were able to gain “better mutual understanding” coming to the realization that their position in the wider society was dominated by the color of their skin (Henke, 2001). West Indians began to join the broader Black community, mostly in leadership and representative functions than as regular members (Henke, 2001). They also engaged in political representation of the Black community as well as economic organizations such as trade unions (Henke, 2001).

West Indian immigrant communities and businesses also act as a wall behind which they can withdraw (Henke, 2001). The development of these communities was not

exactly based upon free choice; racial housing discrimination contributed to their forming communities in Harlem, Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx (Henke, 2001). Additionally, they were ridiculed for their dress, speech, and behavior (Henke, 2001).

Waters (1999) attempts to explain the success of West Indians by pointing out that there are also psychological and structural consequences of immigration that impact immigrants in the United States. They are more likely to accept low-wage, low-status jobs because their sense of self is not as bound up with the job; they will also judge jobs based on comparisons with the opportunities available to them in their own country (Waters, 1999). Furthermore, immigration is also a selective process on its own; immigrants tend to have the common personality characteristics of ambition and drive to migrate (Waters, 1999).

Waters (1999) also found that African Americans believed that West Indians would take their jobs from them because White employers were more willing to hire West Indians due to West Indians' accepting lower wages. This finding concurs with other researchers such as Vickerman (1999) who outlined African Americans sharing the belief that White employers preferred West Indians and other foreigners.

Waters (1999) did find in her research, however, that middle class immigrants have a harder time adjusting to race relations in America because they must come to terms with the idea that money does not "Whiten" the way it does in the West Indies. This ideology according to Thomas-Hope (as cited in Vickerman, 1999) has its roots in the slavery plantation system that influenced the social structure of the modern Caribbean; race determined socio-economic status and political power.

White Plantation owners and overseers in the Caribbean were at the top of the hierarchy, house slaves who were generally mixed and of lighter complexion, and mulattoes fell in the middle. Black Field slaves were at the bottom of the plantation hierarchy (Vickerman, 1999). In the modern Caribbean, the social structure has varied to the extent that wealthy Blacks have a higher socioeconomic status and greater political power (Vickerman, 1999).

Labor Market Incorporation

Service Roles. In the early 1920s West Indian immigrant women were mainly employed in the United States as household workers or in the personal service industry (Foner, 2008). However, European immigrant women during and after World War I were able to find better jobs in factories or as clerks, while southern and Caribbean Black migrant women were excluded from these jobs (Foner, 2008). Foner (2008) found that West Indian men and women are clustered in certain occupational spheres, primarily “women’s work” including the field of nursing. Foner (2008) also stated from 1970s onwards, West Indian migration to New York and elsewhere in the United States has included women and men with college education, which helps to explain why a substantial minority of them are found in various professional and managerial positions there.

It has been noted that West Indian immigrants face difficulty in gaining entry to White and Black cultures due to the fact that they were not born in America, and are not members of sororities or other social clubs, have a foreign accent, and sometimes a different religion (Alfred, 2002). As a result, they feel marginalized and have a multicultural existence (Alfred, 2002). Professional West Indians may also feel the sting

of being overlooked or unacknowledged despite their accomplishments, and begin to feel invisible, and may become self-critical (Alfred, 2002).

Occupational Mobility of Professional West Indians. Heron (2001) in her research on the occupational attainment of Afro-Caribbean immigrants found that in the United States Black foreign-born women are more disadvantaged than Black native-born women in occupational attainment. Education, according to Heron (2001) “has a positive effect on occupational outcome, with gains to occupational status as educational qualifications increase.” (p. 90). Whereas increased length of duration in the United States had a positive effect on occupational gains for White immigrants, for foreign-born Blacks a “duration period of over twenty years is no more beneficial to occupational attainment than one of eleven to twenty years.” (Heron, 2001 p. 90). Heron (2001) found that Black immigrants are a doubly disadvantaged and do not realize the same gains as African Americans. For Black immigrants, education reduces the effect of race-immigrant status but does not allow them to attain similar equality with White natives with varying levels of educational attainment. (Heron, 2001).

Even more alarming is Heron’s (2001) finding that Black immigrants with advanced degrees who have lived in the United States for twenty years or less, have the same or slightly lower occupational status as Black immigrants with an undergraduate degree. If Black immigrants earn their degrees outside of the United States their credentials are devalued, however, if they earn advanced degrees in the United States they compete with African Americans for higher status White-collar jobs (Heron, 2001). In spite of the length of time spent in the United States labor market, Black immigrants face disadvantages because are almost never able to access to some of the same high-

quality networks or other job-related resources as native-born Americans, or because employers prefer African Americans for higher-status jobs (Heron, 2001).

Heron (2001) also found that Black immigrant women in the United States receive much lower returns on their educational investment than men, and that the relative effects of immigrant status are worse for Black women than for Black men. However, “the interactive effects of education with race-immigrant status allow some Black women to gain additional returns to education...” (Heron, 2001 p. 94). Heron (2001) also points out that the key beneficiaries of the United States transition to a service economy have been White women, and Black professional immigrants have been disproportionately pulled into the service economy to support native White working women. Those professional West Indian immigrants who have attained success underscore the importance of earlier learning and development in their home country as a foundation for coping with their various experiences in the US including learning and working (Alfred, 2002). Alfred (2002) also emphasized the importance of remaining knowledgeable of the professional culture and its expectations that West Indian immigrants find themselves in.

West Indian immigrants have also been noted to form social support groups and networks (Palmer, 1995). However, research by Sandis (1977) on voluntary organizations among immigrants in New York found that many post 1965 professional immigrants formed social networks that tended to exclude their non-professional fellow immigrant nationals. This begs the question do West Indian immigrants still form and utilize these social support groups?

A study on occupational mobility of legal immigrants in the United States found that fifty percent of Latin and Caribbean immigrants experience occupational downgrading (Akresh, 2006). The same study also found that among the highest-skilled immigrants from Latin American and the Caribbean, more than three-fourths end up in lower-skilled jobs than they had abroad (Akresh, 2006). However, Akresh (2006) also stated that individuals from countries that are more similar economically, culturally, or linguistically similar to the United States are more likely to experience greater skill transferability and lower rates of downward mobility.

Education and experience obtained in the United States was also shown to have a positive impact on occupational mobility for Latin American and Caribbean immigrants in the United States, yet education abroad showed no significant relationship (Akresh, 2006). Akresh (2006) explains this by suggesting that employment-based immigrants have lower probabilities of downgrading and higher probabilities of upgrading than the other class of admission categories (for example family-based immigrants).

Treatment discrimination is one factor that may account for West Indian immigrants' limited access to high quality networks. It is the phenomena that occurs when minority group members "receive fewer rewards, resources, or opportunities on the job than they legitimately deserve on the basis of job related criteria". Levitin, Quinn, & Staines, (as cited in Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley, 1990) argue that this kind of discrimination represents a situation in which the treatment of employees is based more on their subgroup membership than on their merit or achievements. Ilgen & Youtz (as cited in Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley, 1990) found that Treatment discrimination may affect not only position assignments, training opportunities, salary

increases, promotions, terminations, and layoffs, but also acceptance into work groups, or the availability of career-enhancing and psychosocial support from supervisors and others.

Ethnic Minority Success in the Workplace

Examining the success of ethnic minorities in various American organizations is important because it may predict the issues professional West Indian immigrant women may face in the American workplace. The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) found that 97% of senior managers of the Fortune 1000 Industrial and Fortune 500 are white, and 95-97% are male. The same study also found that African, Hispanic (Latino), and Asian Americans do not earn the same pay for comparable positions, and that African Americans earn 21% less than their white counterparts in the same job (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995).

Thomas and Gabarro (1999) in their study of minority executives looked at the career progression of minority executives and compared them to White executives, and minority managers who plateau, and what accounted for their differences. James Rosenbaum (as cited in Thomas and Gabarro, 1999, p. 12), stated that, “managerial careers advance through a series of competitive rounds, where cohorts of individuals with roughly the same hierarchical status and tenure perform against one another for promotions, with the winner advancing to the next round” in order to describe the distinguishing features of competition for career advancement in management.

Thomas and Gabarro’s (1999) major observation was that White executives advanced quickly, or were on the ‘fast track’ to management, while minority executives rose slowly, “experiencing a slower pace of early promotions,” (Thomas and Gabarro,

1999 p. 23) and spent a longer period of time in the lower level positions, before their talent was recognized, and they were promoted (Thomas and Gabarro, 1999). Minority executives who performed outstandingly, would sometimes be rewarded with promotions, or at other times with better resources, challenges, lateral promotions (Thomas and Gabarro, 1999) unlike their White counterparts who were most often rewarded with promotions (Thomas and Gabarro, 1999). However, an important characteristic to becoming an executive, is winning early in the game, or successfully completing initial assignments both for minorities and Whites.

The minority executives during this slow period of career advancement were able to develop their technical and leadership skills, and deepen their knowledge of the workings of the organization (Thomas and Gabarro, 1999). Both minority and White executives also had sponsors or mentors throughout the organization who supported their development and vouched for their promotions (Thomas and Gabarro, 1999). Minority executives, however, tended to have more extensive networks of supporters, same-race and other minorities in their networks, and more mentors and sponsors, than minority managers who plateau (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999). Minority managers who plateau, according to Thomas and Gabarro (1999), tended to experience less continuity and more changes across the board, and fewer developmental experiences.

Minority executives when compared to their White counterparts on average were more likely to have had a role/function change, more senior executives as mentors or sponsors, a task force or special assignment, location change, and bigger successes (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999). The backgrounds of the minority executives all revealed the

strong emphasis their parents placed on education, achievement and the importance of hard work (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999).

Thomas and Gabarro (1999) also noted that many scholars emphasize that members of racial minority groups in the United States tend to grow up in segregated communities. To enter the predominantly White world of corporate America may require being bicultural and comfortable with oneself as a racial minority in the corporate culture (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999). Many of the minorities in Thomas and Gabarro (1999) study had prior exposure to predominantly White settings such as school, or living in predominantly White neighborhoods. This was an important factor in the success of the minority executives as it prepared them for their experiences.

Thomas and Gabarro (1999) also focused on the psychological characteristics that contributed to pivotal career decisions, as well as assignments and work relationships that distinguished the early careers of minority executives. The three most important characteristics Thomas and Gabarro (1999) found among the minority executives were competence, credibility, and confidence. Competence was on average developed through a focus on becoming technically proficient, selectively choosing assignments that would develop core competencies, and networking with other minorities. Mentors of minority executives gave them resources and added responsibility, as well as advice on how to negotiate the organization (Thomas and Gabarro, 1999).

For the minority managers that plateau, a common theme was the lack of competence they developed due to the nature of their unchallenging assignments, their constant movement from line-to-staff changes when they were bored with a particular job, and the within level promotions they commonly experienced. Barbara Lawrence (as

cited in Thomas & Gabarro, 1999,) described the effect that employees' sense of being ahead, on time, or behind an apparent promotion schedule can affect their psychological orientation toward their work. Lawrence (as cited in Thomas & Gabarro, 1999) went on to state that those who believe they are moving slower than the norm feel less optimistic about the future and less satisfied with their jobs than those who think that their careers are moving at average or fast speed.

Several senior executives in the organization also had to believe in the minority executives' ability in order for them to get the exposure and opportunities they needed to succeed (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999). Once others viewed them as credible, more doors began to open for them, and their credibility increased (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999).

Thomas & Gabarro (1999) also stated that encounters with racial prejudice could have an impact on the psychological orientation of minorities toward their work, by lowering their otherwise high performance and reducing their work efforts. Minority executives, who succeeded, unlike the plateau minority managers, were passionately committed to excellence and had an "inherent and unshakeable love of the work itself." (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999, p. 101). With regards to negative racial stereotypes, Thomas & Gabarro (1999) found that the minority managers and executives initial success in achieving goals were called flukes or attributed to the support of others.

Parker (2002) conducted research on African American senior women executives to explore identity negotiation within gendered and raced organizational contexts. Parker (2002) argued that members of dominant culture organizations expect leaders to reflect their socially constructed idea of what an 'organizational leader' is. Their ideas of what

‘organizational leaders’ traditionally are, conflict with their stereotypical assumptions about African American women.

Determinants of Career Success

Objective and Subjective Success. It is also important to define determinants for career success in order to examine West Indian women’s career success in the United States. Psychologists make a distinction between objective and subjective career success. The former includes salary, promotions, and occupational status (Heslin, 2001). The latter is defined as the “extent to which people feel that their career is fulfilling their values and life aspirations” (Heslin, 2001).

Factors Influencing Career Success. Heslin (2001) outlined five factors that lead to career success including personality, education, gender, mentoring relationships, and career tactics. It has been demonstrated that of the five most commonly studied personality traits—extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experience, and emotional stability—conscientiousness and extraversion are both positively related to job satisfaction, income, and occupational status (Heslin, 2001). Emotional instability has been associated with lower income and occupational status (Heslin, 2001).

Education. Education also influences the career options available as well as the range of career outcomes (Heslin 2001). One study showed that work experience and education led to participation in training and managerial advancement to a greater extent for men than women (Heslin, 2001). People with higher levels of education also report higher levels of job satisfaction (Heslin, 2001).

Gender. With regards to gender, a British study showed that the salary and managerial level of 233 women were more strongly related to their job-relevant merits, career-move decisions, and domestic responsibilities (Heslin, 2001). Having a spouse and dependents was also found to reduce women's work experience (Heslin, 2001). Also, women experience smaller salary increases, fewer management promotions, and lower hierarchical levels compared with men of similar education, age, years of experience, performance, and career paths.

Mentors. Individuals who have a mentor to help guide their career tend to experience more financial success than those without mentors. The more mentors one has, the greater the financial success. Studies have shown that women find it harder to find a helpful mentor, and that they are less likely to report that mentoring facilitated their advancement (Heslin, 2001). Another study also found that the quality of close relationships with male coworkers was more associated with career success and job satisfaction than the quality of close female relationships (Heslin, 2001).

Career Tactics. Finally, there are three career tactics that can enhance career success including networking, political influence behaviors, and an individual's proximity to organizational decision makers. Networking has been shown to be most effective at enhancing careers when it enables people to do their jobs more effectively. Politically influencing one's supervisor, that is, ingratiation has been found to lead to higher success. However, job focused political influencing behaviors for example self-promotion, have been associated with lower levels of career success (Heslin, 2001). Having close proximity to information, decision-making, and influence within one's

organization has been associated with salary, promotions and career satisfaction (Heslin, 2001).

West Indian Immigrant Women

Black West Indian immigrant women are faced with the challenge of “triple invisibility” in the United States of being Black, a foreigner, and a woman, and many West Indian immigrants in general go through a period of self-doubt and culture shock upon arriving from the Caribbean (Alfred, 2002). Whereas back home they were well known for their accomplishments and capabilities, when they migrate to the United States they become an unknown and an outsider (Alfred, 2002).

In their home societies they are assigned female roles as a mother and a partner. West Indian women on average are very independent; due to the insecure financial and economic conditions under which Caribbean people live, West Indian women increased their power in the household through outside work (Foner, 2008). Historically, they were forced to accept many of the roles that Western society attributes to men, which strengthened their position within the family. Nevertheless, women remain at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder.

Many West Indian women work outside the home and assume full responsibility for childcare in the United States and also in the Caribbean. In fact, many of West Indian women first migrate to the United States, and then send for their families.

Research Questions

The following study explored the work experiences of professional West Indian immigrant women in the United States, including the factors that have aided or hindered their success. It is expected that the findings of this study will add to the existing body of literature on diversity recruitment and retention in organizations. This study also aims to address the dearth of data in immigration literature regarding professional West Indian immigrant women. The study explored 7 basic areas of functioning for professional West Indian immigrant women in the United States:

1. What are the participants' experiences with immigration?
2. What are the participants' employment experiences as immigrants?
3. What challenges do the participants face in their work environments?
4. What are the participants' experiences in attaining career success?
5. What are the participants' experiences interacting with non-West Indians and individuals born in the US like?
6. What are the participants' experiences around work-family balance as immigrants?
7. What social support systems do the participants use?

While these areas are extensive, they will aid in creating new data on an area that has been relatively unexplored in the immigration literature on West Indians.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research

This study explores the work experiences of professional immigrant West Indian women in the United States: their reasons for migrating, their challenges as immigrants in the United States, their work-family balance experiences, their experiences with racism and prejudice, their use of social networks, and their experiences in attaining career success.

This study used a qualitative research approach based on a combination of the methodologies of McCracken (1988) and Strauss and Corbin (2008) to obtain in-depth data on the range of work experiences of professional West Indian immigrant women in the United States and the import of other factors such as social support systems and non-West Indian interactions. The goal of qualitative research according to McCracken (1988) is to “isolate and define categories during the process of research” and is better suited to this study due dearth of studies on professional West Indian immigrant women. Although several studies have been dedicated to the study of West Indian immigrants in service and domestic roles (Bonnet, 1990; Waters, 1999) very little research has covered the work experiences of professional West Indians and the way they adapt and negotiate their identities and achieve success in the United States. Quantitative study would have limited the depth of information obtained and give an incomplete understanding of the participant’s experiences. A qualitative approached allowed for the pursuit of in-depth

information in seven main research areas ranging from participant's immigration experiences, to their family life experiences in the United States. A thorough understanding for example of the impact living in the United States has had on participant's family life would not have been possible through the use of quantitative methods only.

The Long Interview

McCracken's (1988) approach is called the 'long interview' and gives researchers the opportunity to see and experience the world through the eyes of another. The long interview is designed to guide the participant to reveal his or her own beliefs and experiences, and to express well-entrenched concepts that are usually taken granted. McCracken (1988) also advocates for investigators to "manufacture distance" when working in their own culture, which is relevant to this study, and devised four stages of inquiry to the qualitative process in order to achieve this. In the first stage an extensive literature review is undertaken to "search out the conscious and unconscious assumptions of scholarly enterprises" (McCracken, 1988 p.31) and define the research and interview questions.

The second stage involves thorough self-examination in order for the researcher to gain a "more detailed and systematic appreciation of his or her personal experience with the topic of interest". Here an inventory of associations, incidents, and assumptions that surround the topic in his or her mind are examined to support question formation, data analysis and create distance from the topic.

In the third stage a questionnaire is developed including a biographical section, and several question categories, complete with "floating prompts" and "grand tour

questions” to serve as a guide for the researcher. During interviews the researcher attempted to create a comfortable atmosphere to encourage dialogue, but avoided being obtrusive so as not to color the participant’s responses.

The final stage is data analysis, whereby the researcher determines the categories, relationships, and assumptions that inform the respondent's view of the world in general and the topic in particular. The researcher is guided by the literature review, his or her own experiences, as well as his or her experience during the interview, and must also be prepared to ignore all of these to see what none of them anticipate. Strauss’ and Corbin’s (2008) approach was also used to analyze the data and further details on this process will be discussed in the Methodology section entitled ‘Data Analysis’.

Participants

Twelve professional West Indian immigrant females between the ages of 30 and 65 years were interviewed. All participants had lived permanently in the United States for over 10 years, and had lived and worked full-time in a professional capacity in the United States for at least three consecutive years. One participant was retired and not employed in a full-time capacity at the time of the interview. They were recruited from a networked sample from a variety of industries, including education, health care (corporate and hospital), banking, law, broadcasting, and communications. The participants worked in private corporations, non-profit organizations, or government organizations (see Table 1). Participants came from a number of English-speaking countries including Antigua, Barbados, Jamaica, and Guyana. Seven were married, four were single and one was divorced

Table 1

Summary of participant demographics

Age Range	Years in West Indies	Industry	Position/Level	Still Employed in first Industry	Employed at time of interview	Education/ Degree level	Christianity/ Church Attendance Discussed	Ethnic Self-Identification
47-50	19	Corporate: Health care	Senior Executive	Yes	Yes	MBA	Yes	West Indian American, African American Jamaican
36-46	8	Education	Supervisor	Yes	Yes	B.A.	Yes	Caribbean-American
47-57	13	Communications /Consulting	Executive— Director	No	Yes	MBA	Yes	Black, Afro-Caribbean
30-35	11	Law	Associate	Yes	Yes	J.D., M.A.	Yes	Black
47-57	25	Broadcasting, Health care	Manager	No	No	M.A.	No	Black- West Indian
30-35	15	Banking	Team leader	Yes	Yes	M.A.	Yes	Black
58-70	30	Education	Supervisor	Yes	Yes	B.A	No	Black, Jamaican
58-70	23	Education	Professional	Yes	Yes	M.A.	Yes	Black Caribbean
47-57	32	Health care	Manager	Yes	Yes	M.A.	Yes	Black
58-70	21	Banking	Senior executive	No	Retired	Some college	No	Caribbean
47-57	24	Education	Administrative supervisor	Yes	Yes	M.A.	Yes	Black
36-46	39	Education	Professional	Yes	Yes	M.A.	Yes	Black

Use of Self as Researcher

The researcher is considered by McCracken (1988) to be an instrument in qualitative research. McCracken (1988) argued that the researcher's deep familiarity with the culture he or she studies has not only the potential to dull the investigator's observation powers but also has the advantage of giving the him or her an "intimate acquaintance" with the study and provides an important analytical advantage, which should be fully by the researcher. Alderfer (1986) also advocates for the researcher to pay attention to his/her identity and organizational group memberships as well as those of the participants. One of the most important analytical tools of any researcher is the identification and understanding of emotions, thoughts and behaviors evoked within him/herself, in order to understand the participant, the system and conscious and unconscious forces at play (Smith, 1995). The researcher therefore has to engage in a continuous process of self-scrutiny in order to identify the emotions, thoughts and behaviors being evoked in him/herself in order to inform his/her choices in the ongoing process (Orenstein, 2007).

In order to do this effectively the researcher must have an in-depth knowledge of his/her biases, experiences, characteristic responses and group memberships (Orenstein, 2007). Engaging in constant self-reflection is also necessary in order to differentiate between his/her characteristics responses and those triggered by the research context (Orenstein, 2007).

Researcher. The researcher was an advanced female doctoral student in Organizational Psychology from Jamaica, in her mid-20s. At the time the research was conducted, she had been living in the United States for over four years, and worked in a

variety of industries including education, health care, consulting, and pharmaceuticals, as well as corporate and government institutions, both in the United States and Jamaica. The researcher was the sole interviewer for the study and had previously conducted research on professional and working class Jamaican women. The researcher was also trained and had extensive background in career development and diversity issues.

Procedures

Participant Recruitment

The participants were recruited through personal contacts and through a snowball sampling technique (asking participants for other potential participants). An email describing the general purpose of the study and main research question was used to recruit participants (See Appendix B) and contained the researcher's email address through which she could be contacted. Participants were asked to contact the researcher if they were interested in being interviewed or to send the email to potential interviewees.

When participants contacted the researcher they were informed of the general purpose and procedures of the study and given a brief background on the researcher, including her educational background. They were also informed of the time commitment of approximately 1½ to 3 hours, and the semi-structured nature of the interview. They were also told that their participation was completely voluntary, and that there was no financial gain. They were also pre-screened to ensure they fit the criteria for the study, that is, being 25 years or older, born in the Caribbean, living in the United States for three or more years, had been employed full-time with an organization, that is, not self-employed, and speaking English as a first language.

Data collection

Interviews were audio-recorded (with the exception of one for which detailed hand notes were taken) and an interview protocol (see Appendix A) was used as to guide the interviews. Prior to interviews, participants completed a demographic questionnaire (see Measures). The researcher also kept a journal during data collection and analysis in order engage in a continuous process of self-scrutiny. She recorded her impressions of each interview and the various responses (emotional, psychological, physical, et cetera) she had throughout the process, as well as body language and non-verbal cues from each participant. Some of the data from this journal was used to analyze the themes, which resulted from the data. Further discussion of these observations is included in Chapter V.

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire. A Demographic/Preliminary questionnaire (see Appendix A) was emailed to all the participants, with the exception of two participants who completed the demographic questionnaire at the start of the interview. Some of the data from the questionnaire is presented in Table 1. All participants returned the questionnaire to the researcher either prior to the interview via email, or at the beginning of the interview.

Interview Protocol. A semi-structured interview comprised of open-ended queries regarding the individual's experiences, thoughts, and opinions about her interactions in her work environment was used. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) was designed to elicit information in seven categories namely (1) Immigration Experiences, (2) Education, (3) Social Support Networks, (4) Social Interactions, (5) Work Experience, (6) Career Success, and (7) Work-family balance. The interview was conducted in a

semi-structured format, and therefore the order was determined by the flow of the interview.

Data Analysis

Once data collection was complete, interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and analyzed using a combination of techniques from the grounded theory technique (Strauss and Corbin, 2008) as well as McCracken (1988). Once data collection was completed, data was broken down and classified into major themes or concepts following the open coding technique utilized by grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). This involved line-by-line analysis of the transcript as well as analysis of the document as a whole. Here the researcher's objective was to develop categories and names for smaller groups of data. Data was reduced as categories were shrunk under more abstract labels that united the groups or subcategories.

Axial coding followed, where the data were restructured under new categories and subcategories by integrating and refining the data. As in open coding, axial coding continued the process of defining categories. At this stage the researcher went further than identifying properties but stopped short of offering theoretical formulations (Strauss and Corbin, 2008).

Finally, selective coding was used to integrate and refine the data, and link the core concepts to the major categories through explanatory statements and relationships. Here the researcher examined the observations for similarities and contradictions, while keeping in mind the templates from the literature and cultural review (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). For example, if the data showed that most West Indian women chose to migrate to the United States because they viewed it as the 'land of opportunity', then the category

was described as “Opportunity”. The associated properties were then grouped into ‘Financial’ or ‘Educational’ opportunities. Categories previously identified were further collapsed under main categories to form the major themes. This integration of categories produced a grounded theory. The goal was to identify not only categories but also relationships and assumptions that inform the participants view of the world and of the topics explored in the interview. Connections between categories were authenticated and suggestions for additional refinement and development were examined.

It is expected that the results of this study will offer hypotheses and themes, which might later be tested in future qualitative and quantitative research. Use was also made of data from the journal of the researcher for an added dimension of data analysis. Notes about the researchers reactions to interviews and hypotheses about data were utilized in constructing themes and explanations for data.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview

In this study most of the themes resulted from the questions in the semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A) used with the participants. The interview protocol for this study investigated multiple areas of interest in the work experiences of professional West Indian immigrant women in the United States. The participant responses were categorized under seven main areas: Immigration Experiences, Employment Experiences, Challenges at Work, Career Success, Experiences with Non-West Indians, Social Support Systems, and Work-family Balance.

Apart from themes accumulated from the semi-structured interview protocol, other themes emerged from the participants' responses at different points in the interview. These themes were grouped into minor categories. For example, participants were asked about the challenges they experienced at work; however, a few participants described challenges they faced living in the United States in general and the impact it had on their experience attaining success. There was no specific question in the interview protocol that asked about general challenges they experienced outside of work in the United States. These challenges were grouped under the minor theme 'Other Challenges'.

Data were analyzed using techniques from grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 2008) as well as McCracken (1988). This study utilized data collected from 12 interviews. All of the women in this study lived in the North East region of the United States at the time of data collection. Only two of the participants disclosed ever living in a state outside of the North East region, therefore, the majority of the experiences disclosed by the participants are related to the respondents' experiences primarily in the North East region.

Seven themes/areas follow based on the seven research questions asked in this study. The first result section describes themes and concepts related to the participants' immigration experiences, the second focuses on their employment experiences, while the third result section details themes on the challenges participants' experienced in their work environments. The fourth result section centers on the participants' experiences attaining career success, and the fifth result section outlines themes on the participants' experiences with non-West Indians. The sixth result section details the participants' experiences around work-family balance. And the final section describes the various support systems participants used over the course of their time living in the United States. All identifying information was disguised to protect the identity of the participants.

Immigration Experiences

Reasons for Migrating to the United States

Land of Opportunity

In answer to the question, "What were your reasons for migrating to the United States?" 91.6% (11 of 12) of participants stated that they viewed the United States as a

place where they could pursue better financial or educational opportunities. One participant stated:

...[W]hen I came here the United States was viewed as the land of opportunity, a place where if you worked extremely hard anything that you wanted to become or pursue was possible. And it really was this idea that I could be anything or do anything...

Five (41.6%) participants described pursuing both educational and financial opportunities in the America as the reason for migrating. One participant who migrated at the age of eleven in describing her reason for migrating to the United States remarked, “I wanted to be a business woman and be rich, specifically a banker... education was key...”

Four participants (33.3%) mentioned educational pursuit as their sole goal. One participant stated, “The primary goal that I set was to get a higher education.” Eight (66.6%) participants stated that they wanted to complete tertiary education; either to obtain a Bachelors, Masters or Doctoral degree. One participant, a teacher, stated that her goal was “To complete my Masters degree...” Two (16.6%) of the participants’ primary objectives were to find employment. One participant described her experience this way, “

I landed (in the United States) Friday evening... The Monday morning I told my brother that I needed to start working, and he said that I just came so I should give myself a break. I said “No...”

Two (16.6%) of the participants added that they wanted to provide more educational opportunities for their children. One participant stated that one of her goals was, “...[F]or my kids to achieve a good education and get their Masters degrees.” Another participant stated, “I wanted to complete my education and have it (education) be easier for the children since they were already born in Jamaica.” Two (16.6%) participants also indicated that their parents migrated to provide them with better

educational opportunities as children. One participant who migrated as a teenager said, "...[T]he reason Mommy came was because it was 4 of us (children), and she was concerned that she wouldn't be able to put all of us through college in Jamaica."

Reunification with Family

Five (41.6%) of the participants also listed reunification with a family member as a reason for migrating. A participant who migrated during high school explained, "My mother was here (in the US) and my father died when I was a baby..." Three (25%) of the participants immigrated as children (between 10 to 17 years) and stated that they migrated because their parents 'filed' for them. One participant remarked, "I did not have a choice; my parents forced me."

Escape Political Situation

One participant also stated that she left her home country, Jamaica, during a period of political unrest. She stated,

In the (Jamaican government) too (Michael) Manley (the Prime Minister at the time) had just lost power. That whole political situation was getting really scary. I was (teaching Computer Sciences)... it was the era, it was just taking off, everybody was into all of that, but because of the politics coming in—and I think what really pushed me to leave Jamaica at the time—this gentleman (that I did business with)... went to set up a great computer center... where we could actually teach, because there was such a great need for people to learn computers then, we were going to get the computers shipped in... Everything was in place, I was the head... and I was really excited... And then he got killed, because of the whole political mess. And I said... if they could kill him, who knows? So... I told the principal that I would not be staying, and he said, "Why? You don't have to worry, maybe it was some business deal with him." And I said, "But I was part of the whole deal," and I started to get really scared... so I finally decided that I would come here...

Additionally, thirty-three percent did not intend to stay in the United States but to return after accomplishing their goals, and one participant returned to the Caribbean after migrating here.

When one participant was asked why she had not yet returned she responded this way:

Lifestyle I guess. I really had not thought about it until maybe the last 5 years. My son was almost through college and I knew that I would soon be free to do some different things. Besides, things back home are different and I've never worked (there). I'm very much schooled in the American way, especially the corporate way. But I have thought about it because it is home and it always will be, so I still have not ruled it out. Quite frankly I could go anywhere...

First Interactions in the United States

West Indian Exposure

All of the participants (100%) had their first interactions with other West Indians. Seventy-five percent (nine) had only positive interactions with West Indians. One participant said this about her West Indian interactions in school, "I hung mostly with West Indians...I found the fact that they had migrated... that we instantly had something to talk about..."

Twenty-five percent had mixed (negative and positive) interactions with West Indians. Another participant who migrated as an adult on her own described her mixed interactions with West Indians:

I had a friend whose father was here, and she invited me to come look for her... she said, "I'm making loads of money, you have just got to come here!" I (stayed) with (her) until I went out on my own... I had another good friend who was working in a financial investment firm, and I (told her) that I wanted to go to college, she was actually discouraging me... so surprisingly that friend and I drifted (apart)...

Seven (58.3%) of the participants, had positive first interactions primarily with family members. One participant described her interactions with family this way:

Well I had a good relationship with them from back home. As a matter of fact it got closer once I got here because I didn't have anybody else. It was a fairly good time, and since most of them were living in a neighboring state we went there almost every weekend to assimilate and keep in touch with them.

One participant had mixed initial interactions with extended family members, having a positive experience with her niece and a negative experience with her brother. She said:

(I stayed) about 3 months at my brother's house... it wasn't going well... so I left and went to my niece's house... she was kind... she showed me the ins and outs... showed me how to do things.

Non-West Indian Exposure

Non-West Indians exposure for participants meant White Americans and African Americans. 50% of participants had initial exposure to non-West Indians and of that number, 25% had positive interactions, 16.6% had negative interactions and 8.3% had mixed initial interactions with non-West Indians (see Table 2). One participant's initial experiences with non-West Indians was in high school; she noted:

One of the things I found very interesting in high school in particular here is that there was a very distinct line between the Black Americans and the Caribbeans. It was the White folks and they were all one as far as we were concerned, although they may have viewed it differently. Then there were the Black Americans and then the West Indians. Three distinct groups that did not interact, almost to the point of it being a pretty scary in some respects.

Another participant who had positive interactions with a White coworker said of her experience:

I worked the evening shift, and I used to take the bus and an Italian-American woman from the hospital asked me what I was doing there... She said, "They will lynch you—just like that!" So she put me in her car and took me home, and from that day onwards every evening she took me home I never had to take the bus again. And while we were driving she showed me the Klu Klux Klan... she told me..."Do you notice there are no Black people around here?" So I begun to get nervous and she said, "You cannot go home by yourself I will take you home."

One participant who had mixed experiences with non-West Indians described one of her experiences:

I started to work for a family (White and Jewish) that lived in the (suburbs)... and I took care of them and their dog... that was an interesting experience... I learnt so much from them and as a result of (those) bad experiences that I draw on today...

Employment Experiences

Work History

Employment in the United States

Fifty percent of participants' (6 of 12) first jobs in the United States (after completing high school) were in non-professional jobs. These jobs included housekeeping/maid, food service, factory assembly line, and a beauty parlor receptionist. Seven (58.3%) of the of participants sought professional jobs upon arriving in the United States and some were very disappointed at their inability to acquire one. One participant described her experience this way:

...I came here, with the expectation that I would be able to parlay that (experience from home) here, and I think the biggest disappointment was coming here and... people assuming that because I came from the West Indies, I was barely literate. And really having a difficult time trying to find employment that I thought at that time was equivalent of what I would have been doing at home. So after a couple of months of beating my head against the wall without much success, because I didn't have a high school diploma from the US... because I'm a very practical person, and I've always been raised to be practical, and very much identified with

what you said about “you must take care of yourself, you must be independent... I started to work for a family...

Only two (16.6%) of participants did not initially try to seek professional jobs, either because they did not have the educational background or because of a lack of a work permit. One participant who had training as a teacher from the Caribbean was unable to obtain a job as a teacher upon migrating because she did not have a Bachelor’s degree and worked in various fields before obtaining a job in her field of study. She said:

(When I first came to the United States)... I did home (elder care work) not for a long time. Then I worked at a pharmacy for less than an hour. Then I worked in the school system as a paraprofessional—because while I worked on my Bachelor’s I (could not teach)—I worked in the school system doing computer work, helping teachers and staff until I finished (my Bachelor’s). And then I started teaching at the same school...

Familiarity with Professional Culture

Adeptness at Professional Culture

Of the fifty percent (6 of 12) participants working in non-professional jobs, all pursued tertiary education, while 16.6% (2 of 12) had to obtain their GED before pursuing tertiary education. After receiving their various certifications these participants then obtained professional jobs in their respective fields. One participant who attended high school in the United States worked in a non-professional job for a year after high school before going to college.

Eighty-three percent (10 of 12) of participants expressed adeptness in their professional cultures, however, three of those participants revealed that while they were knowledgeable of their organizational cultures and expectations, they did not necessarily

follow them. One participant said of her organization's expectations for her, "I think I have an idea of what it is they want me to do and what their expectations are in terms of my work product... it doesn't mean I follow it..."

Two (16.6%) participants revealed that they were not knowledgeable about their professional cultures. One participant said, "I'm not really knowledgeable, and I don't think I ever will be. The company has many different cultures, even within our own department..."

Satisfaction with Current Job

Eighty-three percent (10 of 12) of participants indicated that they were satisfied with their current jobs. One participant said, "...[I]t is amazing... it's more than doing what I love, it's also the other aspect of reaching other people. And the people I've met—that's a big deal." Another participant stated, "... I have touched and changed so many lives over the years and I feel this is what God has prepared me for, this is my calling."

Eighty-three percent (10 of 12) also felt they were able to utilize their skills and training in their current jobs. One participant who was happy with the on-the-job training she received as an attorney stated:

...[I]t has massive benefits to working there... and I think they are training me a lot more too, which is definitely a plus for this job. You pretty much go in not knowing anything, you're not trained until you go in court and you're doing it and they really prepare you

However two (16.6%) participants indicated a strong dissatisfaction with their previous jobs. One participant who was not able to keep her jobs in two different fields said this:

I have two degrees from their (White) schools...when you do all of that you still can't get the job that means something... I went to a White school

(university), I got the orientation they got... There are just so many barriers to knock you down.

Another participant stated that changes could be made to improve her work environment:

I think changes could be made to make it a bit (friendlier)... it would be nice if they paid more... and I don't really think we are supported by management. It has its benefits and its downfalls, it all depends on how you want to weigh it.

Challenges at Work

Leading as a West Indian Woman

Creating an Inclusive Workplace

When asked about the challenges they faced in their professional work environments 16.6% of participants mentioned creating an inclusive workplace and creating opportunities for other minorities. One participant, a corporate senior executive, who grew up and worked in the West Indies before migrating to the United States, said:

... [A]s a woman, an African-American, and a woman of West Indian descent, I approach things in a different way... how do I use the uncommon access, and I do have uncommon access... How do I use that in a way that creates other opportunities for other individuals, not just professionally, but also for them to manifest their unique skills and talents in the organization? ... I also feel very responsible for representing the African-Americans in this organization, that's not something I can pick up, and put down, and pretend, to be anything other than I am...

Viewed as Incompetent by Americans

Fifty percent of participants discussed being viewed as incompetent by American coworkers, or encountering some resistance to their leadership from Americans. One participant in describing her experience of managing an African American employee related what this employee said to her:

...[S]he would say time and again, “Here it is that I am an American and I’m reporting to you.”... [A]nd they (African Americans) would start calling me “suit lady”. Now here it is I went to a White school. In those days you dressed properly, I came from the Caribbean, I never felt uncomfortable in a suit. So I came to work appropriately dressed. “Suit lady.” I didn’t pay them any mind.

Religion

Limited Promotion Opportunities

Three participants (25%) described facing challenges in their work settings regarding their religion. However only one participant (8.3%) mentioned that she was unable to take promotions at work because of her religious beliefs as a Seventh-day Adventist, which prevented her from taking part in the Saturday activities of her job. Seventh-day Adventists keep the seventh day as Sabbath, which is a holy day. She described her experience this way:

I’ve had to turn down a lot of positions. I was recently offered Chief Administrator of the company... and numerous times I’ve had to turn down positions because it (goes against my religious beliefs). This has been the toughest challenge... my friend said, “If you’re the boss you can change the days.” And I said, “Oh no... I have to lead by example... I believe there is a blessing that comes from obedience... God will make a way.”

Discomfort with Religious Expression

Two (16.6%) participants described the discomfort their coworkers felt with their religious ideals. One participant described her coworkers discomfort with her decision not to drink alcohol. She said:

... It’s hard connecting with these people. Do I really want to sit in a bar and pretend to drink a beer drinking ginger ale? People bother me about why I don’t drink. A lot of it is religious, and some of it is personal...

Another participant described her coworkers discomfort when she shared her religious beliefs:

... I ground myself everyday, I have a faith based practice of meditation, reading my Bible, praying, I'm very open about that in the organization, and... The challenge with that is that it sometimes makes people very uncomfortable and I have made a decision that I'm able to live with that discomfort...

Exclusion by Americans

African-American Exclusion

Ten (83.3%) participants in answering the question about the challenges they experienced in their work environments described feeling excluded by Americans. However, only two (16.6%) stated that they felt excluded by African-Americans in particular. One participant, a Vice Principal of a school in describing her experience working with her African-American boss, a Principal who always sent an African American teacher instead of her to meetings to represent him when he was unable to attend, said:

...[I]f he (the Principal) has a meeting to go to and he's not able to go, he'll send someone else (an African American teacher) because he knows the helm will be kept secure rather than having me go as the Assistant (Vice Principal)... because the person he's sending is in fact a Black American...

White Exclusion/Concrete Ceiling Effect

Five (41.6%) participants spoke of experiencing exclusion by White co-workers or White bosses limiting their career growth/promotion opportunities. One participant who worked with an organization of predominantly White males remarked:

One of the issues actually, with this company, was that the first position of real power was Director. And there were 13 Black Directors, and there had

been 13 for about 20 years. It appeared that somebody thought that 13 was the magic number, so when one left, another one was promoted. If one died, another **one** was promoted—for years. What's with this 13? It seemed like a quota; as if someone decided that this is the maximum that we will permit. There can't possibly be anymore!

West Indians Viewed as a Threat to their Jobs

Twenty-five percent (3) of participants described experiences at work where Americans felt West Indians were taking jobs away from Americans. One participant, a teacher, said this of her experience:

Well they (Americans) just didn't think that a West Indian should take their job... We were not hired by the school (by the Board of Education instead) so no one really wanted us there. They did not like us because we were American—I call it Nativism... All Americans who were there saw us (West Indians) as a threat, most of them at the time... saw us as a threat. At the other school I taught at, they made no space for us.

Sexism

Male Colleagues Being Promoted

Two (16.6%) participants in response to the question of the types of challenges they experienced in the workplace discussed seeing their White male colleagues being promoted ahead of them. One participant described her experience this way,

...It took me a while to realize that there was sexism, racism, all that... for example I knew on one occasion that there was a plan for me and I was groomed to (become a manger), and then, I wouldn't say all of a sudden, but there was a change and that was no longer a part of the plan. And I was almost kind of floundering, and...there was an announcement and one of my male peers became the manager of my team...

Chauvinism

One (8.3%) participant who believes she was promoted to improve the company's diversity profile discussed her White male peers being disturbed at her promotion. She said:

...There were many of my White peers, especially the males who were beside themselves when I got the position (Director). It was a big deal. You have a bit of power and influence. They just could not figure out why the hell I got it. I wanted so badly to tell them, I'm sorry you're not Black, and I'm sorry that you are not a woman, it's not my fault but get over it...

Distinct Differences in Salary Scale

One (8.3%) participant also described receiving a lower salary than her male counterparts. One participant stated,

"Well, one thing I picked up on was the salary scale... the raise came but it always seemed like the lower end of what was available. Although I worked hard—when you are working for a man versus a woman—they were mixed. Some women were more reasonable than others, and some men were more reasonable than even the women of my own kind...

Lack of Support from West Indian Community

West Indians' Rivalry

Two (16.6%) participants in discussed rivalry from West Indians, who seemed to be very competitive, regardless of the field they were in, with other West Indians as a challenge they encountered at work. This puzzled one participant who said:

I say this as a West Indian professional; you are a teacher, (and) I'm a broadcaster, why are we competing? Explain that to me. It's not like we're in the same field. There are West Indians here who would try to take from you what they would never give.

Unsupportive West Indian Community

Two (16.6%) of participants discussed the lack of support from the West Indian community as a challenge they experienced at work. A participant bemoaning the lack of support said this:

It's interesting; there were not a lot of West Indians in the company but the few that were there were tight. I have to say that they stuck together, but I don't know that we necessarily did as much for each other as we could. This whole research that you're doing, I was thinking about it as I drove home in my car and wondered; what is it about West Indian women that we don't know how to support each other? What is holding us back? What's in the culture, or make up that makes us do that? There are not a lot of us (in corporate America), and not a lot of us who will admit outright (that we are West Indian). They have established themselves not on their ethnicity, but very much on their credentials, and downplay their Caribbean background until it comes out much later.

Another participant in discussing the limited of support she experienced from the professional West Indian community for her broadcasting show said:

... [N]obody from the community has ever said, "How can I try to keep this West Indian woman on the air, and give her a chance to recognize our leaders when they come here? The West Indians (from my country) have done a lot of disservice to their own professionals here. They don't give you a leg to stand on. And the others that are so entrenched here on the affirmative action, they are so afraid that you are going to take their jobs.... The unfortunate thing about the balance is that if our community was there and understood the value of strong community, there are enough of us in this city to form a soft spot for us to fall on, but it is not there. I would never turn to any of them to ask them to help me get a job.

Contradicting Values

Doing what is in the Best Interest of People

Thirty-three percent (4 of 12) of participants in total described having contradictory values with their organization as a challenge. Twenty-five percent of those spoke specifically about putting the best interest of their employees/clients above that of

the company as managers. One participant who left her organization described her experience this way:

I will also say very honestly that I could probably still be there, if I was willing to be a different type of person, but I'm not a cut throat, I'm not a suck-up, and unfortunately, I was also the kind of person who could not stand injustice. And I would not shut up, and that's deadly in corporate America. I realized that I had done my part. I was director for 8 years, and for that time I think I made an enormous difference for the people that worked with me. To this day I have people who tell me that was one of the best experiences they ever had.

Politics & Networking

Two (16.6%) participants spoke of their frustrations with the politics or the need to 'schmooze' at work. They did not like doing it; one participant said this:

You have to play the politics, the game, and I really, really hate politics. I don't want to play the game, I just want to go and do my job, I don't want to have to show up at an event and schmooze with people. Not just even in the workplace but even the work I do; like you have to be, even if you really, really dislike a judge, you have to be really polite...

Another participant said, "I got sick of networking with folks and them not recognizing me the next day."

Being Outspoken

Thirty-three percent of participants (4 of 12) discussed their outspokenness as a challenge in their work environments. One participant relayed this experience:

...I'm just a very outspoken woman and I've been told that even though things are not Black and White I really do believe in the concept of wrong and right and I've been told I should change that thought because it doesn't help me necessarily, so if I see an injustice I get angry at it no matter how small that injustice is.

Conflicts with Management

Unfair Performance Evaluation

Five (41.6%) participants described conflicts with management in their organizations as a challenge. One participant spoke specifically about receiving an unfair performance evaluation. She said:

I was given a review by my supervisors that I felt was unfair, I thought it was a personal attack, that it had nothing to do with the quality of my work. And in addition they really did not supervise me, so I did not think they were even qualified enough to evaluate me. When I saw the evaluation, I thought it was outrageous and I wrote a seven page rebuttal to the evaluation, submitted it and refused to sign theirs, and submitted it to my boss. And after a number of meetings my union got involved because I was going to grieve it, which is basically an internal law suit, and in order for me not to grieve it, their boss worked on it. actually, he kind of threatened me, prefaced it by saying it wasn't a threat but it really was. Then they had to change their evaluation and modified it. I still refused to sign it, but they were able to submit it without me doing a suit against them... one poor performance rating, even from a lower supervisor is a bad reflection on the higher supervisor, and having me grieve something... it would not have looked (good) on any of them had it gone (further).

Divergent Management Approaches

Two (16.6%) participants discussed having a different management approach from their organization. One participant who had been with her organization through several mergers said this of her experience:

I saw the writing on the wall, after 4 mergers. My glory days had passed, what I had they couldn't take from me, and it was up to them to either use it or lose it, and I was not tiptoeing through the tulips any longer—I never did—and I approached them and said, “This relationship is no longer working let's put our cards on the table, and I have been here long enough to know how it ends, this is what I want.”... You can change things, but it's how you do it. There's a way to do it, you (executives) can't ram it down their (employees) throats.

Jealous & Vindictive Female Bosses

Two (16.6%) of participants also described malicious/vindictive female bosses as one of the challenges they faced at work. One participant expressed this:

I worked for a White woman who absolutely hated me... she was jealous. I was a very popular person and there was nothing my team wouldn't do for me... Several years later she was the one who started a series of events that eventually led my team being reduced from 80 to 2 persons.

Fired without Reason

Two (16.6%) participants described being fired without reason from their jobs by their bosses. One participant said:

...She (the boss) asked me to come into her office... And I said, "Are you firing me?" She said, "I'm asking you to resign." I said, "That's fine, God bless you." And she said, "You're making it so easy for us?"

Difficulty with Students

One (8.3%) participant relayed her initial difficulty working with students as one of the challenges she faces. She stated, "They are so different from back home, but I understand them now."

Other Challenges

One participant mentioned being overworked and not respected as one challenge she faced in her job:

Here's a big challenge any lawyer in my case will tell you—we are overwhelmed and over worked... If we had fewer cases I would be a better lawyer because I would have time to go out and investigate... I would have more time to focus on the cases. Those are the kinds of things we don't get (to do) and we kind of get a bad name as attorneys for it in this type of environment and agency... we do the best we can, and I do think we are some of the best attorneys out there. Another challenge is that we have clients who don't respect us because we are public defenders, and they think if it comes to them free then it's not good, which is an interesting mentality. I have family members who think I'm not a real lawyer.

Non-Work Challenges

Even though participants were not asked about challenges outside of work, 16.6% of participants mentioned a non-work challenge that was having a significant impact on their lives.

Buying Property. One participant described her challenges buying a house in her current neighborhood:

The building I'm living in now, when I moved there, there were a lot of other Black folk... Most of the Whites died out, and more Blacks came in to the building. True gentrification, as a matter of fact, the building is (now) mostly White again, because they are coming in from the major city, and it's just a few of us who are Black.... I tried to buy later on, but the racism came in. In those days my apartment was going for \$50,000. So most of them in the building are White... and they even tried to take me to court because they don't want me to get it... It's all about racism, because there are other people there who are their (Whites) own, who are old, and they're not doing that to them... So it's not about knowing our rights, it's not about default on rent, it's not about how we carry ourselves, it's not about being poor; they just don't want you (Black people) around.

Acquiring Work Permit: Another participant discussed her initial challenge in getting a work permit in the United States:

... When I came here at first I didn't have my papers, I just had a visitor's visa, and I couldn't get back in school with that. So I worked for a while as a receptionist at a beauty parlor in [this state]. I was so torn, I was so unhappy here. I loved [my husband], but that wasn't what I wanted... and it just felt like my life was going nowhere, and I didn't know what to do with myself... and then the worst thing happened; we had a friend who decided that he could help us if we gave him \$5000. It was a scheme, he took our money and I did not get my papers, and it set everything back. It was so unbelievable, I was so broken... it was just so sad, it set us back big time. Then we finally found some friends—lawyers, a Jewish guy who said, “You don't have to go through that, all that money you wasted. Your husband is a citizen, it will take a little while.” It took about 5 years before I got working papers after I came here (United States)...

Strategies for Coping with Challenges

Indirect/Non-Confrontational Methods

Fifty percent of participants (6 of 12) used non-confrontational methods for dealing with their challenges, in addition to other methods.

Hard Work. Thirty-three percent of participants (4 of 12) used hard work or decided to let their work speak for itself when faced with Americans who viewed them as incompetent, or being excluded by Americans. One participant stated:

...I also work hard. I'm usually the only Black person or woman sometimes. I spend a whole lot of time preparing, I just want to make sure that the one time they deal with me, it's a good impression they get.

Prayer & Faith. One participant prayed and used religious songs to help her through her challenges. She said:

I cried in my sleep and had (religious) songs- "For I Know My Redeemer Lives", "When You Have Done All You Can Just Stand"... I cried, I prayed, and I had the church praying... I cried and I prayed, and I prayed and I cried. My husband used to joke about it, he said, "If you want somebody to cry for you call my wife."

Ignored. Two (16.6%) did not address their challenges at all when faced with challenges around sexism or competition/lack of support from West Indians. One participant stated, "...I didn't pay them (coworkers) any mind."

Confronts Issues

Seventy-five percent (9) of participants chose to confront the challenges they faced with their coworkers.

Creates Open Environment. For example, with the challenge of sharing religion in the workplace, one participant encouraged her coworkers to share their perspectives with her. She said:

I do it (discuss my religion) openly, because I think that's the only way, that you really create inclusion. Inclusion isn't about hiring Black people, and hiring women; it's about really causing within the organization, openness to having openness and a skill building to allowing difference to manifest itself, and then having the skill to be able to talk about that difference.

Raise Awareness. Fifty percent of participants (6 of 12) tried to raise others' awareness of the issues and attempt to influence change. One participant described her efforts in raising awareness:

I really started observing women in the workplace...I was very aware how women in the company were interacting, or didn't. How they fought with each other, the backbiting, and stabbing, so I made some very conscious choices to raise that awareness to women that I came in contact with. I wasn't trying to conquer the world but I did it with the women that I worked on my team. I did this through breakfast meetings, I was shocked at the, "Oh my God, she's talking about that." And then, it took a good year before I felt that folks had absorbed the idea that they needed to be aware of how they interacted with each other and the subtle put downs and the things that we do that are just so demeaning... Every opportunity I get to talk about the Johari Window (self-perception), I do, because until you know where you are in that spectrum you can't be effective, you can't grow.

Training. One participant mentioned utilizing her Masters degree training to help her relate better to the students. She said, "Reading, and learning how to relate to the students, I learnt that from the courses I took."

Left the Organization

Four (33.3%) participants when faced with some of their work challenges, including discrimination, conflicts with management, and chauvinism, decided to leave their organizations. One participant said, "...whatever challenge I faced I took it in stride... by moving to another area... I would always look out for what was available... and try another area."

Negotiate

Twenty-five percent of (3 of 12) participants negotiated with their managers to cope with their challenges. For example one participant who was passed over for a promotion she had been groomed for negotiated a financial deal and stayed with her company. She said, "...One thing that you can do for me is to make sure my education is paid fully... in corporate America you can turn things to your benefit."

Social Support

One participant talked about utilizing social support of friends, a therapist and social events after work to deal with their challenges at work. "I use karaoke, I sing, and act really stupid. I have fun..."

Figure out the Bottom Line

One participant, in coping with the challenges on her job as a senior executive, was able to decipher what was most important:

...I was always able—I get this from my mother—I was always able to know what is the bottom line... Don't waste time. The other thing I found out... your boss is the most important person... find out what he/she wants... and how much you can get away with him/her. Your word means a lot, and that's how you get along with HR... I always came out on top...

Grounding from Caribbean Experiences

School Training

When asked how well their experiences in the West Indies helped them cope with challenges in the United States, 16.6% of participants referred to the training they received in school. One participant referenced the fact that she had to wear uniforms;

Discipline in school and taking pride in oneself. We had to wear uniforms, and they had to be neat... And that may be different now, but that's who I am, that will always be part of me. And I'll always be

profoundly grateful for those things because they have a direct correlation to work particularly at senior levels, when everything about you is under scrutiny, every single thing, and I have a heightened sensitivity about that...

Family/Parental Values

Seventy-five percent (9) of participants described family/parental values as helping them to cope with their challenges at work in the United States.

Strong Work Ethic. Five (41.6%) discussed gaining a strong work ethic from their parents. One participant remarked, "...My mother being a hard worker...set the stage for me to do hard work... that's how I got the job as a teacher."

Education is the Priority. Two participants (16.6%) discussed their family putting education as a priority, which helped to get them through their challenges. One participant said this about her family:

I had a family that didn't believe I needed to rush to work (get a job), I wasn't even allowed to work until I graduated high school, education was key. Caribbean people really place a strong emphasis on education.

Act with Grace. One participant spoke of her mother's values being inculcated in her, which she used as her guiding principle. "My mother said, "Always try to have grace and rise above."

West Indian Work Experience

One of participants described the work experience in the West Indies as a factor that helped her to cope with her challenges at work in the United States. She said, "I've been teaching for 26 years and just relating to students and seeing them learn... it has

helped me to stay and encourage them... I've seen education make a difference in people's lives..."

Other Experiences

The participants shared a few other experiences that helped prepare them to cope with their current challenges in the United States.

Working in Healthcare. One participant shared one of her earlier experiences working for her uncle who was a medical doctor. She related this:

He lived in (a predominantly Black neighborhood). And he chose to stay there...so this was at a particularly tough time in the city, he had just started up his business... and this gets back to the issue of healthcare disparities... He really wanted to provide access to healthcare for African-Americans, primarily senior citizens, who didn't have that access, and because of the crime were scared to get out of their houses... He started an Ambulate service... I worked with him setting up... to hire the drivers, getting the Medicare billing in place... I mean I've always been drawn to healthcare, and part of that early experience of healthcare disparities, and the fact that the only thing that differentiated these men and women from people living maybe 10 blocks away was the color of their skin, and that they happened to live in that community versus another community, and without the Ambulate service they had no access to healthcare. I've always had a piece of me that's about service, and serving others, and that's the first opportunity that I've had to put it into action, and it's what I've been doing ever since then...

Elementary School Teacher. One participant referenced an elementary school teacher who taught her life skills that she found helpful when she migrated:

My social studies teacher (in Jamaica) I cannot forget her, she used to give us these lectures... she used to tell us about America and how it was, this was why I got into reading political books... She would always tell us that you need to be aware of what's going on, and never take things for what you think it is. Learn to look at things from another perspective; and I always kept that in the back of my mind... She said a lot of people go to America and get a credit card and think that you run it up, and you buy things. And you know, when we moved from our apartment, when we bought our house, my friend said, "so you're going to buy new furniture to put in the house?" And I said, "What? What's wrong with the furniture

from my apartment?” She said, “You can’t put that into your new house!” I’m like, “why not? That is not the most important thing.” And I think she [social studies teacher] has really helped me...

Initial Experiences with Racism. One participant described her initial experiences with racism upon migrating to the United States:

When I moved here people from my country were not popular then, in the 1980s. Every crime that was committed, (even) if it was someone who didn’t speak English, the reports would say it was someone from Jamaica, so we were not popular. When I went to junior high school I remember kids making fun of me asking, “Did you swing on trees, like a monkey?”... [M]oving into the neighborhood we did, they didn’t want us there; 2 blocks down they spray painted on the school, “no niggers allowed”... They beat up a Black guy because he was with a White lady. So when you go through all of that, like just being here for me—and I had never experienced that White people were just light skinned people to me I didn’t realize there was a huge difference—I think that definitely let me see something else.

Church. Two participants (16.6%) discussed their church experiences as being of some help in preparing them to deal with their challenges here. One participant said, “From church, dealing with kids, working with teenagers, all that prepared me for the classroom, and also being the leader of my youth group that did volunteering.” Another participant referred to her faith in God:

Faith without works is dead, and having a relationship with God—I was trying, trying and after a while I just stood still and saw the salvation of the Lord, knowing there would be a breakthrough. I think the year I went through, all the degradation I used to feel so emotionally down, and someone at church testified about being embarrassed and praying and claiming, and that thing just went. Just pray and claim the level of faith, and that’s when I started to build my confidence, I don’t care what happens, I just do what I have to do...

Balancing Time. One participant remarked on her ability to balance her time effectively:

And then I had to balance my time because I loved sports and I was involved in sports, I played netball, I played hockey for my country, I ran track. So I had to learn to balance my time because I was in church work in Jamaica also. So I think that personally prepared me for this kind of life, I didn't come here lost.

Encouragement of Parents. One participant referred to the encouragement she received from her parents,

If it wasn't for my parents... My parents were very poor, but they had a plan for us and we followed it... my father had a vision. We were from the country... my father was not rich but he wanted all his girls to be educated, and he had been to Panama and realized that there was a place for women who are educated. And he came back, and he was determined to get us educated...

Ethnic/Racial/Gender Stereotypes at Work

Pigeonholed—"You Don't Belong Here"

When participants were asked, "Do you encounter ethnic/racial/gender stereotypes at work? 100% of the participants relayed experiences of being pigeonholed by their White coworkers. Each participant received the subtle message "You don't belong here" in different ways. One participant, a senior executive, described the surprise her coworkers expressed at her executive position and articulation:

I had an experience where someone was asking me whether or not I was aware of the impact of my position and presence on a group of individuals. And I said, "Talk to me a little bit about that." And the person said, "Well you're articulate, you have an excellent command of the English language, you're able to be very persuasive in your point of view, you are an Executive Committee member". And I said, "If I were a White male sitting here, would we be having this conversation? What I'm taking from that is the assumption that because I'm a Black female these things represent an anomaly in me as opposed to the norm."

Another participant spoke of the shock of her colleagues from one of her professional associations expressed at her being Black:

I remember I went to this conference in [another county] which is very racist. We would (her colleagues from other organizations) talk on the phone regarding clients, they'd get my reports all the time and they'd read them. But for some reason, in their mind, they thought I was White! So I went to this conference and my name was on the list and I guess they didn't know who I was, I said hello and everything, and some of them that I knew, they passed me, I knew them by voice, and when I was introduced and I stood up to speak, you could feel the [gasps, intake of breath]. Because it was right after we had upgraded the whole computer lab and they were talking about all the reports, and what we had done at [my organization], so they wanted me to give a report on what we'd done... Someone came and said, "You're [Mrs. X]?" and I said, "Yeah, I guess you thought I was White, right?" And she turned pink...

One participant spoke of her White colleagues always expressing surprise that the Black lawyers dressed so well:

There was a Black male lawyer dressed very nicely and another Black woman from Africa, and the judge used to always say, "Wow! Mr. X, you're looking like Mr. Y, you look very nice and spiffy!" Once when I walked in someone actually said, "Oh all the Black people dress nicely?!" I don't know, I guess because we have taste?

The same participant also described her White coworkers consistently messing up the Black women's names in the organization:

... I've had at my job another Black woman, Mary, started working there when I first started. She is very short and had 'permmed' hair, and was pregnant, yet everyone called me Mary and called her by my name (which sounds nothing like hers). We look nothing alike! It was so funny when she started doing that, so I said to her, "This is what we're going to do when they mix up our names say, 'No, that's the other Black girl.' So we started doing that and then they got it. Mary left and there's another Black coworker who had been there years before me; they started calling me by her name. It's as if they would not take the time to learn my name! I was like, when I came in I had to learn all your names separately, but you have to learn one name, why can't you get it right? ... I had this discussion last week, it's like we are interchangeable, they do not give us individual names; they don't do it! And it's constant, that's just one of the things, it's more prevalent...

Two participants discussed getting the message from their coworkers that they did not fit their organizations' demographic. One participant described this experience at an organization:

I wanted to be a program manager. The job that I ended up getting was, I don't even know what that job was...I very quickly got bored with that; any idiot can do that... There was a department next door that had a group of programs that involved entry-level college graduates like myself. So I took it upon myself to introduce myself to the head of the department, and told him of my credentials, and expressed an interest in joining his group when there was an opportunity. He (head of the department) made it very clear to me that there was no way that that was ever going to happen, that I did not fit the... he used a term that basically indicated that I was not White, the "right demographic". I think he used it thinking that I would not know what he meant. And the group consisted of primarily White males, and a few White women sprinkled in.

Another participant relayed the experience of her colleagues being shocked at her presence in the field:

... Then to be a Black woman lawyer is a whole different topic. When you walk in it's sort of like, "You don't belong here," that's the first thing. "How did you get here? How did you get into law school? Was it affirmative action?"

Although this experience occurred while this participant was in college, it is included as a work challenge:

...One of my earlier experiences while in college involved me sitting in the dining room, and a White student walked by the table and said, "Oh, she knows how to use a knife and fork." I was a little—oooh! I had been here up to four years and had not experienced anything like that up to that point in time. So there was a little bit of that, nothing other than that, more than subtleties, which I learnt to pick up after a while, I had never been exposed. And I thought to myself, "What if I had been really dark? What would they have said then?"

One participant described being invited to dinner by her boss whom she considered a mentor, only to have the offer rescinded after he told his wife. Another participant relayed her experience of clients automatically assuming that her White team members, of whom she was team lead, were the ones in charge:

It's more about me being Black and my gender more than anything else. That's what they see first. I go into meetings where I'm the boss and they don't know I'm in charge (with my White colleagues). I love that. They don't introduce themselves to me, but to my White peers...

One participant discussed being failed by her White professor because she was Black. Two participants gave incidences of being viewed as incompetent solely because of their ethnicity/race. One participant described it this way:

I was the only Black person, (with) all these White women. They thought, "Where does this Black little girl think she's coming from? Thinks she's smart telling us what to do!"

One participant was told she could not go on a staff trip while her White colleagues were already on the bus:

I saw racial things because we have a White Assistant Principal, she has the White teachers going on trips and then she would tell me that I can't go on the trip, and I told her, "No, I came prepared to go on the trip, so I will be going on this trip." And a Dean went to her and said, "Well you know that's racist because you had your friends go on the trip and you can't tell her that she can't go."

Another participant's roommate in graduate school remarked:

So I went to graduate school, did my Masters and got my first cultural shock. When I went to graduate school, I lived on campus, and my roommate was White. I had never lived with a White person before, but she's learning about me, I'm learning about them. And the first thing she said to me, "my aunt's helper is from Jamaica." So what the hell am I supposed to do with that? I suppose she thinks she's paying me a compliment to tell me that her aunt's helper is Jamaican...

Oreo Cookie

One participant described her experience with African American students:

I've been called Oreo cookie by my students, I've been called all kinds of names... they expect me to show them favoritism because they are Black... [And they would say], "Oh you people (West Indians) think you're better off than us!" And I said, "No, were not. It's just that we perceive things differently."...

Gender Stereotypes

One participant discussed an experience relating to her White male colleague, who became frustrated by her firm stance and made a sexist remark to her,

There was one time a White male colleague said something to me that was completely inappropriate. I think I scared him, we were having a conversation on the phone and had a difference of opinion, and I was quite calm and stating my points quite eloquently, and he said on the phone that I was getting on his nerves and that I was a pain in the ass. I asked him to repeat it. I said, "Do you realize that what you just said could be considered sexual harassment...? I have never been rude, or cursed, and you know that."...

Dealing with Ethnic/Racial/Gender Stereotypes

Directly Address Stereotype

Five (41.6%) of the participants chose to directly address the stereotype in dealing with it. One participant said:

When people say, "You're not from the Caribbean, are you?" I ask them, "What is it about your expectation of me that is different now as a result of your knowing that?" There is also the stereotype of women in corporate America. I believe this leadership role I have is an opportunity to have people question their stereotypes.

Ignore Stereotypes

Five of the participants also mentioned not addressing the stereotype at all in dealing with it. One participant said:

...[L]ike I said, I didn't let those things bother me, I just went ahead and did what I had to do. I knew they were present, I heard things going on, but I didn't let them bother me. I just did what I came here to do.

Indirectly Addresses Stereotype

Two of the participants (16.6%) described indirectly addressing the stereotypes they experienced. One participant does so through hard work and telling her White coworkers she's competent when they challenge her. The other participant whose White clients wrongly assumed that one of her White team members was in charge said:

Sometimes I play the game. Sometimes I assert myself, sometimes not. They feel stupid when they have to call me afterward, (because) the associate (White) tells them they will have to check with me first.

Career Success

Definitions of Career Success

Internally Driven

When asked the question, "What does career success look like to you?" 50% (6 of 12) of the participants referred to measuring their success on various internal standards.

Personal and Professional Alignment. Two participants discussed having alignment between their personal and professional lives. One participant said:

It's more internal for me; it's about whether or not I'm doing work that will bring integrity. It's also important for me to have alignment between my professional and personal life. It is about growing, learning, developing on an ongoing basis. About being challenged, having the respect of peers, and being known as a person who adds value.

Great Parenting. One participant prioritized her children's development as number one:

... Once my kids became teenagers, I realized that the most important thing in my life was my children. I couldn't see myself going to university at night, or leaving work and going straight to university and not being there, to make sure their homework was done, and they were getting what they wanted... I believe that I need to be a force that's always there. I use the word force, because when they are away at (boarding) school I'm very involved in the PTA...

Be the Best I Can. One participant stated:

... [U]ltimately I want my career to be able to provide for me to live a lifestyle I want to live which is fabulous. I want to be a great lawyer... to know the law and to do your thing, that would be it, even if I don't win all my cases because not all cases are winnable, but it's just to fight hard.

Did Not Expect This Much. One participant expressed surprise at the fact that she accomplished as much as she did:

Coming from where I was, I think I'm very successful, and I thank God for that. I never dreamt I would get this far in life until my girlfriend encouraged me, and the supervisor from the first hospital I worked in, they told me I would make a good nurse.

Fulfilling Personal Goals. One participant stated,

Fulfilling your personal goal, but also lifting someone up or reaching out to someone, whereby someone can be better because they associate with you or because you work along with them, someone can be better for it. So in your career yes, but also in your personal life.

Externally Driven

Fifty percent of the participants referred to a variety of external factors that determined their career success:

Graduate Degree. One participant spoke of wanting to obtain her Masters degree:

I didn't finish grad school--that's one regret I have... I know I can go to teach with my Masters, I could go on further and teach courses in college. Deep down in my heart I know that's something I want to do, maybe a few years from now when [my daughter] is in college.

Role Modeling/Breaking New Ground. Two (16.6%) participants spoke of both being role models and “breaking new ground”. One participant said:

In my first career I was successful in breaking new ground, and providing a role model for folks, to let them know that it was possible to be a decent person and still have some measure of responsibility & authority and that it didn't have to be a negative. So from that perspective I consider my career measured success.

Being of Service—Helping Others Succeed. Two participants (16.6%) who worked with students viewed career success as their ability to be helpful to students and helping them succeed. One participant remarked:

What I've found, teaching students, you grade them and you reward them and after a while they find the joy. They have seen in working with me, themselves moving from one level to the next. Even if they don't excel but there's improvement, if they continue like that, they will be successful.

Executive Title and Salary. One participant described career success in terms of her title and salary:

I was proud of the fact that my hard work resulted in a title, a salary that was befitting of the job that I was doing. I deserved it... I always wanted to be in a position where I could teach and guide.

Factors Contributing to Career Success

Integrity

When participants were asked what some of the factors were that contributed to their career success 25% (3 of 12) of them made reference to integrity. One participant

stated, “I believe that you should let your performance be your calling card, be a person of integrity, and a compassionate human being.” Another participant adopted the value of integrity from her grandparents, she said, “I was raised by my grandparents, and my personality was honed to their values...” And one participant spoke of doing things the right way. She said:

Do things the right way. I would tell my nephew that I interview people, it’s a human thing—the way you are dressed—you’re either in or you’re out. I felt in that respect, I felt successful. I felt that when I spoke I knew what I was talking about, I had some experiences I could share with them that could make a difference, and I still do...

Compassion

Two participants (16.6%) believed that being compassionate and genuinely caring for their clients also made them successful. One participant said, “I think they see that I’m interested in them, I know what I’m doing, I care, and they have seen that through what I do, it’s helping them.”

Support

Five participants (41.6%) discussed having supportive family members and/or friends who helped them attain career success. One participant spoke of her husband as being supportive:

[M]y husband, he has been amazing. I used to come in bed with the laptop (and do work) and he would never fuss... He’s my biggest, biggest fan. He’s always encouraging me... when you find a mate that’s there for you, in the middle of your worst day you can call him and he’ll have a comforting word for you. He calls to check on me during the day to see how I’m doing. This makes all the difference...

Three participants referred to family and friends. One participant said:

I think support, I didn't mention it and it's very interesting that I didn't mention it but I've had really good support in my life. My friends have been awesome, I have people who are always telling me how good I am and there are times when I doubt myself, when I think I've fooled everyone, they think I'm great. Then I have people who tell me, "Look you fake it till you make it." So I think support, the support—I can't imagine anyone doing it without friends and family, I don't know how you would. You would get stressed out.

Another participant spoke of surrounding herself with diverse people and friends:

I also surround myself with great people. I also have a diverse circle of friends, and I make sure I'm hanging out with the right people at work. I speak to everyone, and build relationships with everyone, no matter how 'bad' they are.

Spirituality

One participant discussed her faith in God as a contributing factor to her career success. She said "...The fact that I have a faith (in God) and a loving family."

Career Challenges

Keeping Relevant

When asked, "What challenges have you faced in your career?" 16.6% (2 of 12) of participants discussed keeping relevant or a breadth of their fields. One participant said, "How do you keep your skills, interest, and experiences relevant? Not becoming jaded, or cynical."

Lack of Knowledge of Corporate American Culture

Two (16.6%) participants spoke about not being more aware of corporate American culture earlier in their careers. One participant stated:

My biggest challenge was not being aware earlier, I think I got it eventually. I often wondered what would have been had I been just a little more astute?

Finances

Two participants also described the financial challenges they faced in attaining their education. One participant said, "... I also had financial challenges in going to school, so that was compounded with the learning and educational aspect of it..."

Lack of Support/Being Suppressed

Two participants (16.6%) also discussed the lack of support they experienced in their careers from either the West Indian community or colleagues, or both. One participant said of her experience with the broadcasting community while producing her show:

So here I was doing this show, I went to all the major advertisers, and they gave me all kinds of excuses. And since my show was a niche show, for Black people, they don't have a lot of respect for us. This is when you know the larger community has no respect for the smaller people. You hear them talking about equality, it's not about equality of economics... It's equality where they can recognize you as the lower class, where they can be sorry for you. But when it comes to working with us, they don't want to work with us. They want to go back to the days of the housekeepers. We were not housekeepers in our own country. They came here and became housekeepers because they wanted to make a way for themselves, and as soon as they didn't have to do it, they were out of there...

One participant discussed the lack of support she experienced from the West Indian community:

There are West Indians here who would try to take from you what they would never give. I could call names, but I'm not going to call names, some people whose businesses I took time to help. But when it was time to give me a boost, they wouldn't even give me a ticket to a function...

The same participant also discussed the lack of support she received from her White professors:

... [A]t that time, (I thought) having had that British experience that hard work is it (all you needed), it wasn't. I realized that I had to know somebody to pull me in, I didn't understand that. I just thought that if I dressed well in my suit, I was much better looking, had my demonstration tape, to show them that I had been to one of the better schools, that they would hire me. No, I had to have the contacts, someone to say, "listen she is..." And the White professors didn't do that for us, at least they didn't tell us. Because there are other girls that I know had jobs, and now that I look back it obvious that people said, "This is my student take care of her..."

Body Language

One participant discussed working on her body language which she viewed as a challenge initially:

I spent a good amount of time working on my non-verbal cues and body language. That was a big piece of feedback given to me. I choose to do things over the phone as opposed to face-to-face. I tend to be introverted, and that has an effect on people. I was told that I appeared to be standoffish. I learned to read body language and facial expressions to figure out answers whenever people were withholding answers.

Education

Thirty-three percent (four) of participants described education as a challenge in their careers.

Academic Struggles. Two participants discussed having trouble academically at some stage in their career. One participant said:

...[W]hen I went to England... I don't know why I never recognized this but a lot of science is involved in P.E. and science was not a strong area of mine, so I had to dig deep to finish that course of mine. Also when I went to graduate school I had to do a lot of science and Physiology. I had

looked at it and thought it was just teaching of the sports but it was much more than that, so science was a challenge for me.

Prejudice. One participant spoke of being failed in nursing school by one of her White professors who did not like her:

...[O]ne professor told me that I would never be a nurse and tried to fail me in the last semester. When I went to Clinicals she scrutinized what I was wearing and told me to leave the clinical area, even though someone else had on the same thing. And she told me that the only thing I'd be good at is making beds. She was White, I was the only Black student and every year she failed a Black student...

Failure to Complete Tertiary Education. One participant regretted not completing her Bachelors degree, "Perhaps if I had gotten my degree it could have made a difference, because more (and more) now you have to have one. I was able to get by based on my performance."

Overworked

Two participants discussed being overworked as a challenge to their careers. One participant said, "The challenge is the work, I hardly get to sleep."

Non-West Indian Interactions

Amount of Interactions with Non-West Indians

Limited Interaction

When asked the question, "How much interaction do you have with non-West Indians and individuals born in the US, outside of work?" 66.6% (8 of 12) of participants described having very limited interactions with non-West Indians outside of work. These interactions included professional, neighborhood or church settings. One participant said,

“Not really. Not a lot of interaction, but I do have... My coworkers, some are White, Black. Mostly from work.” It is important to note that while the interviewer asked participants about non-work interactions, most participants included their work interactions with non-West Indians.

Friends with Non-West Indians and West Indians

Four (33.3%) of participants described being friends with non-West Indians. One participant remarked:

[W]e (husband and herself) have that kind of camaraderie with them. Sometimes I have to decline things, and sometimes (my friend) will be mad. She came to my 40th birthday party at (a church member's house) and I said, “Now you know how it feels, to be the only White person there.” But she stood out! But she's comfortable around Blacks, because she doesn't have that problem.

One participant's best friend was White and she also had West Indian friends from church. Another participant had friends from an African-American women's support group. One participant still had White and African-American friends from Law school, as well as West Indian friends from church, work and Law school. Another participant was married to an African American man and she had African-American and West Indian friends from church. She stated, “It's not necessarily where you are from but who you are.”

One participant developed friendships with a few African-American women from a few of the political organizations she joined. She said, “So I've always had a couple of African-American friends, but it wasn't as wide as it could be...”

Experience of Interacting with Non-West Indians

Threatened or Surprised by Success/Competence

Seven (58.3%) of participants described non-West Indians as being surprised or threatened by their success. Two participants discussed their American colleagues being surprised at their having an Ivy League education and at their professional success. One participant talked about her experience at work and her paradigm shift:

... I should tell you a little bit about a formative experience that I had. A couple of years ago there's an organization called NTL, and for decades they have been the pioneers in the work around leadership, diversity... and what they helped me understand was a tendency that West Indians had to buy into the paradigm of being different... So for instance I observed that when I would meet people here in the US... they would comment on the fact that I had either really good grades, for instance I went to (an Ivy League school), and I graduated in the top of my class. Or they would comment on the kind of position that I held, and they would say, "Oh, I hear an accent, are you West Indian?" And they would say, "Oh!" And for a long time I bought into that, because what it did is it served for those people who had a paradigm about the typical notions of Black Americans, as lazy, shiftless, uneducated, etc. When they met someone who looked like she could be Black American, by ethnicity, but then engaged with me and found that these particular ways that they expected to experience me were different, the fact that I was West Indian allowed them to hold on to the paradigm of Black lazy, shiftless Americans, because I wasn't an American, and I bought into that on an unconscious level, and one of the things that NTL helped me to do is to recognize that I actually was co-opting myself into a system, and therefore not being an agent of change...

One participant discussed her White graduate classmates being surprised at her presence at the university:

...Those people really are not friendly. They pretend like they are friendly, but I really didn't find them friendly... When I got to the school, I didn't think it was a big deal, but people were asking me, "How did you get into this school?" I said, "How do you mean how did I get into this school? I just applied!"... So apparently the school was very racist, but I didn't know that. But when I was there in a class of 157 there were only 3 Black girls...

Another participant experienced White colleagues' being threatened by her. She said,

I'm conscious of the fact that I'm a Black woman, a Black Caribbean woman, an educated one at that, that just makes it even worse... that's a threat to others, it's not a bad thing, not for me anyway, but for some it's definitely a threat. It's sort of like an educated Black man; it's a threat to all White men. It may not be conscious, but it's there, it's America, it's a threat to some extent.

Another participant discussed the tension between West Indians and African Americans who excluded her. She said:

I thought it (relationship between African-Americans and West Indians) was a much better relationship (in the past) than now, because I think now it has been fragmented, and I think most of it is our fault because we came here and we started telling these people that they don't know how to grasp opportunities, and that there's really no racism, and these people knew what they were talking about. So a lot of us poisoned the well, not my generation, but there were a lot of Jamaicans I know who did that. So now they (African-Americans) see us and they say, "You guys come here and pretend as if it was a different level, and they treated you as foreigners. Are they still treating you as foreigners?" They knew what they were talking about. They say, "Now you guys are coming and getting all of our Affirmative Action, and it was for us and not for you, all the scholarships, etc."... And when I would go on assignments, I saw that they looked out for their own, and I can't blame them. They say, "You guys came here and felt like it was never hard..." They don't say it in so many words, but you can read between the lines.

One participant described her African American colleague being surprised at the success of a West Indian doctor:

... There's a woman in that organization that I worked with when I was an administrator at the hospital. She was African-American and very influential. She helped me to get a job as a deputy for one of the CEOs at the hospital. We did things together. One day the mayor got sick, and she said to me, "You know who the mayor's doctor is? A West Indian!" I didn't even say a thing; I just pinched myself and thought, "she probably forgets that I'm one." As if that had anything to do with it. But she showed me that despite the fact that I was having a relationship with this woman, they (African Americans) have their (biases)...

No Focus on Race

Three participants (25%) remarked in some form that they preferred not to focus on race when choosing whom they interacted with. One participant stated, “Well I have good relationships with people overall, and the type of people I find myself interacting with are more or less people of the level of higher socioeconomic education.”

Positive Interactions with Americans

Four participants (33.3%) discussed having positive interactions with Americans.

One participant remarked about her interactions with her coworkers:

It is good and I try to maintain this kind of thing because I know I just can't stay in my little network, I need to get out. And you really need them at some point, for some things so I really keep in touch with them. They were quite (nice) to me as well when my children were younger. If I needed anything they would cover my class for me so that I could go.

Another participant described having American patients at the hospital she worked make special request for her; they would ask, “Where is the little Black girl?”

Negative Interactions with Americans

One participant described having an extremely negative interaction with White Americans:

...[M]y first dose of “You’re Black and you belong over there,” was when I came here (USA)... this little Jewish girl called me a nigger. I was like, “Excuse me what did you just say?” [She said] “Get out of the way nigger.” She was riding her bike, and I was walking on the street, and her parents were walking behind her... I turned to parents and I said, “I hope that’s not what you’re teaching her.” And the father’s face turned red, because I looked him dead in the eye.

Impact of West Indian Accent

Don't Lose It

When asked the question, “Has your accent impacted your interactions with others?” 16.6% (2) of participants discussed being told not to change or lose their accent.

One participant stated:

I thought it would, I don't hear it anymore, and I made a conscious effort to change my accent at least to be able to speak so that people would understand me... I made a conscious effort—in law school... I remember we had to do things in public and people said to me, “Your accent is an asset because it forces people to listen to you because if they want to know what you are saying they have to listen to you, and they are going to want to know because you are speaking to them.” So I use it as an asset.

Distinguished from African-Americans

Earlier, it was noted that one participant experienced colleagues' using her accent to distinguish her from African Americans and to retain their negative stereotype of African Americans as “lazy and shiftless”.

Experienced Challenges

Five participants (41.6%) discussed experiencing a challenge of some form due to their accents. Two participants described having White coworkers not understand them.

One participant remarked:

...[W]hen I came first especially the Whites, they used to say, “I don't understand. Can you please repeat?” I (just) looked at them. The journalists and others on TV don't speak much different than me...

Another participant believed she experienced challenges because of her accent and also because she is a Black Caribbean woman, “My accent might have something to do with it, and being a Black Caribbean woman also.” One participant stated, “I made a

conscious effort to change my accent at least to be able to speak so that people would understand me...” And one participant said that her accent was not the problem but being misunderstood because of the way she used certain words:

Not my accent but you have to realize that with different cultures certain words that you use may be reacted to differently. For example, I look at their faces and I can tell they got the wrong impression, I have to ask her to rephrase it and I ask her to rephrase what I said to you.

Americans like the Accent

Four participants (33.3%) described positive reactions from Americans to their accent. Two were complimented or copied. One participant remarked:

Actually, I’ve been complimented mostly. Even on my voicemail people would leave a message first to recognize that (her accent). Until it’s mentioned I don’t realize, I just think I’m fitting in. but once it’s mentioned, I take it mixed, because it’s something I don’t want to lose. Although I am going along in my daily routine not recognizing that there is so much of it. But I think it’s more positive.

One participant discussed her students’ reactions to her accent:

... Even the students at times, but now they are accustomed to it; they want me to say certain words over again, because they like how I say the words. Some of them their parents speak like me, they are Barbadian, etc. it’s a Caribbean thing. At first some of them did (have an issue) but when they got to know me—because most of them in the schools, their parents are so busy that they just want somebody to care for them—so after that they don’t see anything else about me.

Another participant talked about her coworkers remarking on her accent when she got excited:

My accent would come out when I was excited and my team members would laugh and say, “Oh Ms. X is really excited or upset, we can hear her accent!”...

Work-Family Balance

Impact of Living in the USA on Family Relationships

Back Home

When participants were asked, “How has living in the US impacted your family relationships?” 58.3% (7 of 12) discussed their families back home or what it would have been like for their families if they were back home in the West Indies. One participant described the impact of being separated from her siblings and mother who still live in the West Indies:

Yes, definitely. My mother lives back home, and it’s not the same when your teenage years were not spent with your mother. I think she (my mother) is getting comfortable around me now, but she wasn’t always comfortable because she didn’t know me very well, she knew me as a child and she pretty much got to know me as an adult. I think it definitely affected my mother-daughter relationship, I don’t have it... and then I never really had a mother-daughter relationship with my stepmother. My siblings, I don’t know—I’m closer to my stepsister—who I just refer to as my sister. I’m very close to my twin brother; our relationship was affected when I migrated because we were separated. But I know that my maternal siblings probably feel funny, on the Internet I just put up a photo of my stepsister and I captioned it, “I love my sister” and my mother’s daughter made a comment, “Very nice” but I’m sure she had a thought about it, because that comment was not made about one of the blood sisters that was there.

Another participant discussed being able to help her siblings who lived in the West Indies at the time with remittances, “I have been able to lend a hand to my siblings. Fortunately they have all migrated, and they have all done very well and taken advantage of education opportunities...”

Two participants mentioned having more help if they were “back home” in the West Indies. One participant stated:

I wonder had I not taken off (migrated), what would be different? I think a little selfishly along that line about others. For example, if I were in Jamaica in this same capacity I'd have a (domestic) helper to help me with different things and so on. But here you do everything (for yourself) and move along.

Four (41.6%) participants discussed their long distance relationship with their family members and not being able to see them frequently. One participant stated:

Well my mom and I, we are not as close. It's a long distance relationship. And I could tell you, not just living here, I feel like I can send money to her, and we talk on the phone. But my Mom and I, we've never been close.

Two (16.6%) participants spoke about their families having better opportunities in the United States than back home in the West Indies, including education, "There are opportunities for them that they would not have had if they were back home..." Another participant stated, "In terms of my immediate family, my husband and I have achieved at least our undergraduate degrees and had very stable jobs with good benefits..."

Children

Five participants (41.6%) spoke about their children when describing the impact that living in the United States has had on their family lives. One participant spoke of being more deliberate about work-family balance:

... In the states you have to be very deliberate about your balancing of family and work, and I say deliberate in that you can't leave anything up to chance. Back home you could say I'm going on the road please keep the child and you didn't worry about anything that would happen. Here you have to be very calculating, some places for example, even at church I wouldn't let my children stay at their (church members') house, so I had to be very careful... not that I don't send them out...

One participant also discussed the fact that her children did not have any connection to their grandparents:

I wish my kids had grandparents they could go and stay with. They don't have that. (My husband) would never let the kids go to stay with my mother even though I know my mother would take care of them. My church family is closer. My husband would have no problem letting the kids go hang with a church family member, but family members, no, because of the distance.

Two (16.6%) participants described having help with taking care of their children from family members. One participant described being a single parent and raising her child with the help of her family members:

I think what we brought from Jamaica was (the concept of) family first. We have really tried to maintain that focus that we take care of each other always. In every opportunity I had—I was given an opportunity to go to Europe, my son was 2 or 3 years (old). And I said to my family, “Here is the opportunity, what do you say, because I can't take my son with me.” And immediately the response was, “Let me help you pack.” And that whole discussion really illustrates what we are about as a family. I raised my son as a single parent, and it was really very hard especially after I moved to another state, I felt very isolated, and it took a while to get my footing there...

Another participant spoke of being able to raise her children well and providing them with a good education:

... We've been fortunate because I have not heard that everyone has had good experiences with their own family. We've raised 2 children quite challenging, quite fulfilling. In as much as the outcome hasn't been yet what I anticipated, I don't know how much measure I would put on life without it. The experiences are just so powerful, they make you into this person. I definitely see education as a ticket to move along positively. I have put in a lot of time preparing for them to advance, at least what I thought was trying to prepare for them to advance. But it's a bit stagnant in terms of one who should be in college who is in and out. I can't fathom the hesitancy when it's there just for the taking...

Extended Family

Two participants spoke about not being close to and/or able to see their extended families in the United States as much. One participant said:

Yes, not the immediate family, the immediate family is very strong, very together. But the extended we don't get to see each other as much, and my cousins in the US make comments about that.

Hectic Lifestyle in the United States

Three (25%) participants discussed the hectic lifestyle in America affecting their families. One participant remarked:

Yes, it has because it has changed our ability to have family devotion, to eat together. Back home we used to have breakfast together, we used to have devotion together in the morning. It impacted our style and hours of eating, people eat at different hours and eat different things. We now have different devotions; my daughter and I do it together, and my husband by himself. Sometimes we don't get to have devotion for days, sometimes I don't get to see my husband for days; he comes in after I leave for work. At one time we only slept together once per week, now it's 2 times per week. It's different. When you grow a certain way you maintain that, and we always try to make sure we have family devotion, that's very important.

Family Experiences with Racism

Children Picked on by Classmates

When asked, "Have you ever had to help your family (or children) cope with experiences of racism?" 25% of participants stated either their child or relative had been the victim of a racist statement made by a classmate. One participant relayed this experience:

My stepsister yes. Her daughter was going to school and was playing with dolls and the White girl looked at her and said, "You can't play with that doll, she's White." So my stepsister did not know how to address that when her daughter came home crying because she's sad. So I had to get

on the phone and talk to my niece, and I suggested to my stepsister that she get a mixture of races of dolls, which she did.

Another participant's daughter was a victim of name-calling:

A Hispanic classmate of my daughter told her she looked like "burnt chocolate and dirt"... I tell her that kids throw words at each other, don't buy into it, don't listen to it. Someone tells you "You look like chocolate," fine but you don't respond to her and that's it.

Exposure to White Environments

Four (33.3%) participants spoke of their children's exposure to White environments. One participant's children encountered racism in a White environment and she encouraged them to do their best. She remarked:

My son was playing in an orchestra (in a predominantly White neighborhood), and I had to explain (racism) to him. I remember the teacher was not a very positive teacher towards my daughter when she was in the chorus. She realized my daughter could sing but she was giving more solos and attention to the White kids, so I had to talk to them concerning that. However, they have matured now and I think they can handle themselves, I tell them, "You know what you're doing, and you're doing well. Just go out there and do your stuff." I try to be positive but at the same time I'm not going to withhold the experiences from them because of their ethnicity.

Two participants felt it was necessary for their children to become comfortable with mixed environments. One said:

... [I]n all that we've done I've exposed them to a lot of differences when we go on holidays they were not baffled about being the only Black kid in the pool at the time. And wherever we were people would ask, "How do you manage this?" And I'd say, "We work; we do what we will with our resources."... I sent them to private school where I even fitted into the minority group so that they got whatever benefit came out of that... And you make them aware that this is not how it is, the world has everyone and you are going to have to struggle your way through. I don't think they are intimidated by that, in the back of their minds they'll think, but they know that with confidence you will push on...

Two participants' children attended White colleges; one participant whose son went to a predominantly Black boarding high school and a predominantly White college stated:

... [T]hat's why I sent (my son and daughter) to that high school (which is predominantly Black) so they can get a strong sense of who they are, because they give them that. But for college, I want to make sure that they are in an environment that's mixed (Black and White), and I'm happy with where (my son) is going to college, because he'll get that there.

'Hang-ups' on Race

One participant spoke about her husband and daughter having "hang-ups" with race:

... That was why I said to (my husband) consciously, I want my kids to stay in the (church) school. We made that decision early, but I said I don't want them to have to deal with this Black and White issue. And (my husband) he still sometimes has a little hang-up with that. I said, "What if (our son) decides to date a White girl?" He has White friends. And... (my husband) said, "I would make sure he doesn't get married to her." And I said, "Honey, you've got to get past that, because yes, it might be difficult, but we live in a different world now. Do you have a problem with (our White friends)?" And he said, "No, he (White friend) and I are like brothers, we talk." They have a good relationship like (some of our other Black friends), they talk. But still I guess some things are just there...

Discrimination from White Teachers

Two participants discussed their children experiencing discrimination from White teachers. One participant spoke of her son's grades plummeting and being accused of not doing his homework himself:

Yes, the older one... that is another thing I said I had to be deliberate and I had to watch them... I really had to watch him because there were certain things that he was going through that he was too shy to say... and when he went to junior high school he had a rough time. He's very aggressive-academically; aggressive he likes to do well... he wanted 90's and 100 scores... [H]e was doing so well and I thought the teacher was for him and

he used to talk about her all the time. He started doing so well and some of the White kids weren't doing well, she started to belittle him, asked him, "Who helped you do this?" He became very upset, and I would see him in his room and I asked him what happened and he said, "The teacher said somebody helped me do this!" And I know that he sat down and did it (by himself), and when went he to high school it was the same thing. He was doing well, getting 90's, and one test he got a score in the 70's and I wondered why? And he said "I don't understand because I did my work and the teacher said I didn't hand it in," and when I asked other children they said he handed in the work, and the teacher said he couldn't find it. He had to ask Daddy to go home and retrieve the document from the computer and he handed it in...

No Complaints

Two participants stated that they did not hear their children or family members complain about racism. One participant however observed that while her son never complained his attitude changed after moving him from a predominantly White private school to a public school:

No they never did that (complain). With my son though, when I moved him out of the private setting and streamlined him (in public school)... because I thought that in certain settings you gain a little bit more... And then when I moved him into a public school he was really having fun! The dynamic of the other children, it was mixed and a bigger setting. So maybe he was feeling something and didn't say anything. But I knew he was happy...

Another participant said her family members had never really experienced racism, even though she knows it exists:

They always said it's (racism) big in the US, but we never had it spelt out for us. It's (there) a lot in Guyana, I never really faced it, in the workplace or so. They had little experiences there (Guyana), to get rid of Black people they will just close a whole corporation and it was Black people were out of jobs... but it never really filtered down to me, because I was a teacher, unless I wanted to move in to other sectors. It's just like here; if I were in other sectors I would face it more.

Other Family Issues

Black Man in America

When asked, “What major issues have you had to help your family members cope with?” one participant discussed the issue of being a Black man in America and sending her son to private school instead of public school:

Well one of the big things, especially with my son, because I work with folks in rehab, I get to see the effects that society can have on Black boys, the drugs, the gangs. The schools in our district are really horrible, but it didn’t bother me, because we are living in a nice neighborhood, and I knew I wouldn’t send him to the public school; he would never survive there. I wish I could have sent my kids to school in the Caribbean. I loved my high school and it’s diversity, and I wish my kids could have had that experience.

Educational Pursuits

One participant spoke about helping her sister in Jamaica with finances for going to school:

My sister back home is in nursing school, and when she was first starting she had to get the pre-qualifying courses, and I encouraged her a lot, and gave any help I could. Anything (money) I could send down I did. Every time she passed a subject, they made sure to call to let me know. I’m so proud of her...

Peer Pressure

Another participant spoke of her son being impacted by peer pressure and trying to help him prioritize:

Peer pressure. When they were younger they wanted the brand name stuff and I told them, “I refuse to spend \$100 on a pair of sneakers, I’ll take that money and buy some books and put in your head.” They can take the sneakers and the clothes from you, but what you have in your head they can’t take from you.” I had to preach that to them. I remember my oldest son asked me, “Is this the life you envision for yourself?” And I asked him, “What do you mean by that?” he said, “The car and the house...?” I

said, “You know the main thing for me is not to have a big gaudy house, no I’ll live the simple lifestyle, but I’ll invest in the mind.” I think he got it, because when he went off to school he realized that he could do all these things and there were other kids who can’t. They realized they’ve had so much exposure. They appreciate now what I was trying to do.

Learning the American System the Hard Way

One participant with a family of four discussed learning about the options she had in America too late:

In my family we laugh because we have learnt everything the hard way. But by the time we learnt if we knew all that in the beginning we were thinking things could have been so much better. You just figure out that when you arrived you could have perhaps taken civil service tests and probably be right there with your longevity, benefits, and all of that stuff. So when I go home now I look at situations and people, if only you knew that this dollar is harder to earn because it has had to deal with the weather, mass transit, prejudice and whatever, rather than you could walk, the sun shines, the rain comes, and the sun comes out again and it’s not as harsh as it sometimes is here.

Balancing Work and Family Life

Help from Family

Three participants (25%) discussed receiving help from family as a means for balancing their work and family life. One participant stated that her family works together to accomplish tasks, “I try, we do it together. We always worked together, when my daughters were younger my husband and I split the duties.” Another participant who was a single parent relied on her siblings to help her raise son. One participant said this about the her family:

I am incredibly blessed. My sister takes care of my children, and I am part of a very large extended family. My parents are here 3-4 times a year, and we [family] are incredibly close; they are a support network for my children.

Family First

Three participants spoke of placing family first in their priorities. One participant said:

I got very sick a few years ago, talk about balance. My son to this day thinks I'm a workaholic. So I figured out how to get things in order. And I started prophesying at the job, and I think that was part of my downfall. I would say things like, "If you die, the company will go on, it continues and will not lose a beat. When your son has a game, that's the priority. Not saying that you don't do your job, but that's the priority. Get someone else to do the report, do it ahead of time, because those (family moments) are the important things." Balance is so critical because tomorrow isn't promised.

Stayed Home with Children

One participant initially balanced work and family life by staying home when her children were younger and working part-time from home and using a nanny:

So (my husband) decided that I had to stay home, that I couldn't go to work, and all this time we were home schooling (my son), he never went to a (day care). So once (my daughter) was born we moved to (the suburbs), so I decided that I was going to stay home, and it was just so funny, I just had this passion in me. I started doing some consulting with this company in the West doing work by the Internet; it was just amazing. I sold computers, and do training. I actually went into people's homes and sold them computers and got them involved in working with computers, because I could build that around my schedule.

Workplace

Two participants spoke about their making suitable arrangements with their organizations, or preferring to work with organizations that were more flexible. One participant expressed this:

I speak to my associates about going on too much travel. Those with kids in my office don't travel much at all. I don't want to be the first one who comes to mind when travel is necessary. If that could change (traveling a lot), then that would be a major help in balancing work and family life.

Another participant stated:

... [U]ntil today, they [organization] have a wonderful policy for family, they are very family oriented. If I have to take off for my kids (I can)... And because of that, and it's a lot of women that were there, that we've grown like a family, we've seen each other through so many things, through marriage, through childhood, through divorce, through cancer. They've been so supportive, so it's been a great working environment. If I had to take off to go for any training (I could). I got exempt status really early, what that meant was I could go in, I could work, however many hours I worked, it was the same, which was really, really great...

Social Support Systems

Types of Social Support Systems

West Indian

One hundred percent of the participants (12) relied on West Indian friends, family or church friends for support. When asked the question, "Do you have a support system now?" five participants spoke about having a mixture of people being in their support systems. One participant stated:

Oh my gosh, it is varied, and because I'm now 50 years old, and I've lived in this country for about 31 years, I have still a close network of West Indians and that never goes away, I have an enormous extended family here in the US, the UK, back home, in Trinidad, in Jamaica. What is fascinating about our family is this sense of connectivity that transcends physical distance.

Another participant stated that her support network included, "...family, friends, church, coworkers." Eight (66.6%) participants stated that their main support system was their family and two participants out of that number spoke about not wanting to be far away from them during tertiary education. One participant remarked:

That core support has always been family. I could not have made it without my family. As I said, my parents came later, they were the ones who sent me to school. One of the reasons I chose the graduate school I

did was because I did not want to leave the state and that was one of the biggest mistakes.

Non-West Indian

Three participants (25%) discussed having non-West Indians as part of their support systems. One participant stated that she had West Indian and non-West Indian friends:

... My friends... are separated into groups; I have really close friends that I can (go) to for advice, they include friends from church, I have Black friends and I have White friends (both) from Law school, (laughs) they don't interact. I have an older group of friends from church as well.

Professional Networks & Mentors

Five participants discussed relying on the support of either a mentor or their professional associations. One participant said this about one of her professional organizations:

I belong to an organization (within her field) and it's all of the (executives) of Fortune 100 companies. And I know that when I'm in that room with them, they're grappling with the same issues professionally that I'm grappling with. They may have had experiences that I can draw on... Again, it is a community of individuals who when I'm dealing with difficult issues, in confidence I can either talk to a group of people, or one-on-one with someone. So there are a number of different networks that I connect with and belong to professionally, because it's important for not just networking to your point, but also for connectivity. So the other way we use those networks is if God-forbid something should happen to me and I lost my job for instance, that network provides those kinds of access to opportunities, because I do that for people in those networks who find themselves either out of work, or if they're trying to do a project and they need some insight, that's the way in which we really support each other.

Another participant included her mentors in her support system, "It really depends on what part of my life you're talking about. If it is work, my two mentors (West Indian) they are senior attorneys..."

Professional Networks

Job Related

When asked, “Are you a part of any professional networks/associations outside of your job?” 83.3% of participants stated that they were involved in professional associations. Six participants (41.6%) were involved in associations that were directly relevant to their jobs or fields. Some of these associations included volunteer organizations, executive support groups/associations, and unions. One participant stated this about being a part of her association, “...[I]t has given me the ability to work with different races...”

Another participant recalled receiving little help from her union when she faced difficulties at her workplace:

...I tried with the UFT but they couldn't do anything for me. I tell my husband and daughter all the time no one can do anything for you but you and God. All the union could do for me was help me go get my teeth cleaned. When he showed up they had a hearing, all he (union leader) did was listen, he said nothing. Now when they have union meetings I don't vote. No one has done anything for me...

General Networking Organizations

Four (25%) participants referenced non-job related or networking organizations in their description of the various organizations they were involved in. Some of these included National Society for Black MBAs, an organization for professional Black women, an organization for African American executives, a support group for professional Black women, and a missionary organization (church related). One participant said this about her support group for Black women in her organization:

... [S]everal years ago when I started working with the company, a young lady, a Black American befriended me. She was... a lot more politically aware than I was. I spent a good portion of my life being very naïve... I started to work for the company and there were not too many Black folks in positions of influence—and (I) felt that something ought to be done about it. So she and several others—and I just kind of tagged along—started this organization to talk about what’s going on in the workplace. And that organization today is a nationwide organization. The focus has been networking, understanding who you are and the role you play. Understanding the corporate environment and how to maneuver it. That whole experience has extended over many, many years...

Mentors, Sponsors, and Advocates at Work

Mentors

When asked the question, “Do you (or did you) have a mentor or sponsor figure at work?” 75% of participants said they had a mentor figure at work. Six (50%) participants of that number described their mentors as persons they sought advice from. One participant stated her definition of a mentor:

I’ve always had mentors, sponsors, and advocates who have been an integral part of my professional life. I make a distinction between those three. Mentors give advice, and there is a certain degree of vulnerability and openness. Your mentor should not be your boss. You should be able to consult your mentor on some business issues, vision for the organization, and give you another perspective of your role within a particular context...

Another participant relayed how much she relies on her mentors and the types of questions she asks them:

A lot, especially when it’s work. When it comes to politics, I will truly listen to them because I can definitely just go on my gut, I’m a fighter, I don’t know how not to be... I go to my mentors quite often, I go to them with questions of law, if I have a challenging case, or not so challenging case, but something that’s new to me, I’ll go to them and if they don’t have the answer they will direct me to someone else. I don’t have a

problem walking around and asking senior attorneys that I respect questions. I don't just stick to them, I go to different people of different races, but I tend to be with them a lot. They give me life advice too in general. For instance they tell me, "Don't get stuck in this job, you don't want to get stuck here too long so you cannot branch out."...

Three participants spoke of having family members as their mentors. One participant stated, "My older sister (was my mentor); she teaches Math also. I guess she gave me guidance-academic, career, how to prepare for exams." Another participant spoke of an assigned or paid mentor she had at her job as a teacher:

At my other school I had a mentor, but they basically told me I was doing well. I shared with other teachers my ideas for teaching... when I had problems I would tell her what was happening and she asked me what I needed. But right now my assistant principal and I work as partners, whatever I'm teaching I share with her. She is supposed to be my mentor, she's paid (that's her role), she'll work with me, she's like a parent, see where you are, what you need.

Advocates

Two participants (16.6%) spoke of having an advocate type figures at their jobs. One participant said, "An advocate is someone who is actively and aggressively advocating on your behalf." Another participant spoke of her boss as an advocate, "Yes my Chief Nursing Officer I know she looked out for me a lot. She gives me good feedback... I think if I left this job I could still have that relationship with her."

Sponsors

Five participants described sponsor figures in their work lives. One participant said this about her sponsor:

Yes there is one person I credit a lot, a White man. He was the one who said, "You can do a lot better than you are doing. Get up now," this was during working hours, "go over to (the university), and see a counselor.

Another participant talked about a consultant who always referred her for jobs within their field:

... I met this other guy, (a consultant) who said, "You are so talented, how would you like to teach for two hours, teach girls that are troubled computer skills? I think your personality will suit them..."

No Mentors

Two participants mentioned having no mentor/sponsor/advocate figures in their lives. One participant said, "Not really." Another participant bemoaned the lack of advocates she had in her career:

... After I left the (graduate) school, (I didn't join the sorority while I was there) I thought about trying to get into an alumni sorority wing, it was harder for somebody to sponsor me. You had to be sponsored by somebody, who knows you well, and you know whom I had to turn to? An African-American, and she didn't want to do it...

Mentored/ Sponsored /Advocated for Others

Two participants who never had mentors (outside of family members) spoke about mentoring or advocating for younger individuals. One participant shared this:

No, and I recognize that even though I was a great advocate, I was a mentor to many, but never had any myself. I only had one relationship with that Japanese woman, and that became strained by that White woman who got in the middle of it. Now peers that supported, yes. Now that I look back I think that was part of my downfall of not having mentors, I believe I should have had a few, but I didn't... I was a mentor to many. It's critical to success.

Other Findings

There were certain topics that were revealed during interviews that were not covered in the interview protocol. Some of these included the role of religion, specifically Christianity, and the issue of skin color/'shadism'.

Role of Religion: Christianity

Approximately seventy-five percent (9 of 12) of participants made mention of church or religion in their interviews (see Table 2). This took various forms, for example, one participant described her search for an ethnically diverse Catholic church:

At my church, the reason I joined it as opposed to the one in my neighborhood is because they have more Black people; I went looking for them. When I went to the church in my neighborhood, which has mostly White and Hispanic, they didn't want to hold my hand. I was like, "I don't need this; I have choices." I remember one specific time I was standing beside a White woman, and she did not want to give me her hand when it came time to do the Lord's Prayer, but when it was time to do the Sign of Peace, she extended her hand, and I looked at her and said, "You've got to be kidding!" And I turned away and didn't say anything more than that... I wasn't going to curse her out but I was going to let her know that no, it was not going to happen, not with me, not that day!

As previously discussed, many participants described the importance of their faith and spiritual life in coping with their jobs. One participant, a senior executive remarked:

As a... woman of West Indian descent... I come from a tradition of being very faith based... my relationship with my faith is very important, and it's not something I check at the door. So it's not uncommon for me as I am talking to leaders about leadership that I talk about how I bring balance to my life... it means that I ground myself everyday, I have a faith based practice of meditation... I've recognized being here over the years and in other places, it enables others for whom their faith is also important to be able to bring that faith to manifest in a way that doesn't cause harm in the organization... I was with a group of leaders—it was a particularly difficult experience we were going through... and I was supposed to talk to them about leadership, and I had a whole presentation prepared, the whole nine yards. I said to them, "I was coming to spend time with you this morning, I really prayed and I asked for guidance for how is the best way to be with you. What came to me, or the way the Spirit moved me, was not to talk to you from a set of overheads and slides, my faith practice this morning lead me to say, just authentically stand and talk with you, about how you are feeling..." I got four emails... from four participants who said, "The fact that you stood and talked about your faith openly, and the fact that you are not somehow harmed in this organization gives me permission to do that..."

Additionally, five participants (41.6%) discussed relying on the support of church friends (see Table 3). One participant described her church family who prayed for her during a challenging period at work:

... I think the year I went through, all the degradation I used to feel so emotionally down. Then someone at church just testified about being embarrassed and praying and claiming. And that thing (stress) just went... a few brothers and sisters at church were praying for me as well. One sister said one day in church how much she loved me and prayed for me...

Skin Color/'Shadism'

Two (16.6%) participants made mention of being light skinned or “cream” in their interviews. These quotes were included under the section ‘Work Challenges’. However, the aspects relating to color will be highlighted again here. Additionally, participants were also asked to indicate how they define themselves ethnically (see Table 3). One participant in discussing her work challenges stated, “I was cream, I was not Black, and my sex had nothing to do with it...” Another, in describing an experience in college in the dining room recalled a White person saying of her, “Oh, she knows how to use a knife and fork,” ...And I thought to myself, “What if I had been really dark? What would they have said then?”

Table 2

Comparison of participants' demographics, Christianity and ethnic self-identification

Age Range	Years in West Indies	Industry	Position/Level	Employed in first Career/Industry	Education/ Degree level	Christianity/ Church Discussed	Ethnic Self-Identification
47-50	19	Corporate: Health care/medical devices	Senior Executive	Yes	MBA	Yes	West Indian American, African American
36-46	8	Education	Supervisor	Yes	Bachelors	Yes	Jamaican
47-57	13	Communications: corporate/Consulting	Executive—Director	No	MBA	Yes	Caribbean-American
30-35	11	Law	Associate	Yes	J.D., Masters	Yes	Black, Afro-Caribbean
47-57	25	Media/Broadcasting, Health care	Manager	No	Masters	No	Black
30-35	15	Financial/Banking	Team leader	Yes	Masters	Yes	Black- West Indian
58-70	30	Education	Supervisor	Yes	Bachelors	No	Black
58-70	23	Education	Professional	Yes	Masters	Yes	Black, Jamaican
47-57	32	Health care	Manager	Yes	Masters	Yes	Black
58-70	21	Financial/Banking	Senior executive	No	Some college	No	Caribbean
47-57	24	Education	Administrative supervisor	Yes	Masters	Yes	Black
36-46	39	Education	Professional	Yes	Masters	Yes	Black

Table 3

Comparison of participants' demographics, non-West Indian involvement and types of social support systems

Age Range	Years in West Indies	Industry	Position/Level	Career Change	Education/Degree level	Non-West Indian Involvement	Social Support System
47-50	19	Corporate: Health care/medical devices	Senior Executive	No	MBA	Professional associations	Family
36-46	8	Education	Supervisor	No	Bachelors	Professional associations, Friends	Husband, mentors
47-57	13	Communications-Corporate/Consulting	Executive—Director	Yes	MBA	Support groups, Family	Family
30-35	11	Law	Associate	No	J.D., Masters	Friends, Professional associations	Family, friends
47-57	25	Media/Broadcasting, Health care	Manager	Yes	Masters	Political associations, Professional networking	Family
30-35	15	Financial/Banking	Team leader	No	Masters	Professional associations	Family, mentors
58-70	30	Education	Supervisor	No	Bachelors	No	Family, church, peers
58-70	23	Education	Professional	No	Masters	No	Family, church
47-57	32	Health care	Manager	No	Masters	No	Family
58-70	21	Financial/Banking	Senior executive	Yes	Some college	No	Family
47-57	24	Education	Administrative supervisor	No	Masters	No	Family, friends, church, coworkers
36-46	39	Education	Professional	No	Masters	No	Family, church

CHAPTER V

CASE STUDIES

Overview

In order to give readers a deeper and accurate understanding of the various work experiences of professional West Indian immigrant women, two cases were selected and described in-depth using a case study format (Yin, 2009). These two cases were selected to demonstrate the wide range of experiences of the participants of the current study. As a result, the two cases are very different. The first case highlights the accomplishments and challenges some West Indian women in senior management roles may face. The second case highlighted a myriad of hurdles some West Indian women may encounter in their quest for professional success. Both cases include the strategies these women utilized in order to attain their success. All identifying information has been disguised to protect the identities of the participants.

Case Study #1- Susan the Senior Executive

Susan is a Barbadian immigrant in her 50s and a senior executive of a Fortune 100 corporation. She has two children, a son and a daughter, and is married. Susan left her family when she was 20 years old, and migrated to the United States. At that time she was unmarried and had no children. Before migrating she held a job as a civil servant and although she had no tertiary education, she had outstanding British examination passes, 9 O' Levels and 3 A' Level subjects.

Her primary intention for migrating to the United States was for general upward mobility and not just educational opportunities,

Yes, interestingly enough, not educational opportunities, because probably like in Jamaica, you have UWI as well, the University of the West Indies, (where) you could pursue higher education, because I have GCE O' levels and A' levels. You could pursue as a Barbadian, higher levels, I could go to the University free of charge. I could go to UWI in Trinidad, Jamaica, or Barbados free of charge at that point in time. But it truly was something beyond the educational opportunities I was seeking, because I always knew I was going to continue my education. That had been drilled into my head, and to this day still in my head is this idea that one day I will pursue a PhD... So it wasn't coming here for the educational opportunities, it was much broader opportunities.

Although Susan migrated for broader opportunities, she initially did not plan to stay in the United States; in fact she did not have a long-term plan,

... I planned on going back home actually. Well I should be clear, I didn't really have a plan, I knew I was coming (to the United States); it wasn't like I had a timeline laid out. I knew I was coming here to pursue opportunities and at some point in time, I knew I would make my way back home. But it really was this understanding that I would come here, pursue this dream, and return home after whatever period of time. So, I always have had the intention of returning home.

Susan lived in an ethnically diverse neighborhood and she specifically chose to live there for that reason,

I live in—I call it a little United Nations because I'm blessed, and we specifically picked this community. So on my street in my community are African Americans, Africans, Indians, Jews, Christians, Episcopalians, Methodists, Caucasians... I know that people struggle with finding those communities. And you can. It took me almost a year to find this community. So they do exist.

Susan's parents did not encourage her to migrate, and became even more concerned about her welfare when she was unable to find a job in a professional field.

Susan was also very disappointed with her inability to find a job and decided to take a job as a live-in domestic helper with a White Jewish family,

Primarily, when I first came to this country, I think like a lot of West Indians that come here, I had the equivalent of a high school diploma when I came here, and breaking in to what would have been the same kind of work that I would have done, that I did actually, before I came here. Because I worked for a year, one year after high school, I worked for a year for the ...government writing grants, to secure funding for projects in the Caribbean, and managed those projects. So it was the equivalent of a pretty significant job right out of high school... So after a couple of months of beating my head against the wall without much success, because I didn't have a high school diploma from the US—that's the other thing I learnt—I actually, because I'm a very practical person, and I've always been raised to be practical, and very much identified with what you said about, "You must take care of yourself, you must be independent," I started to work for a family that lived in (my city) away from home, and I took care of them and their dog... Which was very difficult for my parents as you can imagine, because they had not raised me to take care of other people. That was just from their perspective, and my mother would say to me, "Why don't you just come home? This can't be the dream that you're pursuing?" And I don't know, there was something about me, and there is still something about me that sees all of this as part of my journey, and that's not the destination, it's part of the journey.

Susan notes that her experience working for this White Jewish family was mixed, however she was able to learn a lot from them, including the value of lifelong education. She also obtained her GED with their support and afterward got employment with a company,

Again, that was part of my journey, and eventually after I worked with them, got my high school diploma, left them, and went to work, my first job, I worked in the city for the 'Yellow Pages' division of a company...

(The) husband was a physician... he was an incredibly compassionate, caring man... And what I learnt from him was the value of education. He knew I loved to read, so he would give me books. And what she did (his wife), is she would take me to school at night. And when I made it clear to them that I wanted to pursue my education, she would drive me to the high school at night to take classes. And just this idea of a whole different orientation; while they were not orthodox Jews, she was going through her Bat Mitzvah; she must have been 50 years old at that time. So this idea of

constant focus on education and learning, even at that stage of your life, was a real eye-opener for me and help me put into perspective that I'm 20 years old, and I'm only now starting out, but she's fifty, and still doing something that 13 year old Jewish boys do. So it was very interesting... I learnt a real appreciation for differences, because for all intents and purposes, that was my first difference, because I grew up in a West Indian country, around West Indians constantly, I came here, lived in a West Indian neighborhood, and this was my first experience for an extended time, being with people who are different. It was an experience.

Being surrounded by non-West Indians all the time was also difficult for Susan and so she went home to her West Indian community on the weekends for kinship and support,

... [W]hat I did with them as most West Indians did, I would go on Mondays, because they lived very far from me, about a 3 hour ride from me... So they gave me the option of staying with them during the week, or going home. So I stayed with them, I went (to work with the family) on Mondays, and left on Fridays. So this idea of having a support network was really important, because for 5 days out of 7, I was in an environment that was completely foreign to me, and I can guarantee you, there were no West Indians out there. So it was me and these 2 little White people out there. But those are formative experiences; those are things you never forget.

Susan later pursued her undergraduate degree in a predominantly Black college with many African Americans and West Indians. She chose to attend this college because it enabled her to go to school at night and get her degree in four years, and also because of the diverse student background. Susan made friends not only with West Indians,

... I still have lots of friends that I made at that college that are not West Indian, but where I connected socially, and where I connected culturally was really with West Indians.

Susan was therefore able to connect not just with West Indians but with non-West Indians as well, all the time realizing that her West Indians connections were culturally based and therefore the most comfortable.

Included in her current support system are West Indians in the United States, the Caribbean and the United Kingdom who regularly visit her. Susan placed a great emphasis on the role of her support system in her achieving success,

... That's why this idea of a support network, as a real determinant of success, is so important, because, quite frankly, this country with all of its opportunities can be so lonely personally, it can be lonely professionally because of the role that I play, it just can be very lonely. Because there are times when I'm dealing with issues that I just can't talk to anyone about. Not anyone in my family, any of my friends, or anyone in this corporation, depending on what the issue is. And sometimes you just—I find myself grappling with issues that I really can't talk to anybody about—but the ability to know that there is a community that accepts me irrespective of title and education, just accepts me for who I am, is fundamentally important, and I think that's something that is so special and differentiating about the West Indian community. I imagine that Asian communities might be the same way, and other communities might have that dynamic about them. But I do find that very strong. And maybe the corollary in the United States is African-Americans have their family reunions, maybe that's the piece to it.

Susan was also very active in several professional associations and networking groups and relied on the professional support of her colleagues in these groups as well,

I've been doing that (networking) from the time I came to this country, it is around the connection and the network, and being around like-minded folks is what I call it. So, I belong to an organization and it's all of the (executives in her field) of Fortune 100 companies. I (also) belong to an organization... of the senior African-Americans in Fortune 100 companies who are 1 or 2 levels reporting to the Chairman or Chief Executive Officer. It is a community of individuals who when I'm dealing with difficult issues, in confidence I can either talk to a group of people, or one-on-one with someone. So there are a number of different networks that I connect with and belong to professionally, because it's important for not just networking to your point, but also for connectivity. So the other way we use those networks is if God-forbid something should happen to me and I lost my job for instance, that network provides those kinds of access to opportunities, because I do that for people in those networks who find themselves either out of work, or if they're trying to do a project and they need some insight, that's the way in which we really support each other.

The individuals in these groups aided Susan in coping with challenges commonly faced by executives and also provided assistance with job-hunting for those who were searching.

In these associations as well as on the job Susan interacted with many non-West Indians and discussed experiencing a “paradigm shift” in her views on race relations in the United States and its importance to her as West Indian of African descent. One of these organizations, National Training Labs, helped her recognize that non-West Indians, including Whites preferred to distinguish between Afro-Caribbean immigrants and African Americans in order to continue holding their beliefs about African Americans as being “lazy, shiftless and uneducated.”

Some of the challenges faced by Susan at work included the “typical business challenges,” as well as having a different leadership style as an African American woman of West Indian descent with a tradition of being ‘very faith based’. Susan practiced meditating, reading her Bible and praying everyday and did not feel it necessary to leave that aspect of her persona out of her work interactions. She recounted her colleagues discomfort in her sharing her religious beliefs and encouraged others to talk about their discomfort with her. Ultimately Susan’s goal was to create an inclusive work environment not just on the basis of gender and race/ethnicity, but also on multiple levels,

I do it (share my religious beliefs) openly, because I think that’s the only way, that you can really create inclusion. Inclusion isn’t about hiring Black people, and hiring women; it’s about really causing within the organization openness to having openness and a skill building to allow difference to manifest itself, and then having the skill to be able to talk about that difference... I’ve had this conversation with someone, the person said, “I wonder if you’re judging me because I don’t go to church everyday.” And I said, “No, what I’m trying to do is send a signal that whatever your faith, you may be praying before the plasma TV with a big bowl of popcorn every Sunday, that may be the thing for you, that’s your

faith, and if that's your faith, I'm not going to stand in judgment of you. I'm not here to convert you. I'm here to say that we have to be able to be open about these things."

Susan also felt responsible for representing the African Americans in her organization and felt blessed to be in her role,

... I also feel very responsible for representing the African-Americans in this organization, that's not something I can pick up, and put down, and pretend, to be anything other than I am. I consider it a blessing to have the role that I do, but I do also, I'm very accountable and responsible for the role that I have, and the implications for that role...

Susan believed that her former school experiences of discipline in the Caribbean enabled her to cope with her work challenges as well as her experience working for her uncle, a medical doctor, who served lower income African American patients in the city. The latter experience helped her remain compassionate and focused on being of service to others,

Discipline in school, taking pride in oneself. We had to wear uniforms, and they had to be neat. You would never dream of going outside untidy or messy, you just wouldn't dream of doing that. And that may be different now, but that's who I am, that will always be a part of me, and I'll always be profoundly grateful for those things. Because they have a direct correlation to work, particularly at senior levels, when everything about you is under scrutiny, every single thing, and I have such a heightened sensitivity about that...

I've always had a piece of me that's about service, and serving others, and that's (working with her uncle) the first opportunity that I've had to put it into action, and it's what I've been doing ever since then. So as another seminal kind of influence, when I worked with the first doctor and his wife, and then working for my uncle, these are the seminal experiences that continue to shape how I think about my job now. You will hear me talk often about being in service to others, and that is what drives me, and that is what I do everyday.

In addition to work challenges Susan also recounted ethnic stereotypes she faced at work. Her White colleagues seemed surprised at her being a Black woman and being in a senior executive role, being Ivy League educated, and being articulate. Susan rebuffed these stereotypes by saying, “What I’m taking from that is the assumption that because I’m a Black female these things represent an anomaly in me as opposed to the norm.”

Susan also felt that part of her career success was attributed to the positive role mentors, sponsors and advocates played in her professional life. She defined each figure,

I’ve always had mentors, sponsors, and advocates who have been an integral part of my professional life. I make a distinction between those three. Mentors give advice, and there is a certain degree of vulnerability and openness. Your mentor should not be your boss. You should be able to consult your mentor on some business issues, vision for the organization, and to give you another perspective of your role within a particular context. Sponsors are individuals who are willing to speak up for you and say, “I think X would be a really good addition”. An advocate is someone who is actively and aggressively advocating on your behalf. I have always approached people and asked them to help me, and I have not had someone say no. It has been very rewarding playing that role in others lives.

Career success in Susan’s eyes was based on her subjective definition, and was focused on “doing work that will bring integrity” as well as continuous growth. She felt she was successful at managing the changes in the business environment as well as “leading with integrity, openness, and courage.” Susan’s career challenges appeared to be few including keeping her skills relevant and not becoming “jaded or cynical”.

Fortunately for Susan, balancing work and family demands was not difficult for her because her sister, who lived with her helped her care for her children, and her parents who visited regularly also helped her take care of the children. However, she had

to help her children deal with racism at school when her son was called a “Burnt crispy French fry”. She took immediate action by visiting the school,

I went down to the school and spoke with them about it. And I give credit to the school system for how they dealt with that. They used it as a learning opportunity in class and assembly for diversity and inclusion. They have a zero tolerance policy in school for racism and bullying.

Susan also shared that the Caribbean served as an “oasis” for her. She often thought of herself as a “poor girl from the Caribbean” which helps to keep her grounded. Susan also shared a few words of advice for young West Indian immigrant women, she emphasized knowing oneself, to never compromise on integrity, to remember that you are unique as a West Indian, and be professional and have a good work ethic.

Case Study #2- Joy the Journalist

Joy is a journalist, and a single woman in her 50s originally from Jamaica. She migrated on her own in her early 20s to further her education. Before migrating to the United States Joy worked as a civil servant and emphasized that she was not pressured by her parents to leave Jamaica,

My first trip here was immediately out of high school at about 19 years old. I had a friend whose father was here, and she invited me to come look for her for vacation. And I came and looked around, that time it was the good old days. And she said, “I’m making so much money, you’ve just got to come here!” So... I came back at 23 years. I came up, and in those days, for some reason I just loved to read and loved media, so I came up and said I would really like to come up and do media, and these people make you feel like there’s nothing impossible in America, so then I could go to school. So I came back at 23 years, and never went back, I mean, came up and started living here.

... It wasn’t a push by my parents that I had to go; it was solely my decision.

Joy also emphasized that her siblings were also professionals who still resided in Jamaica and were very successful. Her parents, especially her father always emphasized being educated and for that reason only she came to pursue educational opportunities not available in Jamaica at the time,

I came here an idealist, meaning I came here—because remember, I didn't come (from Jamaica) as an economic refugee—we had gotten basic education in Jamaica through high school. I was actually working, I got my first little job at 19 years old, at the (working for the government), I'll never forget it. There was no pressure to leave. It's just that I came here—I had a sister that was at university at the time... and she's still there doing very well! I had a little sister (who) ... went to University of the West Indies. We were doing fine. My younger brother was (in a good high school), we were all doing well educationally. And we were living comfortably [as Jamaicans]. But then I came here and realized the possibilities. So I came here and realized that I can't give this up. So that's how I came here and decided to stay.

Joy sensed from her first trip to the United States that there was nothing she could not accomplish in the United States. When Joy migrated to the United States she did so on a non-immigrant visa but was able to attain legal status with the help of her lawyer,

[W]hen I came I wasn't straight, but in those days it wasn't like now. Because all I had to do in those days, I had a friend and he had gone to London and was working in one of those engineering companies... And I wrote him and told him I would like to stay, and if he could write me a letter on his letterhead. So he sent me a letter on the letterhead, I took it to a lawyer, and the lawyer charged me fifty dollars, and I got my visa. The rest is history, that's how easy it was.

Joy's first priority after attaining legal status was to find a job and begin tertiary education,

I had another friend (from Jamaica) who... was doing his Ph.D. ... Jobs were not hard to get, so he told me to go down to the university and try to get a job there, because once you were working there, classes were free. So I got a job there, I could hardly type, but I went in trying to type, and of course the (Jamaican) in me, I started doing as many courses as I could. So

they allowed me to go to classes, so I got my first taste of education at that university. When I graduated with my Bachelor's, I had more than 120 credits, because I was just doing courses that I loved. It was later on that I started to major, and that was how I started my education here.

The university Joy worked for was predominantly White with very few Blacks, so she chose to interact socially mainly with her West Indian friend who was completing his Ph.D. while she was at school, and spent the rest of her time in the library,

...[T]here was not enough (Black people there) to have colleagues. You saw people and you said, "Hello, how are you?" But it wasn't like we'd hang out after to talk, I wouldn't go to them for notes, I'd take my own notes in class, and I showed up in class. You know I think that was the Jamaican in me, I'd always show up for class, I'm not one of those who would go up to people and say, "Oh I missed class, can I have your notes?" No. I always tried to be in class and do my class work, because I was very bookish, although I was out of Jamaica I took time out to spend an entire day in the library just to do my work. So I didn't have any friends per se, but I learnt quite a bit.

It was more important to Joy to focus on doing well in school than on making friends with her classmates, especially since there were few Blacks at the university.

Joy's first interactions were primarily with her West Indian friend at school, and she lived with a friend from Jamaica until she acquired her own apartment. However, the neighborhood she first lived in was predominantly White,

... [I]t (the neighborhood) was all White. In those days when you went on the (town), there were several theaters; people would tell you they were going there to shop, there were several clothing places, and places to eat, it was very White. At the time West Indians were coming in, and these were professionals. And I remember the building in which my friend lived, you had an outside awning for the building, and lights on the walls, and by the time most of us started coming in, the White population must have left in 2 months. In 2 months the entire building left. And we knew, and you must remember that at the time these weren't lower class West Indians that were moving in like now, because now you have a lot of lower class West Indians coming up. These were professional West Indians who were traveling here. But they saw the color; we didn't see it. But I think the

landlords saw something else, because we learnt later that we were paying 3 times the rent they were paying.

In addition to the emotional sting of the White residents leaving her neighborhood because Black people were moving in, Joy was also financially affected because she paid a much higher rent. Additionally, when the White residents began to move back into the neighborhood Joy's landlords tried to force her out of the building,

... Now they're trying to gentrify it, and all the 'big foot' running back... True gentrification, as a matter of fact, the building is mostly White again, because they are coming in from the major city, and it's just a few of us who are Black. It just goes to show you that West Indians don't understand, because when a lot of the West Indians who I know were leaving they didn't understand that if it was even to buy for business purposes they could have held on to it and used it. I tried to buy later on, but the racism came in. In those days my apartment was going for \$50,000. So most of them in the building are White, and it's just because I'm there for so long, and I tried to buy the apartment, and they even tried to take me to court because they don't want me to get it... It's all about racism, because there are other people there who are their (Whites) own, who are old, and they're not doing that to them. We (West Indians) like to kid ourselves, but the reality is they still don't want Blacks. And remember, we are the better educated among our own group. So it's not about knowing our rights, it's about not about default on rent, it's not about how we carry ourselves, and it's not about being poor, they just don't want you around.

Joy faced the negative psychological effects of racism in her living arrangements, and this caused her great distress.

At times, Joy also felt a lack of support from her West Indian friends for her educational pursuits,

Well, it's strange, because I knew this girl, because we were both from the same parish, we went to the same elementary school... so her mother came up to the city and she got her nursing degree at the public hospital. And she came up here, in those days they were looking for nurses, and she came up here and got a job overnight, and she was doing 2 shifts, and in those days, now that I look back at it, she was making \$1500-\$2000 per month, in those days it was money! ... She was my very good friend. For

some reason I never wanted to be in the clinical part of things... and I think because of her work we lost the bond, she would come in the evening, I was there during the day, and my other interest was academia. She was already a nurse, I wasn't and I wanted to catch up in academia.

Then after that I decided I wanted journalism, and I had another good friend here who was working for a financial investment firm, and I said that I wanted to go to college, and she was actually discouraging me. She said, "If you go to school, you're going to spend a lot of money to get an education," which is true, "you're going to be owing student loans, and you wouldn't be making anymore money that I am." Which is true, but the emphasis is on education. So surprisingly, that friend and I drifted, and I said, whatever it is in me, I can't explain it, but I wanted to get into learning. She wanted to be in things, she felt that I was too idealistic, and we moved in separate directions.

I remember going to a Christmas Party... and I was going to graduate school in January, and when I told her (my friend) that I was going to school, it became like I was defending myself. After I left her, someone asked me what I had for dinner, and I couldn't even remember if I had dinner, because I had to be explaining to her why I was taking this leap to go to school. This was a friend I knew from back home! But she felt that I was doing something so stupid... She was saying, "You're not going to make any money." The Christmas celebration was spent defending my right to get an education. I'm sure today if she saw me she would say I told you so. (Laughs) But, I'm not giving up on my knowledge, never, ever will.

Outside of her college experience, Joy made several efforts to form connections with non-West Indians, including African Americans, in professional and political associations,

I always believe in organizations, and that was where another Caribbean friend and I developed a relationship... I decided to volunteer for the governor's campaign... So I was interacting with African Americans who were in politics. They weren't Caribbean, but politics is a bond, so we shared the same interest. I was socializing with people, but only on the political level. I thought it was a much better relationship (with African Americans and West Indians) than now, because I think now it has been fragmented, and I think most of it is our fault because we came here and we started telling these people that they don't know how to grasp opportunities, and that there's really no racism, and these people knew what they were talking about.

So now they (African-Americans) see us, and they say, “You guys come here and pretend as if it was a different level, and they treated you as foreigners. Are they still treating you as foreigners? ... Now you guys are coming and getting all of our Affirmative Action, and it was for us and not for you...” I can’t say anything, because when they bring in Blacks, they never ask if you are Black West Indian, they just say they have some Blacks. African-Americans were not given an education—they were put upon. It’s because we came here with a different philosophy that we were able to force through. But now that we have shown them what we can do, they still put up barriers, because they don’t really want you to be that aggressive. It was a front to fool people... [W]hen I would go on assignments, I saw that they looked out for their own, and I can’t blame them.

Joy found that because of the tensions between African Americans and West Indians she was unable to develop strong relationships with most of them, despite sharing similar interests. She also felt excluded by them as they chose to help each other only at work. Joy felt it was important to acknowledge the difficulties African Americans faced in overcoming slavery and racism, and also pointed out that despite the fact that Black West Indians have proven their ability to make significant economic contributions to the United States they still face challenges professionally and otherwise due to their race.

Joy also emphasized the importance of joining with the African Americans in order to overcome racism and attain upward mobility because West Indian immigrants cannot do so on their own,

The truth is most of our people can’t employ anybody. Entrepreneurship was not encouraged in the islands, it was more about a job; a job cannot get you and your family where you want to go, if wealth is what you want, only owning your own (business) will. We all thought, I’m going to get this by working at wherever. It’s a paycheck; if it cuts off, what happens?...

...We weren’t such a force because we were few in numbers, and were mostly upper middle class, but when it comes to working with us, they (Whites) don’t want to work with us. They want to go back to the days of the housekeepers. We were not housekeepers in our own country...

Joy faced a number of challenges in professional settings including graduate school, and at work,

... I just loved media. I went to a college and did a course in media, and they complimented me on how well I wrote... So I went to graduate school, did my Masters (in Journalism) and got my first cultural shock. When I went to graduate school, I lived on campus, and my roommate was White. I had never lived with a White person before, but she's learning about me, I'm learning about them. And the first thing she said to me, "My aunt's helper is from Jamaica." So what the hell am I supposed to do with that? I suppose she thinks she's paying me a compliment to tell me that her aunt's helper is Jamaican... I'd go to the dining hall, and there's only one table for all the Blacks, so of course Black folk we go to that table, only for social support, because the rest of the dining hall is all them (White people). Those people (Whites) really are not friendly. They pretend like they are friendly, but I really didn't find them friendly... But I said to myself, "you can't come here and repeat a course, you are going to survive."

When I got to the school, I didn't think it was a big deal, but people were asking me, "How did you get into this school?" I said, "How do you mean how did I get into this school? I just applied!" Because in those days it was the rave of the talk show hosts, (but) apparently the school was very racist, but I didn't know that. But when I was there in a class of 157 there were only 3 Black girls... But as I said, it was a cultural shock. I spent most of my time in the library. I came in (to class) and the professor would say, (not to me directly but he would say to the class) most of you are going to fail this class. Now that I'm older I say to myself, who goes into a class and tells the students that most of them are going to fail the class? ... But I studied, I went there and I studied. There were not a lot of Black students. My counselor was White, the professors were White, and I didn't find most of them very accommodating.

After completing her degree in Journalism Joy tried to find a full-time job for a year with a media corporation but was unable to do so,

I came back, and I just couldn't find anything. It was shocking. But you see, at that time, I had that British experience that hard work is it (all you needed). It wasn't, I realized that I had to know somebody to pull me in; I didn't understand that. I just thought that if I dressed well in my suit, I was much better looking, had my demonstration tape, to show them that I had been to one of the better schools, that they would hire me. No, I had to have the contacts, someone to say, "Listen she is..." And the White professors didn't do that for us, at least they didn't tell us. Because there

are other girls that I know had jobs, and now that I look back it is obvious that people said, this is my student take care of her.

Joy therefore decided to switch fields and made the transition into healthcare administration and obtained a fellowship in that field,

So broadcasting was out for the first 2 years, and then I heard about a fellowship from the State Department for Healthcare Administration, and someone said, "Why don't you just apply?" I (also) interned at one of the bigger hospitals in the city... (and) I was selected as one of 6 management fellows. I spent a year and a half in school in healthcare management, learning how to run a hospital. I went to conferences (and) I lived very well. While I was there I made no friends, it was the strangest place... When the fellowship ended and they asked me if I wanted to stay, I told them no, because it's one thing to stay there briefly, but there were no organizations to join, it was all White... So when I was living there, there were four other girls who were also working in the capital. And I remember one day going to the capital, and I ran into her in the elevator, and I spoke to her, and she hasn't answered me yet. This is someone who lived in the same house, but in different rooms. In the house she spoke to me, but in the capital, in the elevator, she didn't. I said, "Hi," and she didn't say anything, and it was after I came off I said, "Oh, it's because I'm Black!" Well I picked up sooner or later, when I saw them out there if they gave me a blank, I gave them a blank. That's how I lived in this country. I realized that these folks, when they are in a safe place, they want to chatter you up, ask you questions, et cetera. But when they are with their friends, they're not talking to you. They give you a blank. So I stopped saying "Good Morning," which is one of my cultural norms... because that's just the reality.

After completing her fellowship Joy obtained a position as Associate Director in a hospital with the help of a West Indian friend and encountered more challenges from African Americans,

...[S]he (West Indian friend) helped to get me job at a hospital in the city as an Associate Director running a department of over 100 people, including emergency room, clinics... This was a Black hospital, with African American patients... and I ran into the same problem with a woman (African American) who was a nurse. She was running a department, but had to report to me, the Associate Director. And she would say time and again, "Here it is that I am an American and I'm reporting to you."... I was equipped and I had my meetings. I would try to do things to reach out, because I understand that they had this feeling that

we (West Indians) came here and we were getting positions over them that they felt they deserved.

This African American nurse appeared to resent the idea of Joy, a West Indian immigrant, being her boss; a position she was entitled to as an American. Additionally, Joy experienced challenges working with a West Indian man who became her boss when her first manager left,

... And then finally I had this boss from Guyana, he was a nurse, I was an administrator. I don't know how he got there, but I ended up reporting to him, and I later found out that he didn't like me... and all of a sudden, things that I don't even understand... I was transferred to the other side of the hospital, and was over there for a while.

Joy later left this position when downsizing occurred in the healthcare field and got another position in a private hospital. When budget cuts also occurred in this hospital she was made redundant. In order to find employment Joy later turned to a predominantly White career placement organization for mid-level managers, and obtained a job as a training consultant in healthcare. Joy enjoyed this role as well as the financial benefits until she was again laid off,

So I... worked as a training consultant. They sent us to different hospitals and I did very well. The cheapest I made was \$100 an hour. I was making good money, and thought, well I'm on a good line, going to get where I want to go. And [then] all of that was gone. When I think of it I could cry. I never got back that job again, because training in any organization is the first to go. It doesn't bring money in; it is to make the product better. That job dried up. So I said, Lord, what do I do at this juncture? This was the 3rd good position I had lost...

Being laid off three times within short period of time took an emotional toll on Joy and was devastating for her since she had invested so much of her efforts in education and training.

Joy therefore decided to return to her first passion, journalism. She met a manager from a broadcasting company at a networking association meeting,

Then I remember I ran into another woman at the time, she was working for a broadcasting company, and... I wanted to get back into journalism. She was the president of the organization, in charge of government affairs, and I must have made 3 separate (appointments) to go in and see her... [O]ne of the roles of the organization was to link professional women together. And each time that I made an appointment with her, she would call me in the morning to make an excuse. This is another Black woman but she's African-American. I never got a chance to talk to her. My question was, "How do I find a way to get in?" And now I look back, she went to college here, only had a Bachelor's degree, but I hear she was friends with Rockefeller, so when she saw me coming in and wanting to know more... I don't know if she saw me as a threat. She saw me probably from a different perspective... I joined the organization, and one of the things that we were supposed to have as members was for other members to help us as professional women to develop a (network). It never happened with me. Even one of the women that is older now, I had gone to her for a job and I asked her if there is anyway that she could help me, and she said, "Well, I'll go and do some research." She never got back to me...

Joy believed this African American woman might have felt threatened by her and avoided helping her for those reasons. Since she was unable to find a job within a company Joy decided to produce her own show for Caribbean immigrants. .

I heard that they were giving the neighborhoods their own (television stations). I took a class on how to do production, and then I went and started doing my show on these stations. I started interviewing political figures, because I really wanted to be a political correspondent. I did another Masters degree in Politics, because I said, if I have the journalism background, and I have the Political background, no one could say no. I couldn't get into the (political arena of) Washington... So I was on... TV. I got so many compliments; people would call and say I love your program... So I saved up my own money and had that show for 13 years. I started trying to figure out how I could get on National TV. Again, who are the people with the shot (power)? White folks. They don't want us. I remember trying one channel that a lot of Caribbean people watch, and the woman said she was tired of Caribbean shows and she would not carry anymore Caribbean shows. I had to buy the time on the other stations, and get licensed, (as well as have) a million dollars in insurance so that if anybody came on the show and said anything that was libel, the station

would not be held responsible. So it's just like any other station. I started developing my own letterhead, invited people to interview. I went to different places—Western Union, among others to ask for advertising. I spent half the day doing my show, and the other half training (consulting)... I took all my money, and put it into the show. I said, this is it; I'm going to really develop my skills to become a journalist. And then all of a sudden... I knew recession was on a long time ago. In 2005, all the advertising dried up...

Joy was unable to produce her show due to lack of advertising funds, which was frustrating for her.

She also faced challenges with African Americans who gave her little support when she founded a political organization of her own for Caribbean women,

... I came up with a name for the organization; I did a lot of wonderful things. And this same woman, I invited her to one of my Women's History Months, and she hasn't shown up yet. I used to go every year to her foundation Easter dinners, and so forth, but she never acknowledged that I went to my graduate school, (and) the education that I have, and when it was her turn to support my organization and me it still has not happened. And that's when I started to see the real differentiations...

Joy also had African American counterparts who had low expectations of West Indians as evidenced by her African American friend's shock at discovering that the Mayor's doctor was a West Indian. Joy recognized from this experience that African Americans even though they were her friends may have biases as she believed the doctor's ethnicity should have had little to do with his working for the mayor. Joy was also aware of some of the negative stereotypes held of West Indians,

[A]nd some still call West Indians coconut heads, some verbalize it, some don't. Remember they have been oppressed, and they are looking for somebody else to what? Oppress. So that they can feel like can dump on someone...

In reflecting on her career, Joy expressed frustration at her inability to achieve continuous upward mobility and the barriers she faced in achieving career success

including not being able to hold a valuable position for an extended time and the lack of support from West Indian community,

Here is it now, I went into broadcasting, came back with all the credentials, couldn't get in directly; I had to go into healthcare. I had to go and go and spend another year doing something completely different to become a management fellow. After I became a management fellow, I spent 1½ years in the job. Then I became an Associate Director for 2-3 years, making \$50,000 per year. When they started to get really lean, I left and went to (an Ivy League graduate school) to get a second Masters degree in health services management. Ok? So I have 2 degrees, and I am a management fellow, from their schools... I remember there's a group the American College of Healthcare Executives; you take exams along all levels. When you do all of that, you still can't get the jobs that mean something, the jobs that can take you somewhere... I went to a White school, I got the orientation that they got. Before I left, I attended a seminar on "Dress for Success" and I said, I'm there, there are not many minorities there, but they are giving the class, and I'm hearing everything. So you get exposed to information in terms of how to shake and how to move, the organization's to join, after I left the school... I thought about trying to get into an alumni sorority wing, it was harder for somebody to sponsor me. I had to be sponsored by somebody, who knows you well, and you know whom I had to turn to? An African-American, and she didn't want to do it.

There are just so many barriers to knock you down, and as I said, there is no West Indian community. I don't know what your experiences are, but from my years here as a professional, there is no West Indian I could have gone to and said, listen I'm doing a show... The Jamaicans have done a lot of disservice to their own professionals here. They don't give you a leg to stand on. And the others that are so entrenched here on the real affirmative action, they are so afraid that you are going to take their jobs. But what I'm trying to say is the unfortunate thing about the balance is that if our community was there and understood the value of a strong community, there are enough of us in this city form a soft spot for us to fall on, but it's not there. I would never turn to any of them to ask them to help me to get a job...

One of the factors Joy believed helped her overcome the challenges she faced were her childhood experiences and the value her family placed on education and good work ethic,

So what prepared me? I think early childhood, because my father was very supportive of his girls, all three of us (and 2 boys). But he never treated us as if we couldn't make it. When we went to boarding school in the city (in Jamaica), we had quite a bit of challenges. Some of the people we boarded with were nice, and some were not. But he always said dig in there and get your education; it will get you there. So I suppose that's why I'm so disappointed because I think, after having done all of this work, all of this sacrifice... And it's on the days when I walk into a room and I have to take my seat that I say to myself, "Lord thank you for this education, I'm not asking why I'm here. I deserve to be here. I'm not going to prove anything to anyone. You want to know about me, start the conversation."

If it wasn't for my parents, I believe in strong family values, good work ethic, et cetera. My parents were very poor, but they had a plan for us and we followed it...

Despite all these setbacks Joy is determined to persevere and does not have general negative feelings about living in America,

And after going through all of this education they tell you, "You are not qualified." It's a good thing that I'm reading, because if not I would be so focused on my age. I have to stop. If I didn't, I would say it's time to curl up. These books are saying it's not about age. Whenever it happens, it happens, you just have to keep at it. The only thing I can say with America is I keep going. The only thing America has done for me is, everyday I learn something new, and it's like a wonderful feeling, I can't explain.

Every time I run into a stiff situation, the minute I put on my Jamaican hat, I have them read my silent lips, and you can fill in the blanks! (Laughs) I only hope I'm on the cusp of my own greatness.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

Overview

West Indians generally subscribe to the idea of meritocracy and this approach appears to have enabled them to achieve a high measure of success in their home countries, as well as in domestic and service roles in the United States. Additionally, West Indians tend to generally downplay racial issues in their home countries (Vickerman, 1999). This study explores whether the meritocratic approach of professional West Indian women facilitates their achievement of success in professional roles as immigrants in the United States, which, although is sometimes referred to as a 'melting pot', is also known to be a racially polarized society (Vickerman, 1999).

The findings demonstrate that in the United States racial society, while all of these women have managed to attain a certain level of career success in their various fields, it has not come without a number of psychological, emotional, financial and professional costs. Many of the challenges the professional West Indian women of this study faced in the United States are similar to those encountered by African Americans, including racial discrimination, stereotyping and prejudice, lower salaries, and the concrete ceiling effect. However, because of their meritocratic outlook and socialization to de-emphasize race some of these West Indian women appeared to be initially unprepared to maneuver these challenges and expended greater efforts to attain career success.

West Indian women's level of integration into United States mainstream society was also a focus of this study. These results indicate that the professional West Indian women of this sample are yet to become highly integrated into their host society. This is exemplified in most participants' limited utilization of professional support systems outside their families such as mentors, and professional networks, limited social interactions with non-West Indians, as well as some participants' reluctance and discomfort in participating in professional norms such as 'sucking up', schmoozing and networking. The level of professional support participants received within the West Indian community was also limited in this sample. Additionally, there were a few participants that heavily relied on support from mentors and/or professional networks and associations. Many participants were rebuffed upon attempting to form strong professional and/or social relationships with non-West Indians. Those participants who were able to establish stronger professional relationships with both non-West Indians and West Indians (for example mentoring relationships and professional networks) appeared to experience higher levels of career success in the United States.

This chapter addresses the larger findings of this study in relation to the research objectives. The objectives of the study were met as the data collected allowed examination of several issues that guided its design. Seven research questions guided this study:

- (1) What are the participants' experiences with immigration?
- (2) What are the participants' employment experiences as immigrants?
- (3) What challenges do the participants face in their work environments?
- (4) What are the participants' experiences in attaining career success?

- (5) What are the participants' experiences interacting with non-West Indians and individuals born in the US like?
- (6) What are the participants' experiences around work-family balance as immigrants?
- (7) What social support systems do the participants use?

Discussion of the major findings regarding each research question follows.

Immigration Experiences

Reasons for Migrating to the United States

Most participants stated that they came to the United States because they believed there were better opportunities for them to pursue financial and/or education goals here. This confirms the findings of Henke (2001) and Waters (1999) regarding West Indian migration. However, participants in this study also discussed a number of other reasons for migrating to the United States including reunification with family and escaping the political situation in her home country. The reasons why emigrants leave their home countries may have significant impacts on their life choices and engagements in their host countries. The fact that most of the women of this study chose to migrate for better financial and educational opportunities points to their drive to achieve career success.

Initial Interactions

All of the women in this study upon migrating to the United States interacted with other West Indians, however a small number recounted having mixed interactions with other West Indians. These women's experiences of interacting with West Indians tended to include either a general lack of support from their friends or family members with regards to their educational pursuits, or their relatives being unaccommodating when they

lived with them. The lack of support for educational pursuit was a surprising finding since the literature demonstrates that this is a common reason why West Indian immigrants leave their home.

Although the literature and research on West Indians does not cover the initial interactions West Indians have with other West Indians upon migrating to the United States, it does, however, show that most West Indians primarily seek to improve their financial standing upon migrating (Lowenthal, 1975). Education for them is not a priority, instead improving their children's educational opportunities for their children is (Henke, 2001). This may explain the lack of support the participants of this study experienced from their West Indian immigrant counterparts in pursuing higher education, since many of them focused on improving their children's educational opportunities rather than pursuing education themselves.

Half of the participants in this study had initial interactions with non-West Indians (White and Black Americans), and only half of those participants related having positive interactions with non-West Indians. An explanation for the positive interaction some participants experienced comes from Waters (1999) who argued that West Indian immigrants tend to have a low anticipation of negative race relations, which allows them to have better interpersonal interactions with White Americans. Additionally, some participants had negative interactions with non-West Indians. Several of the participants noted being struck by the division between African Americans and West Indians. The literature discusses the tense relationship between West Indians and African Americans (Waters, 1999; Henke, 2001; Hackshaw, 2007). However, most of these participants did not express feelings of superiority with regards to African American, but seemed to be

more concerned about the divide, and a few wondered at how to narrow it. This represents a marked digression from the typical description of West Indians in the literature as ‘separatist’.

The positive interactions these West Indian women had with non-West Indians indicates a potential for deeper levels of integration within the host country. However, since only a quarter of the participants had positive interactions this still remains an area of concern, as it lays the foundation for future interactions with non-West Indians and the likelihood of developing strong relationships with out-group members.

The disappointment faced by half of the women in this study who were unable to obtain professional jobs after migrating to the United States marks another of the emotional costs of professional success in the United States where they become an unknown and outsider (Alfred, 2002). Henke (2001) and Alfred (2002) also found that West Indian immigrants faced difficulty in gaining entry into the professional world in the United States. West Indians usually expect to be rewarded for their hard work and professional accomplishments; in the United States they are no longer qualified, experienced professionals but foreigners who are unqualified to perform in the labor market.

Challenges at Work

The participants described experiencing a range of professional and work challenges in this study, including creating an inclusive work environment, being viewed as incompetent, conflicts with managers, exclusion by White Americans, being viewed as a threat, and negative ethnic/racial/gender stereotypes.

Creating an Inclusive Work Environment

This stands in a marked contrast to previous research on West Indian immigrants that depicts them as indifferent to the plight of African Americans and not taking ownership of racial progress (Hackshaw, 2007). This does not suggest that previous findings are invalid, however, the fact that these women were leaders in their organization suggests that they had experienced and were privy to racial discrimination in a variety of ways. Thus, they were possibly no longer naïve to the racial tensions in the United States and may have successfully negotiated their racial identities. However, readers are cautioned against making generalizations based on this small sample. Waters (1999) notes that West Indians have a strong racial identity, and when they experience blocked economic mobility due to race, they challenge racism/prejudice in a very militant fashion when they encounter it.

West Indians as Incompetent

Half of the participants in this study recounted being viewed as incompetent by their American coworkers either in response to their leadership or in their general work. This adds support to the research on West Indians example by Alfred (2002) who stated that professional West Indians may also feel the sting of being overlooked or unacknowledged despite their accomplishments. However, it also contradicts the literature with regards to White Americans' perception of West Indians as more reliable and hard working (Waters, 1999; Vickerman, 1999). The primary reason the women in this study were perceived as incompetent seemed to be because they were immigrants since African Americans similarly perceived them in this light as well. Additional

support for this explanation comes from Hackshaw (2007) who also found that West Indians experienced discrimination because they were immigrants.

Conflicts with Managers

Additionally, approximately forty percent of participants experienced conflicts with managers in their organizations including receiving unfair performance evaluations, having differing management approaches, jealous or vindictive female bosses, and being fired without reason. The experiences recounted by these participants show another picture of West Indians experiencing similar challenges faced by some native-born Americans (especially African Americans). This represents one of the professional costs West Indian women may face in their attempt to attain career success, which does not fit within their meritocratic framework of professional life as some participants were convinced they experienced conflict based on either their race/ethnicity and/or gender.

Exclusion by White Americans

Another significant finding of this study was the exclusion by Whites that participants experienced or what is also known as the ‘glass ceiling effect’ for women in general (Naff, 2001), or ‘concrete ceiling’ for minority women including those of African descent (Moore and Jones, 2001). The ‘concrete ceiling’ is a barrier that restricts not only access to top-level positions *and* to middle management positions as well (Moore and Jones, 2001). It is more impenetrable than the glass ceiling (Moore and Jones, 2001). The U. S. Department of Labor, (as cited in Moore and Jones, 2001) found that “minorities are faced with insurmountable barriers as they attempt to move upward”.

Some participants felt that White leaders in their organizations limited or slowed their career growth and promotion opportunities. This confirms previous work on the

‘double disadvantage’ Black West Indians face professionally (Heron, 2001). This is a particularly troubling finding because when West Indians, who believe that hard work is the primary factor in attaining success, encounter this concrete ceiling effect it is bound to have far reaching psychological, emotional and professional impacts on their lives because the concrete ceiling effect goes counter to their expectations. These participants faced triple disadvantages as Black, as immigrants, and as women.

This finding adds support to the previous finding of this study of West Indians being viewed as incompetent by Americans. It also demonstrates that West Indians may not be immune to the challenges African Americans and other minorities experience in their professional lives in the United States as demonstrated in the study on minority executives by Thomas & Gabbaro (1999). The major difference is that many West Indians were not socialized to expect these challenges, which may prove to be either an advantage or disadvantage for them.

Threatened by West Indians

The finding that West Indians were viewed as a threat to American jobs adds another dimension to the picture. This finding makes an important contribution to the existing literature on the perception of West Indians by African Americans (Water, 1999; Hackshaw, 2007). However, in this study participants’ experiences in this regard were not limited to African Americans but included White Americans as well. This finding presents a possible explanation for the aforementioned challenges (the concrete ceiling effect, West Indians viewed as incompetent, and conflict with management). Professional West Indians may represent a threat to some Americans, and seems to challenge their notions of supremacy.

Contradictory Values

Contradictory values or priorities were also mentioned as a challenge that some participants faced. A few women in the sample valued doing what was in the best interest of their clients or employees to be their priority whilst their bosses and organizations wanted the opposite. While this finding is not discussed in any of the other research studies on West Indian immigrants, it is not surprising since women in general are socialized to be more compassionate. Additionally, a few participants discussed having difficulty schmoozing or playing the political game at work. The literature on West Indian immigrants does show that they tend to face difficulty in gaining entry to White and Black American cultures due to the fact that they were not born in America, are not members of sororities or other social clubs, and have a foreign accent (Alfred, 2002).

In every society there are social rules and norms; these findings suggest that West Indian immigrants may not subscribe to or play by the same rules as their American counterparts. A strong possibility exists that West Indian women with their 'triple invisibility' status have fewer opportunities to play the political game, and may not understand how to or may not feel comfortable doing so in a foreign culture. In addition, thirty-three percent of participants discussed being candid as a challenge in their work environments. This could be interpreted as another cultural difference between these West Indian woman and their American coworkers, and may cause them to be perceived less positively by them. These findings reinforce the idea of an unlevelled playing field in professional settings. There is clearly a need for more research in these areas.

What is common across all three situations is the refusal of these women to conform or "suck-up" as one participant described it, to the organizational and societal

norms, especially those that went against their values. West Indians display a large amount of pride in their nationalities, often displaying their country of origin flags in their cars, or on their desks at work as one participant stated she did. Lowenthal (1975) found English speaking Caribbean people (particularly Jamaicans and Barbadians) to have the greatest pride in their Caribbean nationhood than any other Caribbean nation.

Additionally, West Indians may also distance themselves from Americans (Lowenthal 1975) and ascribe to British cultural standards more than they do American standards. It is also plausible that the belief these participants or their parents held that migration to the United States was temporary (Lowenthal, 1975), caused them to assimilate less readily and adopt American customs. Lowenthal (1975) argued that West Indian immigrants' fate abroad depends on how they assimilate and reject characteristics of their host countries and how far they accept or internalize host stereotypes.

Negative Ethnic/Racial/Gender Stereotypes

Participants also described the various stereotypes their colleagues had of them at work including ethnic, racial and gender stereotypes. Every participant recounted an experience of being pigeonholed by their coworkers who made them feel as if they did not belong in the organization. Participants' colleagues also appeared to have low expectations of them. As this occurred with both Whites and African Americans, it questions the popular notion of White favoritism for West Indians, that is West Indians receiving better treatment than African Americans (Waters, 1999). These results add further support to the notion that West Indian Blacks face greater disadvantage in their professional lives due to the fact that they are immigrants as described Heron (2001) and Model (2008).

Another possibility exists that White favoritism may have been extended to West Indian Blacks in service jobs or lower level positions, and not necessarily in professional jobs. The idea that West Indians are more docile and less demanding (Waters, 1999) is amenable for managers in service jobs, and indicates a belief that West Indians are simple minded and easily manipulated or managed. These characteristics are less appropriate for professional and leadership roles. Thus, it is tolerable to Whites for West Indians to be hired and work in service or lower level jobs, providing they do not attain higher social status. Support for this notion comes from over half of the participants in this study who observed non-West Indians, including Whites, to express surprise or shock at their success/competence.

Additionally, it is well known that many immigrants including West Indians occupy service roles such as elevator operators, doormen, waiters, and domestic helpers, among others (Foner, 2008). However, their participation in professional fields as well such as nursing (Foner, 2008) is less well known or discussed. Perhaps these participants' coworkers stereotyped West Indian immigrants as occupying only service roles, and were surprised that they were competently performing and successful in professionals. This is another area for future research.

Many participants chose to directly address the ethnic stereotypes in coping with their challenges by either challenging their coworkers view, and/or pointing out the stereotype. This indicates a higher level of awareness of racial prejudice than is usually afforded to West Indians (Waters, 1999; Model, 2008), as well as a determination to succeed while altering others' perception of them and raising their awareness. Another reason for such a large number of participants challenging the stereotypes may have to do

with the length of time they lived in the United States. All participants were over 30 years in age and had lived in the United States for over 10 years. This supports Vickerman's (1999) finding that the longer West Indians live in the United States the more likely they were to acknowledge racial tensions.

Career Success

Subjective versus Objective Career Success

Half of the women in this sample defined their career success in subjective terms or based on internal standards; these included having personal and professional alignment, learning and growing on an ongoing basis, great parenting, being my best person, and fulfilling personal goals and helping others. Fifty percent of the sample also defined career success according to objective or external standards including obtaining a graduate degree, being known as a person who adds value, having the respect of peers, breaking new ground, helping others succeed, and attaining an executive title and salary.

Many of these definitions included making contributions to the greater good, that is, not achieving career success purely for personal and family gain but also for society. This finding was surprising given the perception of West Indians as individualistic (Waters, 1999; Hackshaw, 2007). A study on career-life success of women in Canada, Mexico and Argentina found that successful women conveyed more subjective measures of career success, such as contributing to society and learning in their work (Lirio, et al., 2007). It is plausible that as women the more compassionate aspects of the participant's personalities are elicited even in their attainment of personal goals.

Also, based on Vickerman's (1999) finding, it could be argued that having lived in racist U.S. society for a longer period, these participants are now more conscious of the need to help others succeed and adopted a similar philosophy of some African Americans for racial progress. Additionally, a large number of these participants spoke about being Christian, which may also account for their focus on the greater good.

Additionally, the fact that many participants used subjective terms to describe their career success, and that some of the younger participants had not given thought to how successful they were, may have an alternative explanation. Perhaps living in the United States and negotiating various race related challenges made it difficult to even psychologically approach this issue. There is the possibility that the more objective terms of success, which they may have been more likely to subscribe to in the West Indies, are not as appropriate in the United States given the cross-pressures (Vickerman, 1999) they experience as Black immigrants. Their view of career success may have widened beyond the narrow scope of money, title, salary, et cetera, to include, the greater good (or having a bigger sense of community), the value they are adding to society, as well as peace of mind.

Additionally, the idea of limiting career success to purely objective terms may be psychologically and emotionally disturbing for these women who have struggled with many unexpected challenges. Despite their accomplishments, it is plausible that if these women focused on only factors such as promotions, salary, title, among others, they would not consider themselves successful and view their efforts as being for naught or diminished. It would also mean that they would need a new framework for success instead of their meritocratic one.

Factors Contributing to Career Success

Participants listed a variety of factors they believed contributed to their career successes including having integrity, compassion, social support (friends and family), having a diverse circle of friends, building relationships with everyone, and their spirituality. The majority of these factors listed by the participants are not consistent with the popular sources of career success such as education, mentoring relationships, gender and career tactics such as politically influencing behaviors, networking, and proximity to organizational decision makers (Heslin, 2001).

In fact as discussed earlier, several participants disliked the idea of schmoozing, or sucking up, which the literature refers to as politically influencing behaviors (Heslin, 2001). However, only two participants mentioned having a diverse circle of friends and building relationships with everyone, which can be equated with networking. This indicates lower levels of integration among the participants, and may have far reaching consequences on the extent of their career success. However, it is important to note that although West Indians are partly responsible for integration in their host country, if they are rejected or feel unwelcome/undervalued this will limit the range of networking and they engage in, as well as the extent of their integration as was demonstrated in this study.

None of the participants discussed the impact of their education or gender on their career success, even though most participants possessed higher levels of education (Bachelors degrees and higher). Education and work experience has been found to lead to greater participation in training and managerial advancement for men than it did for women (Heslin, 2001). This may account for why the women did not refer to education

as a factor for their career success. This finding is important because a strong focus on education is a characteristic of West Indians depicted in the literature (Waters, 1999; Model, 2008). Perhaps these women were beginning to understand the rules and norms of the United States wherein education, although extremely important in professional life, is not the sole, or most important determinant for professional advancement for minorities (Thomas and Gabarro, 1999).

Additionally, some of participants believed having integrity (high performance standards, doing things the right way, et cetera) contributed to their career success. Heslin (2001) outlined conscientiousness (or integrity) as a personality trait positively related to job satisfaction, income, and occupational status. A high performance standard appears to have had a significant influence on the career success these women attained. However, it was never enough for participants in most instances as they experienced many challenges/barriers over the course of their careers related to their ethnicity/race and gender.

Career Challenges

A few factors participants felt presented career challenges for them included a lack of knowledge of American workplace culture, being suppressed/limited support, body language, and prejudice. These women were surprised by the unspoken rules in corporate America regarding power, felt suppressed and unsupported by the White community, struggled to read their White colleagues body language and alter their own so Whites were more comfortable communicating with them, or were victims of prejudice. These are very important findings, because they point to the differences between West Indian and American cultures. The immigration research and literature has

demonstrated that immigrants from English speaking countries have a labor market advantage over immigrants who speak English as a second language (Akresh, 2006). However, this finding illustrates that language is not the only important barrier immigrants may face in the United States as research has shown that emigrating from cultures more culturally similar to the United States are more likely to experience lower rates of downward mobility (Akresh, 2006). As discussed earlier although there are similarities between West Indian and United States cultures, the level of emphasis placed on race is a major difference; one's level of experience and familiarity in coping with issues around race therefore becomes an important factor in professional and social mobility for West Indian immigrants in the racially divided context of the United States.

The literature on organizational culture shows that organizations are “gendered and raced to the extent that power relations are patterned through taken-for-granted, often hidden, assumptions about gender and race that are embedded in organizational discourses” that are skewed toward the interests and privilege of the dominant, racial and gender group (White middle class men) (Parker, 2006, p. 252). Not expecting or understanding dominant corporate culture norms may have left these participants unprepared to face the challenges they encountered as Black immigrant women in a White workplace culture.

Parker's (2006) research on African American senior women executives revealed in managing interpersonal conflicts with White male colleagues, these executives recognized their colleagues were “operating on misguided assumptions,” that needed to be “set straight”. The African American women in Parker's (2006) research were quick to clarify the misguided notions their colleagues had, or alter their behavior appropriately,

and establish successful relationships with those colleagues. The ability of these African American women to recognize early the underlying assumptions of their misguided male White colleagues, appeared to be a critical factor in negotiating their work interactions.

This was not the case for some of the West Indian women in this sample, as a few expressed they “wished they knew then what they know now.” This explanation can also be extended to the other participants who discussed challenges around a lack of support, prejudice, and adjusting/reading body language. Had these participants lived in a culture identical to America’s they may have not had as much difficulty adjusting to these issues.

If we examine the challenge of lack of support expressed by 16.6% of participants, we see that they were surprised that they were unable to gain help from both White and Black individuals in their field in order to experience career progression. Some African Americans appear to have grasped the notion of extending support to one’s ‘brother’ or ‘sister’ (Hackshaw, 2007) because little help is available elsewhere. West Indians, however, have lived in the U.S. racial society for a much shorter period of time and either took a longer time to recognize its challenges, or are in denial about it. As Model (2008) argued, West Indians need to believe their work ethic is unusual, therefore the hypothesis that they may be in denial is possible.

There is a simpler explanation as well. One participant in expressing her frustration stated “... the larger community has no respect for the smaller people... it’s about equality where they can recognize you as the lower class.” This finding confirms research by Model (2008) who demonstrated using several studies in the United States, and Toronto, that Whites ranked West Indians and Black immigrants lowest in social standing.

Additionally, Heron (2001) also found in her study on West Indian immigrants in the United States that immigrants are disadvantaged because they cannot access some of the same high-quality networks or other job-related resources as natives, or because employers prefer to hire African Americans for higher-status jobs. In other words, being a West Indian immigrant is not only a disadvantage for one's professional career due to lack of American cultural knowledge, but also because Whites may perceive and rank West Indians lower on the cultural/ethnic Totem Pole than African Americans and Whites.

Non-West Indian Interactions

A large number of participants described having limited interactions with non-West Indians outside of work. Only approximately thirty-three percent described having non-West Indian friends and interacting with them outside of work. Examining this finding through Assimilation theory lens shows that these participants have not assimilated since they are interacting more closely with West Indians.

Given the previous finding discussed above of prejudice and lack of support from Americans, it is not difficult to understand why this is so. However, it may also mean that these West Indians are less able to partake of opportunities available to Americans, especially Whites. While it is not unusual for immigrants to settle or reside in niches in order to ward off feelings of alienation or facilitate adjustment (Murphy and Mahalingam, 2004), it may be indicative of the low comfort level these West Indian participants have with non-West Indians. Additionally, this finding suggests that Black female immigrants have difficulty forming friendships with native-born Americans,

which partially explains why they would have a harder time gaining access to high-quality networks utilized by native-born Americans.

Americans Threatened by their Success

More importantly, as mentioned earlier over half of the sample described Americans being either threatened or surprised at their success. The arguments and findings uncovered by Waters (1999) and Model (2008) are directly relevant to this issue. Although White Americans appear to have low perceptions and expectations of Blacks and immigrants (Model, 2008), being an immigrant can either prove to be just as disadvantageous, or more disadvantageous than being an African American. Most of the participants recounted experiencing either low expectations or discrimination from Whites and/or African Americans because they were immigrants. Only one participant described her White colleagues being less surprised at her executive title and success when they recognized she was not just Black but West Indian as well.

Waters (1999) found that West Indian immigrants who maintained a strong ethnic identity by resisting American cultural and identity influences fared better in terms of their economic and social incorporation in the United States. However, as discussed earlier, Model (2008) demonstrated that some Whites perceive Black immigrants, including West Indians, lower than African Americans. This would explain why some of the participants in this study experienced shock from White and African American colleagues at their (or other West Indians) high competence and success.

For those participants that expressed having challenges working and generally interacting with African Americans, identifying only with their ethnic group may be one cause. According to Phineas (1990) this is separation, and it has its disadvantages.

Support for this is found in an observation of one participant, "... a lot of us poisoned the well..." regarding African American and West Indian relations. As Model (2008) argues, West Indians needed to believe that their approach to racism is more effective, and that they are more productive, or there would be no point to them living in the United States. This belief was one many West Indians shared and served to separate them from the African American community because they used it to distance themselves (Water, 1999; Vickerman, 1999). Even though most of the participants of this study did not appear to hold this belief, African Americans interactions with and perceptions of them would have been colored by previous experiences with West Indians who held the belief that they were more productive and effective in their race relations.

Positive Interactions with non-West Indians

While a large number of participants spoke of having negative experiences with non-West Indians, a few described having positive experiences with Americans, or not focusing on the race of the individual. For the most part these participants appeared to make an effort to maintain good relationships with everyone, including Whites and African Americans in order to network. This is important as it may represent an area of growth for West Indians, and if continued, may enable them to be more successful. One participant was very aware of this and noted that her African American colleagues "looked out for their own," when they went on assignments, and she felt she could not blame them since the previous generation of West Indians were often separatist. Additionally, Bailey, Wolfe and Wolfe (1996) found that it was important for Black women to develop sources of social support at home *and* at work.

West Indian Accent

In addition, forty-one percent of the sample stated that they experienced challenges at work due to their accents because their coworkers could not understand them. All of these participants made an effort to adjust the way they spoke so they would be understood. This is consistent with the literature on West Indian immigrants and various methods they use to assimilate as was the case for West Indians, like Sydney Poitier, who actively sought to lose his accent when told it was a liability (Model, 2008). However, a few participants discussed receiving compliments from Americans about their accents, and one participant said that she did not want to lose her accent. This is also consistent with the literature that describes second generation West Indians making an effort to distinguish themselves from African Americans (Model, 2008).

Although these findings seem contradictory, there is enough evidence to support both experiences discussed by participants (Sowell, 1983; Waters, 1999; Model, 2008). It is possible based on this finding to deduce that there are two main types of reactions to West Indian immigrants from Americans, negative—thinking they are incompetent, or positive—appreciating their differences as foreigners. Additionally, the effort some participants made to retain their accents or not change it significantly speaks to their maintaining strong ethnic identities and a certain degree of separation (Phineas, 1990).

Work-Family Balance

Transnationalism

The results show that over half of the participants discussed their relationships or situations back home in the West Indies being affected by them living in the United

States. These participants referred to supporting their family members and relatives through remittances, the negative impact of being separated from siblings and/or parents, having more domestic/family help back home, or their families having better opportunities in the United States than when they were back home.

West Indian immigrants sending money back home is a common feature in the literature (Foner, 2008; Murphy and Mahalingam, 2004). Transnational West Indian mothers are also often discussed in the literature (Foner, 2008). However, in this sample most of the women had not left their children behind in their home countries, therefore, the majority of separation issues described are in reference to siblings, parents or extended family members. This finding indicates the strong connections some participants have to their extended families and confirms the findings of Gopaul-McNicol (1993) regarding West Indian family structures.

Weakened Family Relationships

A few participants discussed not having strong relationships with their mothers because of the distance or leaving home early, and regretted this aspect of living overseas. This finding suggests that there are even greater costs to migrating apart from racism and discrimination. According to Lee (as cited in Model, 2008), the emotional cost of leaving loved ones behind, financial costs, among others, may be attenuated to the extent that migrants have information about their destination or have individuals to help them adjust. Consistent with Lee's (as cited in Model, 2008) hypothesis, the extent to which the women in this study felt they had attained career success may be explained by the amount and quality of information they had about professional work-life in the United States, as well as the quality of social support networks. Additionally, these 'costs of

migration', especially emotional ones, may act as a pivot for economic or social success, whereby they can act as catalysts that enable West Indians to work harder, or as disablers that may impact their psychological health and potential to succeed. Gopaul-McNicol (1993) outlined the importance of extended family members to West Indians, and the high involvement of these individuals in child rearing and general family support. Regardless of whether or not West Indian women experience career success, the emotional and psychological costs they experience as a result of leaving their families in the West Indies are important on their own.

Impact on Children

Some participants discussed the way they raised their children being impacted by living in the United States. Not having neighbors or friends or family members whom they felt were trustworthy made them more deliberate about childcare and situations such as sleepovers or visits. Other participants discussed paying special attention to race (either with their children or in their environments) being selective in the types of schools their children went to and the extracurricular activities they were involved in, in order to provide them with the best developmental opportunities. On the other hand, some participants focused on the positive outcomes such as the educational and professional opportunities their family and children benefited from as a result of migrating to the United States.

Although these findings appear to be in different classes, one explanation accounts for both. According to Klevan (as cited in Palmer, 1995) West Indians are usually status conscious. Also, what seems to be a common finding is West Indians' strong focus on education, bettering themselves, and setting high standards for

themselves and their children (Palmer, 1995; Waters, 1999). Additionally, Bryce-Laporte (as cited in Palmer, 1995) found that West Indian immigrant success has been attributed to their focus, yearning for success and detachment from society and the close family support systems that they preserve. This may explain the selectivity in childcare discussed by participants as well as the focus on positive educational and professional outcomes of their children.

Participants also discussed their families or relatives' experiences approach to racism. All the participants took a direct approach in helping their children cope with these negative experiences. These approaches included buoying the children's self-esteem, or speaking to those in authority (for example teachers and principals) to address the situation, or a combination of both methods. Again, this supports other research findings describing West Indians as militant in the face of racism (Waters, 1999).

These results also indicate that the complex process of child rearing and family life may become further complicated for West Indian women upon migrating to the United States. The process may become more difficult as some may lack the support systems of extended family members they relied on at home, as additional guidance and support for their children and family members becomes necessary in negotiating their identities and success in the racial context of the United States. Work-family balance is noted to be a difficult process for many women since most of the child-rearing burden falls on them. These results demonstrate that work-family balance in the United States can be a more strenuous experience for West Indian women who may simultaneously be learning to cope with these issues for themselves, whilst simultaneously proffering

guidance to their family members. This was exemplified in the time one participant often had to take off from work to monitor her son's performance and participation in school.

Social Support Systems

All the participants utilized West Indian support systems such as family and friends. However, only a few described utilizing non-West Indian support systems. Those that did use non-West Indian support systems also utilized West Indian support networks. These two findings are critical because they once again reveal the integration issues faced by West Indians. Access to professional opportunities among others although not restricted to Americans is more likely to be greater among them. Thus, West Indian women may have limited access to high quality professional/career development opportunities due to their limited interaction or lack of close relationships with non-West Indian support systems. Support for this argument comes from Lee (as cited in Model, 2008) and Heron (2001).

Lack of West Indian Support

A major finding of this study is the mixed cohesiveness in the West Indian community, and lack of support from the West Indian community. These participants described either experiencing rivalry from other West Indians, or little professional support from other professional West Indians. Due to the prejudice and discrimination some participants experienced, it is possible that other West Indians may have had similar negative work experiences and limited opportunities, and became more competitive in order to secure opportunities. The research literature details the formation of social support networks and mutual aid societies by West Indian immigrants (Sandis, 1977;

Tobias, 1976). However, little or no mention has been made of the lack of support in the West Indian community.

It is plausible that forming social support groups and networks was a big feature in the 1960s and 1970s when fewer West Indian immigrants were in professional fields, thus making it necessary for them to rely on each other. Additionally, one could extrapolate from the findings on lack of West Indian solidarity with African Americans (Hackshaw, 2007) also to mean a general lack of solidarity and loyalty amongst the group. As noted by Hackshaw (2007) West Indians tend to be more individualistic, and by extension could be viewed as more competitive, which might explain the rivalry the participants described.

Another reason accounting for the lack of support among West Indians is based Bryce-Laporte's (as cited in Vickerman, 1999) finding that West Indian immigrants downplaying the importance of race in social mobility. Many African Americans share a sense of community and racial progress (Hackshaw, 2007) or 'collective memory'. This comes from their recognition of racism and discrimination that continues to negatively impact their daily lives. This issue may force them to stick together and support each other. Because West Indians may tend to deemphasize the heavy impact of race from their socialization in the Caribbean, this may prevent them from forming a community dedicated to collective advancement of Blacks and West Indian immigrants. West Indians tend to believe that hard work primarily will enable success (Waters, 1999). This speaks to an internal locus of control and/or individualistic focus and explains why they view each other as competitors, or not feel the need to be supportive.

Also of concern, less than half of the sample relied on support from mentors or

professional associations. Research conducted by Sewell (2007) found that cross-race mentoring relationships reflected a high degree of influential career support; this underscores the concern for this study's findings that fewer participants relied on support from mentors and had limited interactions with non-West Indians is of such concern. Also, very few participants reported participating in general job-related or networking organizations. It is possible that West Indians elect to network within and rely primarily on West Indian support systems, including their families, as several participants described. However, based on the West Indian immigrant and African American research on professional advancement, it is much more likely that these women are unable to access these networks and associations or form strong relationships with mentors and non-West Indians because they are not able to cultivate developmental relationships with non-West Indian mentors, sponsors and peers because they were rebuffed (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley, 1990; Heron, 2001).

Discrimination may account for professional West Indian women's limited use of non-West Indian support systems. As outlined by Ilgen & Youtz (cited in Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley, 1990) treatment discrimination may impact these professional West Indian women's acceptance into work-oriented groups or career-enhancing and psychosocial support from supervisors and others. It is likely that these participants experienced treatment discrimination based on their race, gender or ethnicity, or a combination of the three when interacting with non-West Indians in networking situations.

Additionally, many participants stated they had a mentor figure at work but a smaller number described their mentors as persons they sought advice from. Furthermore,

a few participants had advocates and nearly half had sponsor figures at work. Mentors, advocates and sponsors of these participants played various roles including imparting career and work advice, giving them development opportunities, and encouraging them to pursue further education, among other things. Sewell (2007) asserted that African American women need mentors to help them understand how they impact and are impacted by the system as double minorities and more so how to use those insights to gain upward career mobility. This may certainly be the case for professional West Indian immigrant women who face ‘triple invisibility’ (Marshall, 1992) in their work-lives due to their race, gender and ethnic status.

On a more positive note, several participants noted that they acted as mentors, sponsors or advocates to others, including those who had no such figures in their lives. Additionally, one participant recognized that a lack of such figures in her life may have “contributed to her downfall” and emphasized having a mentor was “critical to success”.

Limitations, Future Research and Implications

Limitations of this Study

This section describes the limitations of the data collected in this study including the credibility, confirmability, transferability and dependability of the results.

Credibility. Credibility, from a qualitative research standpoint is the extent to which the results of the study generate valid results, especially from the participant’s perspective (Trochim, 2006). In this study, the McCracken (1988) long-interview method was utilized because it enabled the researcher to capture complex in-depth data in settings in which observation is not appropriate, and allowed the researcher to explore a cultural

construct within her own culture of origin. A semi-structured interview was chosen to best explore the experiences of the participants and permitted the researcher to construct concepts and meaning for theme building to occur during data analysis. In order to ensure validity every effort was made to have the results accurately represent the ideas expressed by participants. This was accomplished by categorizing each stage of the research around each research question and fitting these stages within the larger project, and through reporting of each stage of research to provide transparency.

Transferability. Researchers must always consider whether or not the results of their studies are transferable to the larger world (Trochim, 2006). Participants of this study were all professional West Indian immigrant women living in the United States for at least 10 years and therefore experts on the experience the topic of focus. Given the small size of the sample, however generalizability of the results to the larger population of professional West Indian immigrant women is not possible. Random sampling was not employed, thus participants' characteristics skewed the data, which would have been less likely in a larger sample. This study was exploratory, and its main purpose was therefore to generate in-depth information related to the West Indian immigrant women's work experiences, and to highlight which particular areas related to the topic would be critical for further study. Due to its small sample size this study cannot represent the entirety of experiences professional West Indian immigrant women.

Dependability and Reliability. How dependable or reliable data of qualitative research is refers to whether or not similar results would be obtained if one were to observe the same study twice (Trochim, 2006). Trochim (2006) posits, "By definition if we are measuring twice, we are measuring two different things," and means that the data

must be collected with as little bias as possible without influencing the participants.

Reliability within the long-interview method has limitations, in that participants report on experiences based on their own memories and interpretations of events rather than observed factual accounts. However, interview data prioritizes depth and meaning rather than specificity. The way participants recollect and explain their experiences provides valuable information as well.

Dependability, however, “emphasizes the need for the researcher to account for the ever-changing context within which research occurs,” Trochim (2006). The research must describe the changes that occurred during data collection and how these changes may have influenced the way the researcher approached to the study (Trochim, 2006). This was a priority for this research study as well.

Additionally, at the end of the interview, subjects were given the opportunity to provide any additional information that might be relevant. Most participants indicated that everything they had thought about discussing and more had been covered during the interview. This suggests the comprehensiveness of the interview protocol in capturing key aspects of the work experiences of professional West Indian immigrant women in the United States in addition to the impact of other experiences on their professional lives. Data that did not occur in more than one interview was not included in the final analysis.

Confirmability. One key issue that may impact confirmability relates to researcher’s bias and experiences. I am a West Indian immigrant female with a variety of work experiences (both negative and positive), which was a major part of the impetus for conducting this research. Although I made every effort to avoid hypothesizing about the various experiences participants would have and why they had those experiences, it is

possible that this influenced the data collection process. I tried to maintain the view the participants' experiences would extend beyond the range of my own.

Interviews were designed to limit the opportunity for leading questions, but rather to ask participants to come to their own conclusions. However, there were some very specific questions that may have implied the researcher's train of thought, for example, "*Has living in the United States impacted your family relationships?*" This question implied that researcher thought there might be a relationship between living in the United States and family relationships. All researchers enter into studies with biases that color the data, however, with enough self-awareness and attempts to limit the impact of bias, this qualitative study was useful in capturing the complexity of the participant's experiences.

Future Research

This study covered a broad range of topics, however it would be useful to explore the relationship between Ethnic Identity using the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) (Phinney, 1992) and its impact on the degree to which West Indian immigrant women establish professional relationships and utilize their professional networks, associations and mentors. Furthermore the relationship between the aforementioned factors and the extent of their career success is also an area for future research. It would also be interesting to learn about West Indian women's coworkers and managers' perceptions of them and their work, as opposed to just the women's perceptions in light of the surprise/shock expressed by White coworkers at the participants' success. Finally, further study needs to be done on the impact of cultural differences on West Indian women's ability to network with Americans and schmooze, as well as the extent to which

career success is impacted by the amount and quality of information they had about professional work-life in the United States.

Implications

Implications for Organizational Psychologists. This study has several implications for the field of Organizational Psychology as well as related fields such as Diversity & Inclusion, and Human Resource Management, among others. Organizational Psychology involves the study of relationships among people in various organizations. This study emphasizes the importance of group memberships and identifying prejudices in order to establish effective relationships. Additionally, a few (33%) of the women in this study chose to leave their organizations, or change careers in order to cope with the challenges they faced in their work environments. Each of these women was very experienced and had extensive training/education. This represents a huge loss of talent and an increase in retention costs, which has direct relationship to Diversity & Inclusion practices. Additionally, these findings could be utilized in Diversity & Inclusion training for managers in all work settings, since as this study demonstrated, West Indian women can be found in a wide cross-section of industries.

Implications for Mental Health Professionals. This study gave a thorough understanding of West Indian immigration experiences and revealed a large number of challenges professional women experience as well as their families. This has an important bearing on the state of their mental health and family dynamics. Understanding these dynamics is important in order for counselors and clinicians to offer effective treatment.

Implications for Networking & Professional Associations. It was revealed that half of the participants had limited interactions to West Indian groups, which may in turn limit their access to professional development opportunities as well as their chances of success. Organizations, and West Indian and non-West Indian Associations including Alumni Associations and churches should take note of these findings to assist their West Indian members in networking.

Implications for West Indian Women. Finally, this study has the most important bearings on West Indian women and their families. Knowledge, as is often said, is power, and while many of the women in this sample were aware of the general lack of professional support in the West Indian community, not all expressed this idea. The lack of professional support in the West Indian community needs to be improved in order for significant progress to be made. Since it is natural for West Indians to reside in niche communities, help should also come from among their communities, although networking in other cultures is also important.

Additionally, West Indian women may learn from the experiences of these participants and prepare themselves for the various challenges they may face in their professional lives. They may also pay attention to the various strategies participants used to successfully manage their challenges and attain career success.

Use of Self as Researcher

As discussed in the Chapter III, it is important for the researcher to pay careful attention to his or her thoughts and emotions evoked during the research processes as well as to his/her identity and organizational group memberships and those of the participants. Identifying the emotions, thoughts and behaviors being evoked in

him/herself will inform his/her choices in the ongoing process. A summary of the results of self-scrutiny undertaken by the researcher are presented her here, as well as their impact on the research process.

I decided to focus my research on the work experiences of professional West Indian women because of my personal experiences in professional situations with non-West Indians in the United States. I therefore expected the data collection process to be a little emotional, and attempted to take a very objective approach to interviewing and maintaining the boundaries. I was prepared to learn a lot from these women, and also contribute to the dearth of literature on professional West Indian immigrants. I was able to easily identify with the participants. Some interviewees became emotional and I understood how painful it was for them, and was surprised at the extent of their challenges.

Throughout the data collection phase I recognized that socialization had a major impact on how one conceptualizes and negotiates race relations. My own experiences growing up in Jamaica were brought into focus as I reflected on discussions my family often had regarding race relations in United States and the impact of being Black in American. I learnt from these discussions that if I went to the United States I would be considered primarily to be Black, and that my skin shade or heritage had little to do with it.

I also observed that questions regarding career success, elicited some discomfort both from participants and myself. Some participants found it difficult to determine if they were successful, and a few stated that they had not given much thought to it. I believe the discomfort some participants and I experienced was due to the fact that I was

directly asking them if they felt they were successful or not. By asking that question I was introducing the notion that all they worked for and struggled with may have been for naught. My internal reactions as well as those of the participants provided much clarity for me as I analyzed the data.

The interviews were also therapeutic for me, as well as some interviewees. One participant commented, “Boy, this feels like therapy!” It felt good to know that I shared similar types of experiences with other West Indian women. I also felt good about providing participants with an opportunity to discuss issues that they may sometimes have little opportunity to discuss. It also inspired me to determine the best means of providing professional support for professional West Indian women in the future.

Conclusion

This dissertation explored the work experiences of professional West Indian immigrant English-speaking women in the United States. It has made an important contribution to an area in the research literature on West Indian immigrants that was previously very limited. The participants of this study migrated primarily for financial and educational improvement, had mixed experiences with West Indian cohesiveness, and for the most part interacted primarily with West Indian family members and friends who helped them adjust to life in the United States.

A large number expected to find employment in professional fields and were only able to do so after obtaining education/qualifications in the United States. Most participants reported being satisfied with their jobs. The participants experienced various challenges in their work environments, including cultural differences, ethnic/racial tensions, being excluded by Americans, blocked career mobility as well as low

expectations for professional West Indian women. The results indicate that these women experienced high levels career success, however, several experienced slower career progression and/or concrete ceiling effects.

Most participants of this study had limited social interactions with non-West Indians or individuals born in the United States, although a few were friends with non-West Indians (African Americans and Whites). Participants social support systems tended to consist primarily of family members, while few relied on the professional support of mentors, professional networks and associations. Several participants reported weakened ties with extended family members still living in the West Indies, and some found it more difficult to attain work-family balance in the United States due to busier schedules, lack of domestic helpers, and greater complexities in child rearing, including racism.

The challenges faced by these Black professional West Indian women in the United States mirror those encountered by some African Americans. Due to their meritocratic outlook and socialization to de-emphasize race, these professional West Indian women appeared to be initially unprepared to maneuver these challenges and expended greater efforts to attain career success.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Immigration Experiences

- 1) Did your parents migrate to the United States?
 - a) How old were you when they migrated?
 - b) Did you migrate to the United States with them immediately?
 - c) How old were you when you migrated to the United States?

Have you lived anywhere else other than the United States and your home country?
- 2) What were your reasons for migrating?
 - a) What goals did you have when you first moved to the United States?
 - b) Did you plan to stay here, or return home?
- 3) Where (what neighborhood) did you first live when you migrated?
 - a) What was the ethnic composition of that neighborhood/community?
 - b) Where do you currently live?
 - c) What is the ethnic composition of the neighborhood you currently live in?

Education

- 4) Where did you attend:
 - a) High school?
 - i) What was the ethnic structure of the high school you attended?
 - ii) What was the ethnicity of your peers at high school?
 - b) College?
 - i) What did you study at college?
 - ii) What was the ethnic structure of the college you attended?
 - iii) What was the ethnicity of your peers at college?
 - c) Graduate school?

- i) What did you study at college?
- ii) What was the ethnic structure of the college you attended?
- iii) What was the ethnicity of your peers at college?

Social Support Networks

- 5) Upon first arriving to this country, who were your first close interactions with?
 - a) What were they like?
 - b) Do you have a support system/network now?
 - c) Who is in your support system?
 - d) What level of support do you get from them?
- 6) Are you apart of any professional networks outside of your job?
- 7) How much interaction do you have with non-West Indian people outside of work?
 - a) What are these interactions like?
 - b) Where do they take place?

Social Interactions

- 8) What have your interactions been like with non-West Indians or individuals born in the USA (both black and white)?
- 9) How much interaction do you have with the residents in your current neighborhood?
 - a) What are these interactions like?

Employment Experience

- 10) Tell me about your work history?
 - a) Did you work in your home country before coming to the United States?
 - b) What was your first job here in the United States? How long did you work there?
 - c) What was your second job in the United States? How long did you work there?
 - d) What was your third job in the United States? How long did you work there?
- 11) What types of jobs were you targeting when you first began looking for work in the United States?
- 12) Where do you currently work (do not give the name of the organization)?
 - a) How knowledgeable are you about your professional culture and its expectations?

- b) Are you satisfied with your current position/job?
 - (i) Why or why not?
 - (ii) Do you believe your current position allows you to utilize your skills and knowledge?

Work Challenges

- 13) Everyone faces challenges in the workplace. What are some of the challenges you have faced?
 - a) What do you think are some of the reasons you faced these challenges?
 - b) What strategies do you use to cope with these challenges?
 - c) Did you work in your home country?
 - d) How well did your prior experiences (education/work) in the Caribbean prepare you to meet the expectations/challenges of your work environment in the USA?
 - e) What other experiences prepared you to cope with the current challenges you face in the USA?
- 14) Do you encounter ethnic/racial/gender stereotypes at work?
 - a) How do you deal with these ethnic/racial/gender stereotypes?
 - b) What are the major differences you encounter (at work) as a West Indian immigrant woman?
- 15) Did you (or do you) have a mentor/sponsor at work?
 - a) What role did (does) this person play in your life?
- 16) Who do you interact with at work?
 - a) What are these interactions like?
 - b) How has your accent impacted your interactions with others?

Career success

- 17) What does career success look like to you?
 - a) Define and describe career success in your eyes.
 - b) What do you feel you are succeeding at now in your career/work life?
 - c) What are some of the factors that contributed to your career successes?
- 18) What challenges have you faced in your career?
 - a) How are these career challenges impacting your life?

- b) What are some of the factors that contributed to your career challenges?
- c) What actions do you take when faced with a career challenges

Work-family balance in the US

- 19) How has living in the United States impacted your family relationships?
- a) How have you helped your family (and children) cope with their experiences of racism?
 - b) What other major issues have you had to help your family members cope with?
- 20) How do you balance your work and family life now?

Preliminary Questionnaire

Instructions: *Please answer the following questions on the lines provided.*

1) Where were you born?

a) How long did you live there?

2) What is your age range? Select one:

25-35 ^L

36-46 ^L

47-57 ^L

58-68 ^L

69-77 ^L

3) Do you have any siblings?

a) How many?

b) Where do they live presently?

4) Are your parents still alive?

a) Did you live with any of your parents?

b) Who raised you?

c) Where was your mother (step) born?

d) Where was your father (step) born?

e) What is your parents' marital status?

5) What is your mother's (step) occupation?

a) What is the highest level of education your mother (step) received?

(i) Any emphasis or specialty? _____

6) What is your father's (step) occupation?

a) What is the highest level of education your father (step) received?

(i) Any emphasis or specialty? _____

7) Tell me about the work your grandparents do/did

8) What is your highest level of education?

Were you the first in your family to attain this level of education?

9) Are you married?

10) Do you have children?

a) What are their ages and gender?

b) Where do they live now?

11) How do you identify or define yourself ethnically or racially?

APPENDIX B

Advertisement/Recruitment Letter

Hello,

I am a doctoral student at Rutgers University in the dissertation phase of my program, and my research will be focused on the **work experiences of professional West Indian immigrant women in the United States**. As part of the research process, I will need to conduct interviews in order to obtain the data. I would like to know what factors aid or hinder these women in attaining career success as well as what their employment and family experiences are like as immigrants.

Here is where I believe you can help me—I need to interview professional West Indian women who fit the following criteria:

- ✓ Must be born in the Caribbean and speak English as a first language
- ✓ Must be living in the United States for at least 3 consecutive years
- ✓ Must have 3 or more years of full-time work experience in a professional occupation in the United States.

The interviews will be completely confidential.

If you are eligible, interested and willing to participate, please contact me as soon as possible so I can discuss the process further and set up an interview date and time. I am willing to meet you at a location that is convenient to you and that is also quiet with minimal interruptions.

If you are not eligible, or are not interested in participating, please let me know of others who may be willing to assist me. You can forward this information to them, or give their contact information to me.

Your help with this is truly appreciated. My goal is to complete all interviews by July 31st. Thank-you in advance for your help.

Regards,

Kyla-Gaye Barrett

APPENDIX C

Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Kyla-Gaye Barrett, a student at the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, as part of my dissertation.

Purpose: The purpose of my study is to learn about the work experiences of professional West Indian immigrant women in the USA. I became interested in this topic because of my own work experiences in the USA; I decided that I would like to study this topic with other West Indian women.

Participants: The participants for the study will include a total of 10-12 employed professional West Indian immigrant women, single or married, with or without children, who have been employed for 3 or more years. You will be contacted and asked via phone if you would be willing to participate in the study, and will be asked to sign a consent form in person before you participate. Participants between the ages of 25 and 65 years old will participate in the study, and each interview will last approximately 90-180 minutes (anywhere from 1 and a half hours to a maximum of 3 hours).

Procedure: The study procedures include the following:

1. Initial contact via telephone to provide a description of the purpose of the research and to provide details of participation. Additionally, a brief telephone screening will be conducted to ensure that you meet the criteria for participation. If you meet the criteria and verbally agree to participate, an appointment will be made for the interview. Additionally, you will receive an e-mail from the researcher confirming your interview date and time.
2. An interview that will last 90-180 minutes. Before the interview, you will be asked to sign a consent form confirming your voluntary participation and to fill out a Background Information form. During the interview, you will be asked a series of open-ended questions regarding your ethnicity, immigrant and workplace experiences. After the interview, you will be thanked and given the opportunity to ask questions. You will also receive the researcher's contact information in case you have any additional questions in the future.

Risks and benefits:

There is a small risk that speaking about ethnicity, immigrant experiences in the USA, and workplace experiences will produce some anxiety in the participants, as these topics may be sensitive given the status of women, immigrants, and persons of color in the United States. When speaking about workplace issues, participants may bring up a

variety of concerns that may not be expected by the researcher. To minimize this risk, all information provided by the participant will be confidential, and if participants express any stress or anxiety as a result of their participation, they should contact the researcher who will debrief with them and help them find resources if they need to speak to a professional about any issues or concerns that they may be experiencing. However, the subjects could benefit greatly from being given the opportunity to reflect upon their professional work experiences as West Indian immigrant women and work behaviors and make improvements at work, if necessary. Furthermore, they may receive satisfaction in knowing that they have added to a body of research regarding a population that is often overlooked in the organizational literature.

_____ (Participant's initials)

Voluntary participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and may withdraw at any time during the study without any penalty. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

Anonymous: This research is anonymous. Anonymous means that I will record no information about you that could identify you. This means that I will not record your name, address, phone number, date of birth, etc. If you agree to take part in the study, you will be assigned a random code number that will be used on each test and the questionnaire. Your name will appear only on a list of subjects, and will not be linked to the code number that is assigned to you. There will be no way to link your responses back to you. Therefore, data collection is anonymous

Questions: If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, email me at kylagaye3@yahoo.com, or you may contact my dissertation faculty chairperson, Dr. Karen Riggs Skean at KSkean@aol.com. You can also mail either of us at: The Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology, 152 Frelinghuysen Road, Piscataway, NJ 08854-8020. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Phone: (732) 932-0150 ext. 2104

Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

Kyla-Gaye Barrett
Doctoral Student
Organizational Psychology
Graduate School of Applied & Professional Psychology
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

This consent form is for your records. You will be asked for verbal consent prior to the interview. Please sign below if you agree to participate in this research study:

Participant's Name (Print) _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____

Revised: 5/31/09

AUDIO TAPE ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled: The Work Experiences of Professional West Indian Immigrant Women: An Exploratory Study, conducted by Kyla-Gaye Barrett. I am asking for your permission to allow me to audio tape the interview as part of this research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the study.

The recording(s) will be used to ensure that the information disclosed in the interview will be accurately rendered during the transcription process and to ensure accuracy of the data.

The recording(s) will include information about your immigrant and workplace experiences. Your name, position in the company and name of your employer, or any other identifying information will not be recorded.

The recording(s) will be stored in a secure location in the researcher's home and linked with a code to the subjects' identity, and will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Participant's Name (Print) _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator's Signature _____ Date _____