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“Home Is Where You Make It”: Navigating Culture & Society as a 1.5 Generation Guyanese Immigrant in the United States

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“Home Is Where You Make It”:
Navigating Culture & Society as a 1.5 Generation Guyanese Immigrant in the United States

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College
by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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ABSTRACT

Based on the experiences of twelve 1.5 generation Guyanese immigrants living in the United States, this thesis serves to understand the strategies that some immigrants may choose as they assimilate into the United States. This study highlights the acculturation preferences of Guyanese immigrants adjusting to the United States while challenging current assimilation theories. It specifically focuses on the understanding of cultural and social capital and how this ultimately influences the attitudes that these immigrants have towards socio-economic values like education/career choices. With an emphasis on language, food, and rituals/holidays, I propose a new way of defining culture and argue that this cohort of immigrants, regardless of where they live, find ways to connect and remain attached to their cultural values. Moreover, I argue that their social ties help us to understand their strategy for adjusting to the host society, a strategy that might be better understood as integration, rather than assimilation.

Keywords: Guyanese, American, 1.5 Generation Immigrant, Immigration, Assimilation, Acculturation, Integration, Culture, Social Capital/ties, Socioeconomic, Attitudes, Education, Language, Rituals/Holidays, Food, Anchoring Effect.

I am Naturally Guyanese.

To be naturalized in an American state,
Is to be born American only.
For them,
Naturalization is Americanization
But I am naturally Guyanese.

Tree sprung with red cherries,
Long ripe yellow mangoes,
And roots that are filled with gold.
My language, my culture, it could never get old.
Yuh telling me to forget who I am,
Freedom confined by knowledge of stolen land.

Abolish my language, my culture, and accept colonization,
Holding the tears of too many victims of racism.
The longer I stay, the greater the lasting fear
After five long years, this American Dream, still unclear.

And anxiety builds as I wait to respond
You wanna be American or Guyanese?
Remember what your new white fathers want you to be
American that is, isn't that the whole reason you're free?
But I am Naturally Guyanese.

I don't get it.
I know who I want to be,
Successful and free.
Not working from sunup to sundown
Because America, this proves to you that I'm human.
I'm hardworking, capable, and versatile
I'm Naturally
Guyanese.

Daniella M.

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PREFACE

“Merica”: The Land of Opportunities

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

My mama always instilled these words of the famous South African revolutionary Nelson Mandela as I was growing up. She was the first in her family to complete high school and so my sister and I were expected to continue this trend. She emphasized the importance of Education as this key that could open several golden doors regardless of where you came from or the color of your skin. Moreover, we looked to America as the best way of acquiring this tool and escaping the struggles of a developing economy.

For as long as I could remember, everyone at home idolized coming to ‘Merica’¹ as they would call it and for all of the reasons prefaced before and more. Even I myself as a little girl wanted to dream big and experience what it is like living like an American and going to college games and even Disney World. In the year 2015, I left Guyana along with my mother and sister and we were headed for what was going to be a better life, the melting pot, the bed of roses, the Disneyland of the world, and the place of limitless opportunities. It would be the start of a new life and I would finally be able to attend pep rallies, football games with cheerleaders holding colorful pom-poms, and a chance to go to college, something no one in my family has ever done. However, with all this excitement, I was still leaving behind a huge part of me; my home.

¹ “Merica” is short for America. Guyanese and other Caribbeans will often refer to America as Merica or foreign pronounced fah-rin.

Guyana is home and leaving meant that I would lose the taste of sweet sugarcane from uncle Ronald's farm and the sweet ripe long mango from aunty Chris' backyard. Leaving meant that I would walk away from the traditions like driving around in my dad's car every year for the Diwali, festival of lights, and the sprinkling of powder at the national stadium for Phagwah. An entirely new life awaited my family, forcing us to leave friends, family, and most importantly our culture behind.

Due to a lack of financial resources and instability in the United States, I was forced to live with my aunt at the age of fifteen while my older sister and mother stayed in New York. Being that we stayed in different kinds of neighborhoods, there are recognizable differences between the ways that we have both adjusted in the United States, the opportunities we were both presented with, and how this has ultimately influenced our cultural behaviors. I lived with my aunt in Kennesaw, Georgia, a suburban neighborhood and gated community located in Cobb County, for about three years before I attended Bard while my mother and sister, fifty and nineteen respectively at the time, lived with other relatives. In due time after acquiring jobs, they rented and moved into their apartment in an ethnically dense neighborhood called Little Guyana however, no matter where they lived, the area seemed to mainly consist of Guyanese and other Caribbean immigrants.

With my family being split into different states, my life became much harder as I fought for my American Dream. I attended Kennesaw High School but opportunities proved to be so limited because I could not afford SAT prep classes or could not play sports because I did not have the 'right' documents but only an alien number that they could identify me by. I fought for opportunities to elevate myself and held my goals and values that my mama instilled in me

throughout high school as I fought my way through to acquire a scholarship to college. Regardless of what I was presented with, I knew that I had a purpose leaving Guyana to come and here, and even though I felt like I had 20 additional steps in comparison to my friends, I knew giving up was not an option. America is no bed of roses in the slightest and I am still working to get to where I want to be. Moreover, I am a few months away from graduating college, overcoming constant battles, breaking generational curses, and learning how to navigate the goals and values of a young black Guyanese woman interacting in a whitewashed American society.

It is now 2021, six years since I've migrated to the United States and my experiences here have driven me to write and explore the experiences of Guyanese immigrants like myself today in the United States. Over the last few years, I have come to realize that Guyanese immigrants have formed microcosms of our homeland and have found creative ways in an attempt to keep our culture alive and find a home away from home. I am doing this project because I have recognized this dynamic of varying experiences of Guyanese immigrants, the distribution of economic opportunities across the diaspora along cultural differences in the United States. Today, even conversations that I have with my sister continue to reveal how deeply she is still embedded within Guyanese culture as she holds her goals, traditions, values, and morals close while I've lost touch with some of them. On the flip side, my sister is less open or understanding of 'American concepts' in her words like pronouns and gender fluidity which are foreign to our culture. She is surrounded by people in a neighborhood that share the same understanding of strict he/she pronouns and their culture has taught them nothing but that. She has never had to adjust to referring to an individual differently because this is not seen as 'the

right thing' in Guyanese culture, a society with stricter norms. Moreover, she is way more comfortable than I am conversing with others in creolese, the common language we speak at home, in the streets of Little Guyana, and restaurants and other places outside of the neighborhood. My sister and I are not a case study for my project but rather a motivation that has led me to the desire of exploring how Guyanese immigrants are adjusting to the United States.

It is important to note that I planned to interview both Second and 1.5 generation immigrants to broaden my pool of participants however, after collecting data all of my participants migrated as children or younger adults, therefore, ending with a pool of 1.5 immigrants only. As you read further, you'll learn that their parents or guardians made the decisions for them to migrate with the exception of one young woman, who migrated at a later age without her parents but rather on a student visa. More importantly, this was not an issue as the study is not a comparison between second and 1.5 generation immigrants but rather an attempt to capture the experiences of more younger Guyanese immigrants that did not decide to migrate or those who were born here; The merit being more methodological than conceptual to capture more formative years of my participants' experiences in the United States. These stories will help develop a better understanding of the strong and complex sense of Guyanese identities for future generations.

In this study, I define a one-and-a-half or 1.5 generation immigrant as an individual that has immigrated as a child from the first generation of immigrants who migrated.² I interviewed the 1.5 generation so that I could capture their experiences and understand what traditional holidays they still celebrate, how often they speak creoles if they still do, traditional dishes they

² Rumbaut, Rubén G., Generation 1.5, Educational Experiences Of (2012). James A. Banks, ed., Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education, Sage Publications, 2012, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2182167>

still cook, and more. Additionally, I explored the social ties that they have in relation to friends and family here in the United States and back home. Getting a sense of these cultural behaviors and social ties allowed me to see the connection one's social and cultural capital will have on their socioeconomic values and attitudes in regards to educational attainment and job/career choices.

Understanding the experiences of Guyanese immigrants in the U.S. is of crucial importance not only for adding richness in the understanding of a particular ethnic group in the field of Sociology but it is very beneficial for exposure to diverse cultures in a society that has a particular view of immigrants today. This study provides exposure to Guyanese culture allowing readers to appreciate the experiences of these immigrants who have left their families and culture behind to build a new life elsewhere while also combating this negative view of immigrants and their contribution to American society. The more knowledge and understanding that we can gain by learning about cultural diversity, the more value, and respect we will have for why people will emigrate, their attitudes, goals, and values. Being an immigrant myself, it is of deep importance to me to contribute to educating others on understanding the History, rights, and responsibilities we all have as humans in our society whether native or foreign-born.

Academically, this project adds to a field of developing research that is much needed on Guyanese/Caribbean immigrants. Their unique identity being the only English-speaking country located in South America with six different blends of ethnicities makes for a pattern of adjusting in the host society that is not considered much today as immigrants are expected to completely assimilate in order to thrive. It shows the importance of culture in any society and the extent to which it anchors this cohort of Guyanese people. These immigrants mainly migrated to achieve

upward mobility but it is evident that they make several efforts to maintain their cultural values making this project interesting as we track the trajectory of these immigrants here today.

For analytical purposes, I have chosen to divide my project into sections. To begin this journey, I will provide a brief introduction in the first section and a History of Guyana and its people in the second. Then I will transition into a discussion about what influences migration from these Caribbean countries and islands, including push and pull factors and micro-level theories about why immigrants from smaller developing countries and islands will migrate. I then explore possible reasons as to why immigrants have been migrating and continue to do so and further introduce the voices of my participants to speak to the general patterns/reasons found as to why these immigrants migrate specifically to the United States. These individuals will be introduced thoroughly in the empirical sections of this paper; however, I wanted readers to get a general sense of why these immigrants left Guyana. Fourth, is the section that provides more insight into my research question, details on my participants, and more on what the process was like collecting data for this thesis. Email scripts and sample questions asked during these interviews will appear in the appendices. This section will also reveal what the remainder of this thesis will look like after and will uncover the “empirical data” collected discussing themes.

Next, I will lay a theoretical foundation that discusses Assimilation in depth. At the beginning of this project, it seemed relevant to provide an understanding of basic theories that address how immigrants will adjust to a host society. However, in the end, I found newer and exciting patterns that lead me to include the concept of Acculturation and introduce this new idea that led to a deeper understanding of my participants' experiences.

SECTION ONE :

INTRODUCTION

Land of Many Waters: Guyana's Origin and Its People

The Cooperative Republic of Guyana is an independent nation made up of a diverse blend of Amerindians (the first group to occupy the land), then Africans, East Indians, Europeans, Portuguese and Chinese. The country is situated on the southern coast of South America bordered by the Atlantic Ocean, Brazil, Venezuela, and Suriname. Though it is situated in South America, Guyana identifies more culturally with the islands of the Caribbean adapting a vernacular of English creole (commonly referred to as creolese³). Guyana, previously named Guiana, was colonized by the Dutch and French who started establishing trade posts in 1580. Its richness in natural resources and ability to produce sugarcane encouraged the Dutch to import slaves from West Africa to work on plantations. In 1814, Guyana became a British colony when Britain purchased Essequibo, Demarara, and Berbice, the three colonies in Guiana; however, after a long fight in 1838, slaves were emancipated allowing them to leave the plantations to establish their settlements on the coastal plains. The British in an attempt to occupy the land and keep plantations up and running imported indentured laborers from India to continue working only now with more benefits than the slaves (Matera, Sandin, & Alvarez 2020).⁴

³ Creolese also known as Guyanese Creole is an English-based creole language spoken by Guyanese. It is based on 19th century English and gathers influences from African, Indian, Arwakan and older dutch languages. It is very similar to that of other Caribbean islands with words being very fluid. In creolese, words can be created, adopted and adjusted to mean different things in various contexts over time.

⁴ Matera, Michael, et al. An Assessment of the State of the Guyanese Diaspora. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2020, pp. 3–16, The Guyanese Diaspora, www.jstor.org/stable/resrep26538.4. Accessed 8 Dec. 2020.

After years and years under British rule, the people of Guyana decided to form parties like the People's Progressive Party (PPP) and the People's National Congress (PNC) in an attempt to fight for independence which they gained with the powerful leadership of Linden Forbes Burnham on May 26, 1966. The country was then renamed the Cooperative Republic of Guyana meaning land of many waters. This transition from a country under British rule to an independent nation changed the political scene affecting the social aspect of life in Guyana. This eventually led to an increase in emigration from the country to other developing nations like the United States (Menke and Richardson 2020).⁵ Due to changes in the state of the Union and its origin, Guyanese migrating during this time shift beyond the bias of the receiving country to examine the role of the country state and its push factors; further contributing to a continuous trend of migration.

With a population of only 787, 000 and the smallest country in South America, Guyanese aspired to travel to the United States of America, one of the greatest nations with unlimited opportunities, jobs, and the promise of a better life. Additionally, the lingering effects of world war II in the U.S encouraged immigrant populations after 1945 because of the major labor shortages and the need to recruit larger numbers of workers. These favorable laws influenced more movement out of Guyana as better jobs and educational opportunities were abroad. During this time, the number of Guyanese living in the U.S. continued to increase as a result of economic hardship, changes in the social and political scene resulting in a tense environment, and many other problems including ineffectual education and health care systems. As families

⁵ Menke, Jack K. and Richardson, Bonham C.. "Guyana". Encyclopedia Britannica, 30 Mar. 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Guyana>. Accessed 23 April 2021.

settled here in the U.S., this growing trend allowed for a more consistent flow of immigrants waiting to bring their families abroad to join them (Maltera et al. 2020).

Around the late 1980s, many other Caribbean countries started developing better relationships with CARICOM (Caribbean community and common market) causing another remarkable wave of skilled immigrants to the U.S. with more economic and political stability. Moreover, Guyana started experiencing an economic decline into the 1990s with unstable wages influencing more migration from the country as skilled workers like doctors and lawyers sought better opportunities. By the 2000s, more tension around politics and race influenced a crime wave that spread across the country resulting in protests and corruption further increasing emigration from the country (Maltera et al. 2020).

Guyanese immigrants have emerged from very “close-knit” communities therefore, they drift towards forming concentrations of similar ethnic backgrounds in host countries like the United States. To this day, the United States continues to attract Guyanese emigrating for a better life with about 400,000 people being of Guyanese ancestry.⁶ Between the years 1820 and 1981, Caribbean immigrants altogether have amounted to about 1.9 million in the United States noticeably in New York City and other northeastern cities. With about 175,000 coming from Jamaica, 24,000 from Barbados, and 64,000 from Trinidad and Tobago, these immigrants started developing trends in successful businesses, professions, and education. These immigrants have

⁶ "International migrant stock 2019, " UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, International Migration, Accessed April 2, 2020. <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp>.

settled across New York, New Jersey, Florida, Georgia, and Maryland and smaller communities in other states like California, Illinois, and Minnesota (Maltera et al. 2020).

Now that we have a sense of reasoning behind the consistent flow of Guyanese emigration, I will introduce the voices of my participants so that you the reader will have a sense as to why this cohort of Guyanese immigrants migrated.

SECTION TWO:
AMERICA, A ROAD TO BETTERMENT

My study aims at capturing the personal experiences of Guyanese immigrants for which understanding micro-level theories on the push and pull factors are more relevant so as to add to our understanding of migration. These theories explain why individuals will choose to migrate from these developing countries with issues of underdevelopment, unemployment, and a lack of many opportunities. Lee (1966) argues that immigrants will decide to migrate looking at four factors: the area of origin, the area of destination, intervening obstacles, and lastly personal factors while Massey et al. address the cost-benefit calculation that plays a role in determining whether to expect a positive net monetary net return, etc. from moving (Massey et al., 1993, p. 434).⁷ Castles and Miller (1998) further add that there are links between the sending and receiving country that are based primarily on colonization, trade, investments, and important cultural ties. Looking at Guyana's climate at the time, it can be argued that this wave of migration pushing people from the country could be a combination of the political economy, interstate relationships, networks, and opportunities in the United States, a more developed and promising nation.⁸ These immigrants may have chosen to migrate because it is what appeared to be most productive after weighing their skills and other personal factors.

⁷ Massey, Douglas S. "Finding the Lost Generation: Identifying Second-Generation Immigrants in Federal Statistics." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 677, no. 1, May 2018, pp. 96–104, doi:10.1177/0002716218760506.

⁸ Parkins, Natasha C. "Push and pull factors of migration." *American Review of Political Economy* 8.2 (2010): 6-24.

At the beginning of my interviews, I asked my participants to share to whatever extent they felt comfortable, the reasons that their parents or guardians migrated to the United States in an attempt to add to our understanding of previous migration patterns. After analyzing the data, I noticed two consistent themes that relate to this idea of cost-benefit calculations and secondly the investments that would occur from the end of the receiving country. Essentially, these individuals spoke about having access to more opportunities, therefore, increasing their chances of upward mobility and reuniting with their families who left to make way for others to join them. Many of them reference elders “putting in” for the children back home. It was also emphasized that this was not their choice; however, they knew that ultimately the entire family would be moving to the U.S. One participant said,

“It wasn't my choice but I knew one day I was going to migrate. America was gonna be a better place, more opportunities and such and my dad lives here. It was already set for me. I didn't have a choice. It was emotional but I came even though I didn't know what to expect.”

Emphasizing this idea that it was a collective family decision, another participant added,

“It wasn't a choice. My mom married somebody else so we moved because of him because it would overall be a better life. I guess more money, more opportunities, and so on. Honestly, If I had the choice to stay I would stay because home just feels different. Coming here was a lot of adjusting to do and make.”

Many of them shared that some of their parents were headed for delinquent paths and oftentimes, it seemed like leaving was the only way to a better livelihood. She said,

“She didn't want me to go through what she went through so it starts from her being able to provide a better life for me. So my uncle came first and then the family sent for each other and then to bring the family back together.”

In addition to familial decisions, is the idea of America being an escape and a doorway to several more opportunities. It would benefit more than it costs as these individuals without a doubt see America as a place where you can achieve anything, especially better educational opportunities. One of my participants reported,

“At first I did not want to leave, but when I came I saw the opportunities and things that are easily accessible. Grants, student loans, and just more general opportunities I knew it was the obvious thing to do.” Another adds, *“Opportunity wise, there wasn't much of a future with narrow opportunities in Guyana. It was a new start.”* These themes are not to be used to generalize reasons as to why all Guyanese immigrants will migrate to the United States, but rather to provide some background knowledge as to how they ended up living in the United States.

A Better Life Away from Home

Scholars provide two main explanations as to how these Caribbean immigrants integrate and give reasoning to their mindsets and attitudes in American society as their immigration is so centered around their successes. Firstly, there is the distinct cultural heritage that immigrants from these islands possess that refuses the “inferiority complex pressure” of the slave experience and values education as a way of elevating oneself, hard work, and the ability to be confident and

take initiative to become successful in life. The second explanation gives rise to the idea that most Caribbean islands are underdeveloped nations which causes natives to see the United States as the only way to achieve upward mobility and a better life away from home.⁹

One study done on West Indian immigrants, found that they migrate to the United States and London to achieve better standards of living and economic situations (Nancy 1967). After migrating, these immigrants maintain highly motivated mindsets focusing on their professions for example in New York City these immigrants are the highest-ranking black men in the city police department, only black borough president, and only black federal judges in the city. A 1970 census shows that west Indian immigrants achieve higher occupational status and incomes more than black Americans.¹⁰ This is true of countries like Guyana where individuals have a very distinct culture that shapes their identities but lacks resources to help elevate and climb the ladder of success for which individuals see incorporating themselves into the American society as a way out of it.

As I begin this journey of unraveling the experiences of a few Guyanese immigrants, I want you to remember that this project seeks to add to work that still needs to be done in this field on immigrants. I want to show how rich Guyanese culture is, to the point where many of my participants challenge assimilation theories and enrich our understanding of what culture means for them as they draw on so many specific elements including language, food, holidays

⁹ García, John A. "Caribbean Migration to the Mainland: A Review of Adaptive Experiences." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 487, 1986, pp. 114–125. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1046057. Accessed 26 Nov. 2020.

¹⁰ Foner, Nancy. "West Indians in New York City and London: A Comparative Analysis." *The International Migration Review*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1979, pp. 284–297. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/2545033. Accessed 25 Nov. 2020.

and so much more that they could never let go of. There is so much to learn from listening to their stories that tell us about the function of cultural and social ties and how this capital inherently influences the way a person will navigate any society.

The next section will prepare us for work that scholars have done in the field of Sociology proposing various theories about how immigrants adjust to the host society. This will uncover a wide range of Assimilation theories and additionally address acculturation which will be very relevant when thinking about patterns found in the data.

SECTION THREE :
LITERATURE REVIEW

Looking at Guyanese immigrant identity in the United States, we must explore assimilation patterns of these immigrants here today as one in every four skilled people in the Caribbean lives outside of their origin countries (Beine, Docquier and Schiff, 2008, p. 4).¹¹ Not only do they have a strong presence in other countries, but how these immigrants assimilate will affect their ethnic identities which gives them a sense of kinship, solidarity, and shared culture that yields a common identity and connection to home (CF. Hutchinson and Smith 1996).¹² Sociologists have observed patterns in the ways that these individuals adjust to these host societies and argue that over time these individuals lose connection to their ethnic identities however, my interview participants challenge these foundational understandings. Additionally, we will explore theories about cultural capital and social ties to understand how the effects they have on how my interview participants adjust to society.

Assimilation

In the late 20th century, the founders of the Chicago School of Sociology studied the first and second-generation European immigrants (Park and Burgess 1969, 735) and developed the assimilation theory that argues it is a process that allows for upward mobility of each succeeding

¹¹Michel Beine, Frédéric Docquier, Hillel Rapoport, Brain Drain and Human Capital Formation in Developing Countries: Winners and Losers, *The Economic Journal*, Volume 118, Issue 528, 1 April 2008, Pages 631–652, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0297.2008.02135.x>

¹²Shaw-Taylor, Yoku. "The intersection of assimilation, race, presentation of self and transnationalism in America." *The other African Americans: Contemporary African and Caribbean immigrants in the United States* (2007): 1-48.

generation adapting into the mainstream American society being less attached to their ethnic language, residential concentrations and intermarriage patterns (Warner and Sroles 1945).¹³

Gordon (1964) defines Assimilation as “the entrance of the minority group into the social cliques, clubs, and institutions of the core society at the primary group level”. Assimilation is seen as a process and a person has achieved complete assimilation when the ethnic identity of the minority group becomes indistinguishable from that of the majority group. Building on Gordon’s understanding of assimilation, Richard Alba and Victor Nee (1997) adds that it is the decline in ethnic distinction; complete loss of cultural and social differences. For this study, we will use this definition of the term assimilation as we show the attachments to Guyanese cultural and social capital in addition to socioeconomic values.

Immigrants were expected to conform to Anglo-Saxon Protestant traditions that are more Eurocentric which is the dominant influence on American culture and society to achieve full assimilation (Schlesinger, 1992, p. 28). This acceptance to Anglo conformity serves as a precondition to being accepted in America which is a way to better access jobs, opportunities, education, and a way of climbing this ladder of success. Therefore, assimilation is seen as a way of giving up these traditions or parts of your ethnic identity that make you “different” from that of the typical American who is white presenting. One way of doing so is integrating socially into society whether that means hanging with more American friends or choosing to marry an American. However, there is often a tension that exists between natives and immigrants that is due to a difference in social customs, attitudes and family values. These tensions may lead to

¹³ Alba, Richard, and Victor Nee. “Rethinking Assimilation Theory for a New Era of Immigration.” *The International Migration Review*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1997, pp. 826–874. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2547416. Accessed 8 Dec. 2020.

“high expected transaction costs and low expected gains from commercial and social interactions between members of the two groups” (S. Djajic 2003, pg 834). This is known to affect the pace of assimilation of these immigrants which will affect access to jobs, opportunities or have overall economic implications on the immigrant.¹⁴

Gans and Sandberg (1973) describe the Straight Line Theory of assimilation, which stems from Warner and Srole (1945), arguing that every new generation will create a new stage of adjustment to the host society. The second generation will experience a different set of issues compared to the first that brings a different type of accommodation. More importantly, this is a step away from their ethnic identities or a growing apart that is closer to complete assimilation (Lieberson, 1973). They argue, “that generation is the motor for ethnic change, not just the time frame within which assimilation takes place” (S. Djajic 2003, pg 832). Critiques of this paradigm lead to the Bumpy line theory which acknowledges that different generations or longer periods of stay in the host country may not necessarily be associated with immigrants' social and economic conditions. Later on, Alba and Nee (2003) looking at post-1965 immigrants further developed a new approach, Straight Line assimilation theory, building on the key concepts from the previous theory. They added the second-generation immigrants are likely to integrate themselves more into society while experiencing upward mobility rejecting this idea of downward assimilation. They believe that this generation does not have to adopt “American norms” but rather embodies being heterogeneous.

¹⁴ Djajić, Slobodan. “Assimilation of Immigrants: Implications for Human Capital Accumulation of the Second Generation.” *Journal of Population Economics*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2003, pp. 831–845. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20007888. Accessed 7 Dec. 2020.

Theories of social capital will help us understand whether they are assimilating themselves into society being fully concerned with American friends, partners or whether they have alternate paths of navigating the society that disrupt this idea of assimilation. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) argue that social capital is determined by one's social network that is outside of the ethnic community. They argue that this social capital serves as a way to confront any obstacles and increase an individual's opportunities. However, on the other end, it could make entering the host society more difficult as immigrants may feel obligated to "stick to their kind". However, as Portes and Rumbaut (2001) would argue, this prevents divorce or marital disruption. This aspect of their lives will encompass how immigrants are entering secondary and primary groups and what factors have defined how they navigate these relationships and networks (Małgorzata Budyta-Budzyńska 2011, page 51).¹⁵ We will examine the relationships and social networks of my interview participants to understand the role this plays in the process of adjusting to American society.

Cultural Capital: A Form of Attachment or Detachment?

Another defining factor in the process of assimilation is in the immigrant's cultural capital in a particular social context (Bourdieu, 1997) and how they adapt to the host society; are they holding on to cultural values, or are they adopting more American values? Or rather is it that they are learning these values while maintaining attachment to their ethnic identities in the new host society?

¹⁵ Budyta-Budzyńska, M.. "Chapter 3 . Adaptation , integration , assimilation – an attempt at a theoretical approach." (2011).

In the U.S., cultural assimilation is a complex topic because of the melting pot perspective that seemingly allows for a diverse blend of cultures. In reality, however, the expectation is that you assimilate enough to the point where your culture may no longer be distinguishable. This perspective is a fundamental trait of American Nationalism and one that is highly spoken about (Hans Kohn 1961, 22). The term is used to compare America as a metaphor, suggesting that it is diverse or a symbol where millions of immigrants can combine to form this huge blend and this is most conventionally understood as a process of ethnic interactions. The question of whether one's ethnic identity is threatened by this very notion remains but a look into how scholars theorize what culturally assimilating means gives us much insight into how immigrants will navigate this pot.

Bourdieu (1997) would argue that the cultural experiences that individuals have in the home as children will facilitate how they adjust to school, and academic spaces making those resources into their cultural capital. Those values, beliefs, and things that they learn will facilitate what they deem as important as they navigate these changes in life.¹⁶ While Gordon (1961) argues that immigrants could "lose their old ways" and adapt to the dominant culture adapting more anglo-cultural patterns. This theory of Anglo-conformity posits that every generation of new groups will lose their culture adapting to that of the dominant culture and institutions. This theory further goes to say that these Anglo-Saxon values can be adapted through school and

¹⁶ Lareau, Annette. "Social class differences in family-school relationships: The importance of cultural capital." *Sociology of education* (1987): 73-85.

mass media. This theory has lost much of its popularity because of alternate routes of assimilation such as partial assimilation etc.¹⁷

The Residential Assimilation theory captures the spatial location of these minority groups as they assimilate into the host society. The theory posits that once an individual in a minority group achieves a level of socioeconomic mobility, they will migrate from ethnically dense neighborhoods to areas that are like the ethnic majority (Alba and Nee 1997; Walton 2015). Proving the residential theory to be true, was a study done in 2009 by Zhou on Chinatown. He reported that Chinese immigrants living in Chinatown located in New York City left the enclave after achieving upward socioeconomic mobility to live in more suburban neighborhoods. This is what defines the decreasing cultural attachment to ethnic identities as Zhou argues in his paper, a movement towards something more “white” or American (Zhou 2009).

Furthermore, Segmented Assimilation as proposed by Portes and Zhou explores the second-generation immigrants challenging classical theory. The theory proposes that second-generation immigrants do better economically than the first but they do not give up their own culture. This theory only applies to the children of immigrants predicting that there is a delay in cultural integration. Portes and Zhou (1993) argue that the parents have moved for a better economic lifestyle so there is no need to embrace culture while also making the argument that the children of non-white immigrants may not have access to the middle class regardless of how well they acculturate. However, Filipino children proved to be financially worse off than parents but adapted well culturally into American. For these reasons, the outcomes of Segmented

¹⁷ Critically Assessing Classic Assimilation Theory and Alternative Perspectives for Immigrants and the Second Generation in the United States Author(s): Sebahattin Ziyanak Source: *Race, Gender & Class*, Vol. 22, No. 1-2, *Race, Gender & Class 2014 Conference* (2015), pp. 143-149

theory differ and are based on three factors; upward mobility into the middle class, downward mobility into the underclass, or economic upward mobility into the middle class.

Though these theories may be true for other ethnic groups, my study on Guyanese immigrants have challenged them in interesting ways as they hold their culture close to them regardless of their neighborhoods or spatial locations. Additionally, these immigrants proved to hold familial values and expectations as their “top priorities” and the reason that they remember not to give up. For this reason, I will introduce the path of integration, which proves to be more relevant for my interview participants.

The Relevance of Acculturation: Integration into the American Society

Alejandro Portes developed Segmented assimilation theory in the 1990s arguing that assimilation could look different for each generation of immigrants (Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). He argues “ascending into the ranks of a prosperous middle class or joining in large numbers the ranks of a racialized, permanently impoverished population at the bottom of society” (Portes, Kelly and Haller 2005:1004).¹⁸ It is a combination of both straight-line assimilation and the ethnic disadvantage perspective that discusses structural barriers to education like in poor urban neighborhoods, employment, and other opportunities. With this type of assimilation, three outcomes are possibly being upward assimilation, downward assimilation, and upward mobility along with biculturalism.

¹⁸ Waters, Mary C et al. “Segmented Assimilation Revisited: Types of Acculturation and Socioeconomic Mobility in Young Adulthood.” *Ethnic and racial studies* vol. 33,7 (2010): 1168-1193. doi:10.1080/01419871003624076

Looking at these processes, we can understand the relations between immigrant children, parents, and their ethnic communities; consonant, dissonant and selective acculturation. In consonant acculturation, both children and parents abandon their mother tongue and gradually adopt American culture achieving upward mobility. Dissonant acculturation will take place as the children learn American culture faster than their parents which Portes and Rumbaut (2001) argue could lead to downward assimilation. Lastly is selective acculturation which I will show is more associated with the experiences of my interview participants and their families as it leads to upward assimilation and biculturalism as both parents and children adapt to American culture while maintaining some part of their ethnic identities.

Many second-generation west-Indian teens in New York attributed their attitude about academic success or upward social mobility to their family values (Waters 1996). Many of the teens tended to have a more negative view of black/white Americans who their parents deemed as “lazy”. Waters in her story explores the three different ethnic identities of second-generation immigrants; black American, Ethnic or Immigrant identity as they relate to opportunities in the United States. Interestingly, those who identified ethnically as West Indians value individual effort and initiative which they believe brings more opportunities in life. She concludes with a more complex understanding of assimilation being that it is complicated by one’s race, class, and the interactions that they have. However, for upwardly mobile second-generation immigrants, Waters (1996) says that there is a maintenance of ethnic ties to the parent’s national origins while the poorer inner-city teens tend to assimilate to black American culture.¹⁹

¹⁹Waters, Mary C. 1994. Ethnic and racial identities of secondgeneration black immigrants in New York City. *International Migration Review* 28, no. 4: 795-820.

Based on the results of my interviews, I have recognized the need to introduce Acculturation theories, in order to more fully explain the experience and process of Assimilation. This model as introduced by Berry and David (2010) describes four different strategies including assimilation, adaptation, integration, and marginalization; concepts that help develop a better understanding of the preferences of this cohort of Guyanese immigrants as they adjust to the United States.²⁰ Acculturation is presented as the resulting phenomena of when two cultures come into “continuous first-hand contact” which results in changes to come with either culture or both, known as acculturation. This is the process whereby the minority group in the new host society starts to take in new habits and patterns from the majority in the host society (Gordon 1974). This means that immigrants tend to start adding new values, norms, and cultural behaviors based on the new society into their daily lives. The term does not infer a decrease in one’s cultural distinctiveness as it implies an added element to the individual’s lifestyle however, the more a person acculturated into the host society, the more at risk they are of assimilating into the host society (Gans 1992; Gordon 1994).

In the upcoming sections, I will introduce the individuals I have interviewed and describe what the process was like conducting research for this thesis. Then, I begin my analysis of culture as I have recognized the overwhelming connections between cultural and social capital while analyzing the data. Additionally, these two have worked to influence the ways in which my participants talk about their attitudes towards their educational and career/job goals. I will define

²⁰ Sam, David L., and John W. Berry. “Acculturation: When Individuals and Groups of Different Cultural Backgrounds Meet.” *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2010, pp. 472–481. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41613454. Accessed 27 Apr. 2021.

culture and its meaning as it was believed to be in this context (based on what my participants have said) and unravel the influence this has had on their adjustment to the United States. Here is where I will discuss the relevance of these theories previously outlined as my participants' challenge and support many ideas presented in the literature review.

SECTION FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Question

To accurately understand the experiences of 1.5 generation Guyanese immigrants living in the United States, I asked a variety of questions about culture, social ties, and attitudes towards education/jobs. These questions provided me with the opportunity to understand how they define culture and offered more insight into how their social networks and socioeconomic values have adjusted while they have been living here in the United States.

Research Method

In November 2020, I posted on my social media, specifically Facebook and Instagram, seeking participants for my study along with reaching out to personal contacts seeking their interest. Surprisingly, recruitment was the easiest part of this process as I gathered a total of about 14 - 15 participants within two to three days. After confirming with each participant, I emailed consent forms and scheduled times for each interview. I commenced the interviewing process towards the ending of December and completed them in the month of January. This period of data collection was most efficient as many of my interview participants were on winter break or had time off from work for the holidays. After explaining the objective of my project and collecting any necessary forms, the interviews were conducted on zoom due to covid 19 and social distancing

guidelines. This did not hinder any part of the process but rather it allowed me to meet with individuals from a wide variety of places.

Each interview lasted for about 45 minutes to an hour. Many of these participants were not part of my social network however, they reached out to me via social media platforms. I began each interview prefacing the purpose of my research project and then I proceeded to ask participants if they were comfortable being recorded. If they were, I recorded the interview, if not only notes were taken. Once started, we instantly connected and every conversation revealed newer details that I was excited to unravel in this project. Many of them even spoke in creolese which offered a sense of comfort and familiarity for both parties. After the interviews, many of them recommended other individuals they thought would qualify to be possible participants in the study. This method of Snowball sampling proved to be the best approach as I gathered more participants easily after reaching out. The conversations flowed naturally and many of them were happy to share and reflect on their journeys knowing that their stories were going to be part of a larger thesis and adding to the field of research on Guyanese immigrants in Sociology.

After each interview, I transcribed the recordings and deleted them to protect my participant's identities along with their names being replaced with pseudonyms.²¹ There were no challenges faced throughout this process; however, I was really hoping to have a few interviews in person. Nevertheless, I've built many meaningful connections with

²¹ Interview questions can be found in appendix A, recruiting email scripts through appendices B through C.

Guyanese immigrants like myself and we remain closely connected exchanging memes and having conversations on social media today.

Interview Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Location	Employment	Education
Tiffany	Female	24	Brooklyn, NY	Tax Accountant	Bachelor's in Business, Master's In Accounting
Jenny	Female	33	Bronx, NY	Business Administration	Student, Master's Degree in Teaching
Jasmine	Female	19	Lithonia, GA	Manager	Student, Bachelor's in Business Administration
Nanda	Female	25	East Orange, NJ	Work in Healthcare, studying in college	Student, Bachelor's in Nursing
Randy	Male	19	Queens, NY	Unemployed	Student, Bachelor's in Nursing
Pato	Male	21	Brooklyn, NY	Unemployed	Student, Bachelor's in Physical Therapy
Michelle	Female	21	Queens, NY	Police Officer in training	Student, Bachelor's in Criminal Justice, Pursuing Master's Degree
Paula	Female	20	Brooklyn, NY	Retail Associate at Primart	Student, Bachelor's in Biology
Judy	Female	22	Buffalo, NY	Sales Representative at CVS	Student, Bachelor's in Biology
Cleo	Female	25	Brooklyn, NY	Sales Representative at Beauty Supply	Student, Bachelor's in Biology
Marie	Female	25	Queens, NY	Police Officer in training	Student, Bachelor's in Criminal Justice
Brian	Male	21	Brooklyn, NY	Unemployed	Student in Nursing School

Table 1: This table shows the total number of 1.5 generation Guyanese immigrants interviewed throughout my study while indicating where they were each from at the time interviews were conducted. The table also describes their current jobs and/or highest levels of education, age, and gender.²²

A few participants canceled for various reasons. However, as shown in the table above, I ended with a total of 12 participants, all of whom identified themselves as 1.5 generation Guyanese immigrants and have been living in the United States for at least 2 years. They were all between the ages of 19 to 33 (during the period of research for this study) and were all born and raised in Guyana, migrating at a younger age with the help of parents/guardians to pursue a better life in the United States. The majority of my participants stemmed from the state of New York; five being from Brooklyn, three from Queens, and one from the Bronx and Buffalo each. The other two participants were from New Jersey and Georgia each. Some of my participants lived in ethnically dense neighborhoods which will show how their cultural and social ties manifest in their daily lives while some lived in Jewish or ethnically different neighborhoods. However, even in these different neighborhoods, the data allows us to see how attached to Guyanese culture these immigrants are regardless of where they resided. The benefits of my research include a chance to win a gift card and a remarkable contribution to a field where social scientific research is minimal on smaller ethnic immigrant groups like Guyanese from South America.

²² Table showing participants however, names were replaced with pseudonyms so as to protect their identities.

SECTION FIVE :
DEFINING CULTURE IN THE EYES OF 1.5 GENERATION GUYANESE
IMMIGRANTS

As we've explored in the previous chapter, assimilation theories suggest that one's attachment to one's culture will diminish as that individual assimilates into the host society and even more with succeeding generations. This very concept of culture and its lack of continuity is put into question especially when individuals migrate at a young age but they have had deep connections to their native land and are now tasked with learning and adjusting to the norms, values, and attitudes of individuals in the new society. Arguably, with the 1.5 generation Guyanese immigrants that I have interviewed, there is this deep attachment to their culture and strong value for continuity that proves to be interesting. These immigrants seem to have found it important that they adhere to very specific elements of their culture as it relates to traditional dishes, holidays, and much more while living in the United States. These immigrants even challenge the narrative of a diminished culture with succeeding generations as they find it extremely important that their kids embody what it means to be Guyanese.

This chapter aims to explore how my participants view their culture and understand to what extent they challenge assimilation theories while residing here in the United States; what elements of Guyanese culture remain valuable to them and in what ways has it manifested itself in their lives today, if so. I will explore and then provide possible explanations to understand patterns found.

First, we must lay a foundational understanding of what culture means in this context, especially taking into account what my participants define it to be for themselves. Recent theoretical approaches to the sociology of culture, relying especially on the work of Clifford Geertz, tend to emphasize the importance of the local context (including structural factors) in which cultural meanings are made (see Lamont & Small 2008). However, other theoretical approaches to culture (e.g. Patterson 2014) emphasize the impacts of intergenerational traditions and experiences.

Culture in this study will adapt something from each of these analytical frames that can be used to decipher what my participants define as Guyanese culture and how it has manifested in their lives today. Culture, in my understanding, is not one-dimensional as it may mean the things I've learned from aunty Princess growing up in Guyana or it may mean the things I've adapted from my Guyanese family living here in the United States. For example, in Guyana, we are taught to 'wash the dishes by hands immediately after eating a meal or you're in for a scolding from mommy. However, here in the United States., my mom does not care if I've done the dishes by hand anymore, in fact, I have the choice of using the dishwasher, the rule remains, however, the dishes ought to be done immediately after eating. This is not necessarily the deepest cultural value but it is important as it shows how as people move, rules, ideas, values, and norms may evolve. I've provided a foundational understanding of many different frames because I think that not accounting for various ways of viewing the concept, could limit our understanding of what my participants could outline in their experiences. I think that cultural history is important but I also value and want to learn more about its evolution as people relocate to different spaces.

In this study, culture can be defined and conceived using two basic paradigms; the first is the more traditional way of thinking about culture as something that has been passed down by way of learning in places like the home, or religious settings. Scholars like Patterson (2014), and Berger and Luckmann (1967) argue that culture is taught through generations and is subject to change but it will endure throughout longer periods. While scholars like Lamont and Small (2008) would argue that culture is not something that will be passed down because it can only be learned in a particular context emphasizing structure. I will take the approach of understanding on the basis of these paradigms; however, it should be emphasized that there are other ways of thinking about culture or alternate things that could be picked up about other cultures outside of this study.

Culture as a Model of Tradition

The first paradigm referred to as the sociocultural approach focuses on the cultural knowledge that a person has and how they use it in various social contexts (Berger & Luckmann 1967, pp. 38). These scholars argue that an individual interacting in any social context over time starts to create models of each other's actions that become repeated and reciprocated habits in response to each other. Members of the society go through a process of institutionalization as they play in and out of these roles giving meaning to these conceptions. Essentially, their reality is said to be socially constructed as this knowledge gathered becomes an embedded pattern in their minds as they interact and roles are made available to other actors i.e. a shared thing. Furthermore, the knowledge that these actors construct may be meaningful in one culture but not

in another and this is shown in the sociological processes like externalization.²³ Through these processes, we develop ideas, feelings, and concepts that we share with others through language, an encoded way this information gets incorporated into the speech community and exists outside of the speakers who constructed it.²⁴

Similarly, Patterson (2014) defines culture as a “conjugate product of two reciprocal, componential processes” (5-7); the first process includes shared knowledgeable structures that individuals embody internally and express externally that provide a sense of continuity and meaning to human interactions. The second process he describes as a “pragmatic culture component” that facilitates the first process with its own rules from practical knowledge. Patterson further proposes that we look at cultural configurations as a way of understanding a heterogeneous society where he believes change is inevitable as people interact and shift between different and overlapping configurations.²⁵ This paradigm of culture emphasizes the traditional elements that rely on it being learned and constructed by institutions like the family however, more importantly, it is the knowledge that lasts from generation to generation but is subject to change.

²³ As defined by Jarvis (1992, 2004), internalization and externalization are defined as dual processes whereby individuals construct themselves and their culture.

²⁴ Berger, Peter Ludwig, Peter L. Berger, and Thomas Luckmann. *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Anchor, 1966.

²⁵ Patterson, Orlando. “Making Sense of Culture.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 40, 2014, pp. 1–30., www.jstor.org/stable/43049524. Accessed 1 Mar. 2021.

Culture as a Model of Context

Secondly, is the paradigm of context for which scholars argue that culture is learned in a particular context with structure at its core. Lamont and Small (2008) provide an overview of contemporary theories that incorporate concepts such as narratives, frames, boundaries, repertoires, and institutions, which inform the ways that individuals define their reality. This model is useful for understanding the diverse frameworks that allow populations to understand their reality and develop ways of upward mobility. Alfred Schutz (1962), Berger and Luckmann (1966), and Erving Goffman (1963) build on this tradition of belief in cultural frames being the very thing that defines how a person perceives the world i.e. race, class, neighborhood, organization. Seeing culture as frames essentially blocks others from understanding unless they learn these symbolic elements that are important for action.

Ann Swindler (1986) sees culture as a repertoire of practices, beliefs, and attitudes that influence how a person will act. Swindler argues that one's culture will influence them by shaping their "tool kit" i.e. their habits, skills, and styles from which they will form "strategies of action" (1986, 273). An individual's culture will allow them to see the world from a different perspective or through a particular "tint of glass" that ultimately influences how they carry on in the social world. Orlando Patterson (2004) critiques this model of culture adding that it downplays culture by creating these comparable images such as "toolkits". Patterson further adds that materials and other artifacts act as an individual's enactment of their cultural software while the hardware is that structural enactment of that cultural model that includes their informal routine, and highly structured organizations. Culture in this view is more stable and predictable

as it is attached to a particular identity however, it is not static as people construct and reconstruct how they interact and perceive these values, goals in varying social situations.

Somers (1994), seeing culture through the lenses of narratives, argues that people will develop an understanding of themselves based on their environment and the people surrounding them. What this means is that individuals will make decisions based on what seems most rational to them and aligns with their narrative; what sounds rational to one person might be completely irrational to another person. In conjunction with this idea of culture as a personal narrative, is the understanding of culture as a symbolic boundary that distinguishes between objects, people, and practices that guide behavior. It is essentially a system of rules that affects “who comes together to engage in what social act” (Lamont and Fournier 1992, 12). Like narratives, these boundaries create a distinction as they define who is worthy or not based on common beliefs.

Lamont and Lareau (1988,56) define culture in a sense of capital as these cultural signals that become widely shared i.e. institutionalized, served as a way for the middle and upper class to pass on these connections that eventually become advantageous for children. The argument is that as these children become familiar with habits and orientations that are valued in their culture for example the education system, they are creating more opportunities for themselves. Lastly, culture can be seen as an institution as Hall and Taylor (1966) define it to have formal and informal rules, procedures, routines, and norms that are most importantly shared. In seeing culture as an institution, they are arguing that these places have an impact on how an individual carries themselves, their attitude. The most important aspect of this is the fact that these attitudes become a shared way of thinking and enable shared experiences.

Culture as a Model of Practice

In addition to the model of tradition and context, some scholars have defined culture based on the practices that happen within communities and last throughout generations. Cultural practices are defined as shared perceptions that individuals develop as norms and values. These practices become governed by the group's attention (Sheynberg) especially by certain cultures that have stronger socialization tactics, for example, tight cultures, in which parents will help to reinforce these cultural practices (Gelfand and Harrington). However, people may choose to conform or not to these specific norms and values (Gelfand & Harrington, Tan, Morris & Zhu) which ultimately determines the continuity of these practices. These practices will shape the experiences of some immigrants as they choose to adopt, reject or change some of these cultural norms and values over time.²⁶

The models of tradition, context, and practices each allow us to view culture through a specific sociological eye so that we may see the multiple facets that contribute to a person's cultural identity, ultimately influencing their social ties and socioeconomic values and attitudes towards work and education. Scholars argue that it is defined using very specific paradigms however, I believe that culture is not this exclusive especially in the case of my research project. By looking at the way these Guyanese immigrants speak, the food, rituals, and holidays that they participate in, we can see how culture here itself is defined and grasps influences from tradition, and structure whether that means the things they learned in schools or from their families along

²⁶ Frese, Michael. "Cultural Practices, Norms, and Values." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, vol. 46, no. 10, Nov. 2015, pp. 1327–1330, doi:10.1177/0022022115600267.

with the practices that they choose to engage within a variety of ways here in the United States in an attempt to have cultural continuity.

A Combination of Toolkits, Changing Morals and Performance

As prefaced before, I am arguing that culture as defined in this context, according to my participants, draws on important aspects of each of the models provided. This cohort of 1.5 generation Guyanese immigrants have shown how important traditional elements of culture have been in their adjustment while also emphasizing the structure that they were instilled by parents, grandparents, uncles, and aunties. Through their ability to speak creoles, my participants have shown culture as a form of tradition that allows them to socially construct a reality and speech community that is understanding of their feelings and the way that they will express themselves. Through foods, rituals, and holidays we see the importance of not only tradition but the value for what was taught by mommy growing up in the kitchen or what to make on Christmas day. They emphasize the importance of familial structure as it relates to their goals and values around social relationships and socioeconomic values and attitudes. For these reasons provided and more, we will adopt a multidimensional way of defining culture to fit what my participants have shared about their experiences.

In addition to this multidimensional view of culture, we will also take into account Goffman's (2008) ideas about performance. This is important as my participants use culture as a

way of defining how they interact or rather “perform” various social roles in different social groups. The term performance refers to the actions or things that a person does while they are in front of a group of observers. Throughout this act, the person will give meaning to whatever it is that they are doing in addition to themselves and the observers. It is during this process that information gets delivered and interpreted while the audience is giving meaning to it. The setting is important because it determines how these individuals will perform requiring them to alter their roles in different locations. While appearance and manner play a key role in this concept, it is the front, and backstage that help us to understand how my participants use performance to navigate these differing cultures.²⁷

The Front and Back stages can be used as a way of understanding the everyday interactions that my participants refer to as they navigate culture in the host society. Using these three regions, we can understand the different effects culture has on performance. Goffman (2008) defines the actor’s front as part of their performance inferring that an individual’s impressions or the image that they present to others is their social front. This implies that there are different rules that apply for different situations but more than often a person has already established a front to choose to navigate any social situation. In other words, when an actor is on the front stage he or she will know how to act accordingly because they are being perceived by an audience. In contrast, being backstage means that an individual rids themselves of expectations and this is where they get to be their true selves. Using this understanding, I will show how these immigrants use their front and backstage selves to navigate two different cultural realities.

²⁷ Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor Books, 2008 pp. 17-18.

Creolese Creates Comfort: Language as Part of a Cultural Reality

Language is one of the primary ways that people will express their cultural reality as they share common ideas about the world that reflect their attitudes, beliefs, and point of view. Language is seen as a “system of signs” that have particular cultural value therefore when these immigrants interact with others through this common use of language at work, home, and in various spaces, they view this as a symbol of their cultural identity.²⁸ Through interviews with my participants, we see how language will conduct their social lives as they interact with Caribbean immigrants like themselves. When asked about the role that creolese²⁹ will play in their lives, it is evident that they consider this language as part of their Guyanese identity and is one way they will strategically use depending on their social environment. Essentially, it is one way to point out a Guyanese in the crowd and possibly start a connection based on this shared entity.

When asked about the role creolese will play in her life, Paula, a 20-year-old young woman living in Brooklyn New York, gives insight into this experience. She was born and raised in Guyana but has been residing in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood. Paula currently works as a retail associate at Primart and describes her work as having predominantly young African

²⁸ Kramsch, Claire, and H. G. Widdowson. *Language and culture*. Oxford university press, 1998.

²⁹ Creolese also known as Guyanese Creole is an English-based creole language spoken by Guyanese. It is based on 19th century English and gathers influences from African, Indian, Arwakan and older dutch languages. It is very similar to that of other Caribbean islands with words being very fluid. In creolese, words can be created, adopted and adjusted to mean different things in various contexts over time.

American employees and predominantly white bosses. When asked about the role creolese will play in her daily life she responded saying,

“It's really something that Americans expect you to keep but it's hard to do it in an environment where they don't understand you. My accent only comes out when I'm with a West Indian person or someone that I know. If a Guyanese/Caribbean person is approaching me to check out, we instantly connect and start speaking like we back home. If a Guyanese, Jamaican, or anybody comes up to me speaking, my accent just naturally comes out too. Outside of that, I speak proper English at my job. My body language knows where it is most supported so that side naturally comes out.”

Another young woman born and raised in Guyana but migrated at the age of 16, shares these same sentiments. Judy is currently 22 and works as a sales representative at CVS Pharmacy along with taking care of autistic children. She currently lives in Buffalo New York and has been for the last four years. She responds saying,

“When it comes to my family, there is no question! Around friends too, I would do it because it's easier and most of my friends are Caribbean anyways. I am more expressive in my tongue but at work, people don't understand and it's a setback. So I play a part and go along with de American accent. It's just easier but if I'm upset, de accent comes out all the way.”

Additionally, 25-year-old Marie who was born and raised in Georgetown Guyana shines a light on the importance of speaking in her tongue but also navigating when and where she will let the accent out.

“Creoles play a very big role in my everyday life. I am proud of where I came from so I will never stop speaking in my tongue. Sometimes I have to change how I speak depending on where I am but I like for people to know where I'm from because I'm proud to be Guyanese. I'm proud of my ethnic identity. It's not that easy for me to change how I speak because I grew up most of my life there and it's something that is deeply ingrained in me.”

For Marie, tradition is important and when she is with her Guyanese/Caribbean friends, they have socially constructed an environment where they understand the words, and phrases that are being used to feel. Like Berger and Luckman (1967) are arguing, Marie has gone through a process of institutionalization in a Guyanese society where she has learned what creolese means and it has become a shared thing that she and her friends play in and out of roles. This also describes the act of codeswitching which is a ‘flexible and contextually contingent resource’ used by individuals that speak more than one language to navigate their social roles and identities around others in their everyday worlds. The act of codeswitching is a multifaceted socio-cultural practice that introduces ‘discursive practices’ that are collaborative and most importantly is a shared interaction with understanding and interpretation between parties (Gumperz 1982 and Young 2007).³⁰

Kramersch (1998) writes that when individuals prohibit themselves from using this language it is perceived as them choosing to reject social groups and culture but my participants challenge this very idea. Some report feeling like they cannot be themselves and speak like they

³⁰ Hua, Zhu. "Duelling languages, duelling values: Codeswitching in bilingual intergenerational conflict talk in diasporic families." *Journal of Pragmatics* 40.10 (2008): 1799-1816.

would because others will question what they're saying because it sounds different.³¹ Tiffany is a 24-year-old young woman that has recently graduated from college and is now pursuing a Master's in Accounting. She currently resides in Flatbush, Brooklyn New York, and works as a Tax Accountant. When asked about her choice of speaking creolese in public spaces she responds saying,

"It simply does not work out. It's part of my identity and how I've been speaking all of my life so I wouldn't change it for anyone but I know when and where to speak like a Guyanese. When I am home, yes but at work, I am forced to speak with an American accent. When I first came here it was annoying because every time I say something, people would question what it meant. Even simple words like vegetables, we say veg- ah -teb- bles, and they are confused or either laugh. So now I've gotten used to it. It's better than it was before. I'm very comfortable with my accent, it's just that people don't understand. Every time I speak creoles to an American, I feel like I have to give a piece of myself."

Similarly, a 19-year-old male, Randy who resides in Jamaica Avenue Queens New York reports how he feels like his neighborhood is a "balance between the two cultures" as it gives him a gentle push into American customs while he still gets to keep his roots. Like Tiffany, he also uses creolese as a way to navigate these two identities and he knows when and where to speak like a Guyanese. When asked about the role that creolese will play in his daily life he says,

³¹ Kramsch, Claire, and H. G. Widdowson. *Language and culture*. Oxford university press, 1998.

“As a black person going to Manhattan, it feels weird but it gets worse when I speak because now I’m not only black but I’m black and an immigrant. When I’m home it doesn’t matter but around white people it’s weird and they ask too many questions. I remember one time these kids started mimicking how I speak. I feel very different mainly when I speak in spaces so it makes me conceal that part of myself. For instance, I had a friend who was a Trump supporter who questioned my identity. So speaking creoles is something that I have to be very strategic about.”

The issue is not that these 1.5 generation Guyanese immigrants reject their culture but rather they feel like they have no choice but to speak like an American. Here language becomes a combining factor of tradition that is guided by contextual learning and the very thing that provides comfort in familiarity being a binding factor for Guyanese/Caribbean immigrants. It is the tradition that they know, those feelings that others in the speech community will understand. Many of them talk about this adjustment to the way that they speak and here we see language as a tool that is being used to navigate different spaces. They do not reject other social groups they play along with the “American accent” but the purpose of this is to make communication easier and avoid the feeling of alienation. Moreover, these immigrants continue to emphasize how important creolese is to them and how amazing it feels to go home and just let a breath of fresh air out. Some even say it is a ‘critical part of their identities’ and just how they express themselves.

A Taste of Home: Food as a Symbol of Cultural Identity

Culture not only influences the way people think but the way that they act and the things that they do throughout their everyday lives for instance the act of cooking or eating. In looking

at food, we can see how culture is defined by the model of tradition that is learned and passed on. Kittler et al (2017) argue that one's food habits are linked to their ethnic behaviors and like language it serves as a symbolic function of cultural identity. What a person eats daily is a reaffirmation of their cultural identity; if they choose to maintain eating cultural dishes, they have made the conscious decision to participate and maintain their culture. Kittler et al (2017) further, argue that these foods that are introduced from early childhood will offer a level of security and good memories especially as individuals compete with living in a dominant outside culture. "Comfort Foods" as they are called will satisfy that basic psychological need that individuals may feel for familiarity in a strange place. Moreover, these foods from the outside culture will serve as a distinguishing factor between foreign groups and maybe the very thing that maintains this group separation.³²

Some of my participants live in neighborhoods that are ethnically dense with Guyanese/Caribbean immigrants while some live in Jewish, Hispanic, and other ethnically dense neighborhoods. There is a notable difference between the food consumption or diet of immigrants that live in neighborhoods like Little Guyana, Flatbush which are primarily in Brooklyn and Queens. These neighborhoods can be described as enclaves because there are so many other Caribbean immigrants dominating the space with shops and stores lining the streets and corners. Immigrants in these neighborhoods find it easier to stick to a traditional diet.

This is the case for Marie who currently lives in a neighborhood around Jamaica Avenue, Brooklyn NY. Marie considers her neighborhood an ethnic enclave because she says it is dominated by Caribbean immigrants. She explains how much of a home this neighborhood is

³² Kittler, Pamela Goyan, Kathryn P. Sucher, and Marcia Nelms. *Food and culture*. Cengage Learning, 2016.

away from home as she's not missing out on anything but her family. When asked about her diet, Marie responds

"I do cook dishes from my country, I'm very traditional. I cook every day, Monday to Friday. I cook my greens. Cabbage, Bora, and pumpkin. I don't like to eat pasta and stuff. I never stray away from my traditional foods because that's what I grow up in Guyana. At home (Guyana) everyday mommy make stew chicken, curry, or something with rice, and then maybe on Friday we go out and eat or get ice cream. It's what I know so here about 90% of my meals are Guyanese, 10% is American. If I'm extremely busy and I just wanna grab something to go quickly, I get fast food. There are Guyanese markets with strictly Caribbean greens, seasonings, and meat that we eat like smoked fish, Boulanger, Corilla, that you just can't find in the regular grocery store. I buy my mangoes, polourie mix, and all my greens then go back home and cook it."

She says that having access to these traditional elements like certain 'greens' which is what we refer to as vegetables make it easier for her to eat and stick to what she knows. In this way, we see how Guyanese culture has manifested itself in this neighborhood that she describes as ethnically dense. Moreover, we see Lamont and Lareaus's (1986) structure or the values from the institution of the family coming to light here. Even though Marie may be in a different country she continues to eat the way she used to as a child growing up in her mother's house. Similarly, Brian is a 21-year-old male who lives in a neighborhood in Brooklyn NY surrounded by Caribbean immigrants says how ingrained his Guyanese diet is. He's been living here for at least three years and for him, Guyanese traditional meals are important. When asked about Guyanese food and how the culture has manifested in his neighborhood, he says,

“I just got back from one today! Just things you can find on a regular basis at home so it's easy and it's what you know! I stick to what I know, yuh know? They have several markets and restaurants like Roti on the run which is a Trinidadian Guyanese restaurant. I buy my saltfish and bake and everything I can find at home, I can find there. Like Chickenfoot and so. Its just a nice feeling to know you can still have these things while living here.”

On the other hand, some of these immigrants reported how different their experiences are coming from neighborhoods that are predominantly Jewish, Hispanic, and American like in the Bronx and Atlanta. Guyanese/Caribbean culture in these neighborhoods does not manifest before their eyes on street walks and pavements making access to these traditional meats, greens, and fruits harder. Nevertheless, some explain how they will venture out into other neighborhoods when they have cravings. This is the case for Cleo, a 25-year-old Guyanese woman that currently resides in Cypress Hills in Brooklyn who describes her neighborhood as having a strong presence of Latinos. She has been living in the U.S. for about five years and decided to move to the neighborhood recently because of its close proximity to her job. Cleo says that her landlord is Jamaican but there aren't other ways Guyanese or Caribbean culture manifests in her neighborhood.

“ I eat a combination of American and Caribbean meals but mostly a traditional diet. I long for my greens and eat them as often as I can. So I will leave my neighborhood and go get whatever it is that I need and then make my way back home. Sometimes I make a trip to Charo's on Liberty

to get the things off my list and then I'm set. Once or twice, I would eat fast food too but I indulge in traditional meals whether some curry or some cabbage. I would say 80% of my meals are traditional and the remainder being whatever is available."

Sherry, who lives in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood adds,

"The neighborhood I live in is very Jewish so they don't really have any Caribbean shops or restaurants near me but I know other neighborhoods that do. So whenever I feel like eating a good meal or whenever I have the time, I hop on the bus and do my shopping and then come back here to cook. In addition, I cook traditional meals on fun days too like we have a nice healthy Sunday dinner. I'll eat and cook American meals because they are most accessible and easy to get."

Interestingly, some immigrants reported that even though they may live in ethnically dense neighborhoods or ethnically different neighborhoods, traditional foods have become harder to make a priority because of how fast-paced the American lifestyle is. Randy reports,

"Every day in school I ended up eating a lot of fast food but when I'm home I'm eating my traditional food." He further emphasized how sometimes, he doesn't even go to the Caribbean restaurants in these places like Manhattan because it's not for Caribbean immigrants. He says, "These Guyanese/Caribbean restaurants aren't for our people even because they are so exotic. De food overpriced."

These 1.5 generation Guyanese immigrants have very specific food habits that connect them to their Guyanese roots in various ways that are dependent on their neighborhood dynamics and their everyday lives. For someone living in an ethnically dense neighborhood it is easy to maintain these food habits because it is accessible, however, in other neighborhoods that look ethnically different it is hard to maintain even though these individuals might crave their chicken curry or oxtail and rice. Essentially, food has served as a symbolic way of connecting with their roots and most of them will go out of their way to preserve this feeling however, with neighborhood inaccessibility and the demands of work, they face challenges of maintaining this and resort to the fast-food lifestyle.

Fostering The Feeling

In addition to traditional and structural components, the participants in my study reported how valuable practices from holidays and rituals were to them. Rituals and holidays offer a connection that becomes energized and intensified as participants share these symbolic objects of communication (Jeffery, 2004).³³ This is seen with 33 year-old Jenny who moved here in pursuit of better education and furthering her studies. She previously lived in a neighborhood in Queens that she describes as having a dense population of Guyanese immigrants. However, she moved to the Bronx to branch out and experience life around another demographic. When asked about continuing to celebrate any holidays or traditions the way we would in Guyana, she shared how important it was for her to do things the way we would at home.

³³ Alexander, Jeffrey C. "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy." *Sociological Theory*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2004, pp. 527–573. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3648932. Accessed 1 Apr. 2021.

“For Christmas, I definitely have to do it the same way. I spend time with my family and even still on ‘old years’ I will make my cook up.³⁴ When I was growing up, we would celebrate Phagwah and Diwali because they were such memorable days of the year. For Diwali, we would all dress up de yard with lights and even drive around to see other houses in de neighborhood. You know, you cook your vermicelli, parasad, and other things and give to anybody that pass by or visit. Or for Phagwah day we all play in de yard throwing powder on each other, I miss them days. Here I don’t celebrate those because there is a huge disconnect and the people I live around don’t know about these things. However, around Easter, I still make cross buns. I try to still get the same elements like cross buns and suh to at least make it feel a little like home cause it could get lonely here.”

Jenny references “cook up” which is a meal that consists mainly of rice cooked on the stove in coconut milk with chicken, tomatoes, onions, channa, and a lot of bits and pieces of things. In Guyana, we usually make ‘cook up’ on the weekends but it is an especially important meal on Old years as our parents believe and have taught us that it brings prosperity and happiness for the new year. She speaks about still trying to make these meals a part of specific holidays to maintain some sense of home, an emotional attachment to that fosters a sense of community and connection to home which she feels she lacks especially since she lives in a neighborhood with no Guyanese immigrants like herself.

³⁴ ‘Old years’ - what is commonly referred to as New Years Eve in the United States and around the world.

Moreover, Randy, the 19-year-old young Guyanese man from Queens as previously introduced, references some of these same holidays and adds how it differs from actually being in Guyana. He says,

“Growing up we learn that Christmas time is all about yuh pepperpot and yuh garlic pork. We look forward to these things more than the average American because it makes us feel like we're home so no matter what we try to do these things. Playing Phagwah in de yard all day and driving around to watch lights on Diwali just brings so much comfort. It's what we used to doing, yuh know? Even on Emancipation day we celebrate and wear our dashiki at the national park but yuh can't do some of these things here. We don't really do Diwali because there is no easy access to the materials. But we still try to do something if we can, like New years is very family-oriented and we must have our cook up.”

Echoing this struggle to celebrate these rituals or holidays is Pato, who is a 21 year old male living in Brooklyn New York. He migrated for better opportunities and has been here for about four years now. He says,

“It's very hard to celebrate because no one knows about your culture and most Americans don't know or celebrate things the way we do. Even outside of them not knowing, it hard because you have to work a lot and when you come home yuh tired. So sometimes you even forget because the American lifestyle is so fast-paced. Not being Indo-Guyanese or living in a neighborhood with other Guyanese immigrants that value these things make it hard to celebrate holidays like Diwali and Phagwah. But I know some people do especially in Queens. It's never going to be the same but we still make our pepperpot, black cake, and sponge cake at Christmas time. Gingerbeer and

garlic pork and we cook up a lot. We still do these things to feel like we're at home. It not the same but it's something, yuh know?"

Randy calls our attention to the culture of the American lifestyle which he regards as very “fast-paced”. This highlights the cultural understanding of the value of tradition in Guyanese culture. Work is of important value however, to these participants, they like to stop and acknowledge traditions. Some may struggle with adjusting to these values but find creative ways to acknowledge this part of their lives and this comes to light in other interviews. Twenty-five year old Marie from Jamaica Queens says,

“Easter is a big deal in Guyana, we celebrate with family and friends. Back home, everybody dresses up and you go to church and then in the afternoon, the entire family is going to the park. We all show out dressed up in our colors and all the children flying their kites in the sky. It's a family thing you know but moving here we don't get to do those things. Over here, yuh lucky if yuh even get a Happy Easter from anybody. I just don't work that day, I go into the park and watch the kids play, etc. It's not the same way like Guyana but I try to savor the day.”

Additionally, Tiffany says she tries to do what she can; however, she doesn't feel like there is space for it because others don't acknowledge it while work always gets in the way. She says,

“I don't really do much just because there aren't necessarily spaces for it. No Diwali, Phagwah, Emancipation Day, and stuff because I can't do it alone. I do post things cause you know all my friends on social media are Guyanese and we all collectively missing home so we acknowledge and post how much we miss home. We celebrate Christmas more here like we still make our

peppercot and bread but it's still not the same. We have to work on these holidays, if not them, you going right back to work de next day.”

Conclusion

Language, food, and rituals/holidays in this study have worked as ways to show us the limitations of the existing theories of what culture is in today's society. Using my participants' understanding of their identities, I argue that, in this context, culture takes from all those rules and regulations you followed in institutions like church and school growing up in Guyana. It is reflected in those practices you were used to as a child that either mommy or aunty instilled in you whether it's cooking in the kitchen or playing in the field. It is those tips and tricks, those rules of mannerism at the table and so much more that shapes your understanding of who you are today. More importantly, culture is not set to be this one thing but it is subject to change especially as individuals grow and interact with many cultural groups that influence their 'toolkits'.

Marie said throughout her interview, *“when I go places that require me to speak in a certain manner, I adjust to that ambiance. You have to make that switch you know? Like certain businesses, neighborhoods, etc. It's more comfortable to speak however you wanna speak rather than going into one you don't know. But when I'm home and I meet up with me friends, issa different story.”* For her, she doesn't reject American culture but has incorporated skills into her toolkit to allow her to navigate American society. Furthermore, my participants show and tell how diverting a little from the things they've learned or lived in spaces that are extremely different than they are used to, does not prevent them from incorporating elements of Guyanese

culture into this new lifestyle. Paula says, *“Christmas is not Christmas without my pepperpot! Diwali and Phagwah here are hard but Christmas and Easter traditions would never grow out of me. I need my traditional meals and everything to keep my culture alive.”* Culture is all of these things, and for my participants, being Guyanese means keeping the essence of these elements alive while also thriving in the host society.

Additionally, these individuals hint at what was previously introduced as the front and backstage performances (Goffman 2008). Using these very specific elements like language, we see their abilities to navigate both cultural identities differently using their American selves as frontstage and Guyanese self as backstage accordingly . The main points to consider as we approach the next section is first their willingness to keep up with the American society while also fostering this feeling of home as they work to maintain cultural Guyanese elements like crossbuns on Easter or Pepperpot on Christmas. Essentially it is this value to integrate and understand the sacrifices for the better that they are making as they may not be able to celebrate holidays like Diwali and Phagwah. This section shows the clear attachment to Guyanese culture while also hinting at the American ideals that are slowly being incorporated into their lives.

The next section will serve as a way to discuss these elements in a more meaningful way as it relates to the relationships and connections that these individuals currently maintain while living here today.

SECTION SIX: DISCUSSION

Being Guyanese Vs. American

Culture has influenced the social relationships that my participants have kept alive as they interact with various cultural groups here in the United States and back home. After interviewing, I've come to realize that assimilation theories proposed by Alba and Nee (1997), Warner and Sroles (1945) support one view of how immigrants adjust in the United States. I believe that my participants reject these theories and rather align more with acculturation strategies proposed by Berry's model which rejects the idea of one straight path of adjusting in the United States. Assimilation is rather seen as a phase of acculturation (Redfield, Linton, Herskovits, 1936, pp. 149-225) as emphasized by Berry and is more preferable to use because it emphasizes the reciprocity that cultural groups will have on each other. Moreover, I've noticed that the way my participants view themselves and navigate their social lives is heavily based on the demographic they are mainly around; hence, how they navigate their cultural identities is heavily based on the type of cultural groups that they are around, that is their social ties.

Berry's (2010) 'universal approach' identifies four different paths including assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. These four strategies account for the extent to which each individual will balance the issue of cultural maintenance when in contact with other cultural groups. As prefaced, assimilation theories emphasize how much individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity seeking interactions with other groups and adapting to the lifestyle of the dominant culture. The separation strategy is used by those individuals who place a

high value on maintaining their culture avoiding as many interactions with others. Contrastingly, is the integration strategy for which individuals maintain a strong sense of cultural identity but also find other ways to participate in the larger social network. Lastly, is marginalization that causes a lack of interest in maintaining culture and exclusion and/discrimination resulting in little to no interest in having relations with others.³⁵

Integration through Social Ties

Looking at the social ties or rather relationship preferences of these Guyanese immigrants, I will argue that this cohort has a strong value for maintaining cultural values while also participating in the larger American society; integration into the American society. Their belief is not to only hold to Caribbean values that they might have learned growing up but also to be open to adapting the newer American values they've seen and heard while adjusting here. For them, the diverse groups of friends, and family that they keep here in the United States and Guyana provide a balanced way of integrating themselves into society and this comes to light in some of the responses given during the interviews. Many, if not all report that having a partner of Guyanese descent is not necessarily an ultimatum but it is a preference as it would make dating easier, however, they are open to dating Americans or any other cultural group while having these deep cultural connections or values.

Twenty four year-old Tiffany from Brooklyn reports, "*my previous partner was actually of Guyanese descent but he was from an island in the Caribbean.*" For Tiffany, her partner does

³⁵ Sam, David L., and John W. Berry. "Acculturation: When Individuals and Groups of Different Cultural Backgrounds Meet." *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2010, pp. 472–481. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/41613454. Accessed 1 Apr. 2021.

not have to be Guyanese however, as Randy and Pato it becomes a preference that their partners be of Caribbean descent since there is less chance of a disconnect. Pato from Brooklyn says,

“It's not that important however, it would be a plus if she was, cause then she would be exposed to my culture. We would be able to share a lot in common and it would save me a lot of explaining. With someone outside, there are a lot of things that you may think are normal but may not be to them like certain rules in the household and ting. Like simple manners, you have to say good morning or goodnight when you enter any space. Also, Americans be really confused when you say goodnight cause to them, it means bye or something. But for we issa greeting yuh know? A sign of respect so for me, I prefer if she is of Caribbean descent and she needs to be able to cook.”

Pato believes that certain words or ways of greeting people like saying Goodnight as a greeting have a different meaning in interactions with Guyanese/Caribbean people versus Americans. Like Patterson (2014) is arguing, some rules come from practical knowledge that Pato is pointing out in common that are known to Guyanese and will be understood when used in a particular context but confusing to another because they have not given meaning to this particular way of greeting or interacting. Similarly, Randy responded by saying

“It's not a dealbreaker but I would prefer to be with someone that is Caribbean. The holidays, customs, and ways that we celebrate things in Guyana is very different so having somebody that already shares that understanding would just make everything flow organically. Like every lil ting matters, like greetings matter a lot in our culture but not so much here. Days like thanksgiving don't even matter to us but in America is such a big deal. I would prefer dating a

Guyanese or any Caribbean woman for that matter. The culture is the same and we could relate to past experiences. That difference in culture, and attitudes is important because it could cause more problems in de relationship that you didn't even anticipate. But like I said, if an American girl come along, I wouldn't seh nahhhh, I would try a ting and see."

Aside from feeling like things would be easier, some participants went further as to say that they would not have to conceal any parts of themselves. Nanda from East Orange New Jersey is one such participant. Nanda is twenty-five years of age, works in healthcare, and is currently pursuing her bachelor's in Nursing. When asked about her relationship preferences, Nanda reports,

"I was with a white boy before and he was American. The relationship worked but then there were so many things that I feel like he didn't understand and so many times I felt like I couldn't say something or do something because it would totally go over his head. I don't have a problem with it really, however, it is a bonus. If I get along with them and I find out they Guyanese I wouldn't even have to try. I get to be myself without having to hide any parts of my true self."

For Nanda, there is an important distinction between the authentic self and the self that she is when in a relationship with someone who is not necessarily Guyanese or Caribbean. This is reminiscent of Goffman's (2008) idea of performance, using the front and back stages accordingly to navigate social interactions with others. "The individual offers his performance and puts on his show for the benefit of other people. Everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role... It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these

roles that we know ourselves.”³⁶ Many of my participants know that acting and performing like “Americans” would be a way for them to play the part making the other party comfortable and limiting the chances of miscommunication and judgment. This is true for many other aspects of life like at the workspace and school that may be dominated by people of another ethnicity. It is harder when you’re misunderstood therefore, being accepting of and open to learning the cultural behavior of an American, or rather performing this way makes for an easier way to integrate into the American society. Judy, a 22-year-old college student from Buffalo adds,

“I’m open to marrying others but I feel like I could be myself more with a Guyanese. All my close friends are Guyanese and I’m able to connect more and show cultural interests. It’s just easier because you don’t have to put up a face or put on a show for anyone trying to speak properly and all that.”

Additionally, one of my participants thought that it would be beneficial to actually have a partner of another ethnicity. June says that her partner does not necessarily have to be of Guyanese descent. Moreover, *“I feel like being able to be in a relationship with someone else allows me to experience life from a different point of view. I’m gaining more than I am losing anything.”*

Aside from partner relationships, many of my participants reported having friends from all “walks of life”³⁷ further showing how their social ties allow for them to connect with and expand beyond groups that they know, integrating themselves into the American society. Many of them report having mainly friends that identify as Guyanese/Caribbean who they speak creolese, dine out, and party on the weekends. However, they also emphasize that they have

³⁶ Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor Books, 2008 pp. 17-18.

³⁷ In Creolese, it is common to say all walks of life to imply a broad or diverse group of individuals.

American, Latino, African, and many other diverse friend groups from college, neighborhoods, jobs, and other spaces. Many of them admit that they mainly have Guyanese and Caribbean friends because these are the groups that they share common interests with, especially food and music which is another important aspect of Guyanese culture. Cleo from Brooklyn who was introduced earlier says,

“I like surrounding myself with people that I have found good connections with and they come from all walks of life. Friends from Caribbean backgrounds, Latino backgrounds, not confined to a specific ethnicity or background. Most of the people from my school are Latina while at my job it's a mix. My closest friends are Guyanese and Jamaicans but I also made friends with some African girls and they like sisters to me and we honestly have the best relationships. Many of my guy friends are also Americans that I met here and honestly, is chill vibes. I don't feel no way about them. But like I know what kind of crowd I'm showing up with to a party like obviously, my Caribbean friends cause we love our soca and dancehall music. With my American friends, we are more likely to go to bars and dine out and stuff and do hookah and stuff. My friend groups are overwhelmingly from other diasporas but not mainly American.”

Similarly, Judy adds that her bonds with her Guyanese friends have gotten tighter because there is so much comfort that comes from speaking to someone that you know is like you. She expressed in her interviews how it's “a breath of fresh air, a relief not having to fake an accent or try so hard to be anything.” She also adds that living in a neighborhood that lacks anything Caribbean makes it hard for her to build more relationships with other Caribbean people so she remains closely connected to the West Indian community on social media like Instagram, Facebook, and Tik Tok. She adds,

“I haven't really met that many people here or been able to build relationships with those that aren't Caribbean. I like living around Caribbean people because there are certain positives like being around your people gives you a lot of comfort. Most of my friends are Guyanese, and it's not that I prefer Caribbeans more it just happened this way. It's nice seeing other Caribbeans but it's also a lot so I appreciate having conversations with people who are American or not Caribbean. That too could be a breath of fresh air because you can learn so much about the ways that people think and all the things that are different between our cultures. Just a different perspective, yuh know?”

Many of them talk about these feelings of comfort that they get when they are around other Guyanese or Caribbean people like themselves. Moreover, they make it known that this often happens naturally and they just gravitate more towards these kinds of people but it does not necessarily mean that they do not have friends of other descents. Many reported having friends of other ethnicities including African Americans, Hispanics, Africans, however mainly Trinidadian and Jamaican friends. Many of these friends, like them, have migrated abroad, or remain in Guyana. Jenny reports that she has to remain connected to her family and friends because it is a cultural value that has been instilled in her to “stay true to her roots”. She says,

“Yes I do, if I didn't, I would run mad. Is important to stay true to your roots. If you don't know your History, you're bound to lose yourself in dis place so staying in contact with everybody home is what connects me to everything and reminds me of my purpose and de whole reason I came here, to begin with. It really helps you to be humble and mindful of where you're from because when you remember all the things your family and friends go through, it's motivation to

keep you going. A lot of people suffer from an identity crisis that is a huge problem because they don't know who they are in this place."

In addition to friendships, when asked about their connections to home, Paula and Karen respond similarly saying that they do remain close to family and friends back at home because it offers a sense of comfort. Karen adds,

"I do, my mom and best friends are in Guyana. It's just the history, the comfort, a sense of home is still there. I have a lot of friends back home too cause I lived there basically all my life. Whenever I'm feeling homesick I can call them and it makes me feel like I have a part of the home with me."

While Paula says, *"I do because our bonds are very strong and I feel like after being there for most of my life, the friendships were so long they have to last. I wanted to keep my same friends even though I'm here. It's easier cause they get me and I don't have to do too much. No matter the distance I still keep it."*

Many of my participants report having friendships here but oftentimes emphasized how important these connections that they have to home are important. They have many diverse friend groups that add to their knowledge and understanding of their current reality but continue to value home and the family and friends that they grew up with. Tiffany from Canarsie Brooklyn says,

"Yes, I do remain closely connected, because I was already grown when I migrated. I had friends

I was close with and social media made it easy to keep in contact with people. I love my culture and I always visit too. It's easier to keep up with things that are happening at home when you stay in contact and I want to know what's happening back home with the people I care about. Being away makes it more important to me and absence makes the heart grow fonder. I wish I could go to a coal pot and get this thing. I still feel connected and proud to be Guyanese.”

Michelle, a 21-year-old police officer in training from Queens New York also emphasizes the importance of holding on to these connections and ties from home almost as a way of reminding themselves of why they came here, to begin with.

“Most definitely, I speak to them daily. I even ask how the neighbors are too. Being away is hard so I live through my family in Guyana. If I'm homesick I ask them what they're doing and just trying to find out what's going on. Most of my close friends and the majority of my family are in Guyana so I have to remain closely connected. Maintaining close relationships with them because my values haven't changed because I'm not there. Family is very important to me and they keep me together and remind me of the things I need to do, the whole reason I came here, to begin with. I think it's important because you could come to this place and get caught up with work and forget where you came from. So it's important to me that I stay connected.”

Noticeably, there is a difference between being their American selves versus being Guyanese and their social ties will help them to navigate these two culturally different realities. Pato adds,

“ If I'm going to certain neighborhoods, I'm more alert, and I adjust how I carry myself. I feel weird in predominantly white neighborhoods too but I'm way more comfortable in the hood

cause you know everybody chillin. Like when we home, you know everybody, and the hood does kinda mimic that with everybody out on the block and music playing in the streets. It kinda reminds me of home man.” June says, “In my neighborhood, I tend to speak quote on quote proper - I speak with my accent around Caribbean people but with others, I have to carry myself a certain way so they understand me or don’t frown upon me I have to act accordingly.”

Looking at these social ties, it is evident that my interview participants find it important that they remain close to their roots and keep in contact with family as it reminds them of who they are, and makes them feel connected to the home they had to leave. However, we further see throughout their storytelling that they do value connections with others outside of their ethnicity whether American or not. In fact, they see that there is much benefit that comes from expanding their social networks at a very low cost of losing any part of themselves that make them Guyanese. I argue that it is their conscious efforts to maintain their Guyanese identities and their deep value for tradition is what allows them to freely expand without feeling like they have threatened their roots or true selves. These testimonies further revealed the importance of family and friends or rather social ties and how they have continued to play a role in influencing the values and attitudes that these Guyanese immigrants hold to as they pursue education and jobs/careers.

SECTION SEVEN:

FAMILY INFLUENCES SOCIO-ECONOMIC VALUES & ATTITUDES

As the interviews continued, I started to notice the importance of maintaining social ties at home amongst several of my participants. Moreover, the social ties that these immigrants choose to maintain further influence the decisions that they make about educational attainment and job/career choices. Many of them refer to their parents, grandparents, and families at home that they do it for. In their storytelling about why many of them migrated, it is seen that migrating became a cultural thing within families and generations because it was seen as a way of climbing the ladder to upward mobility. Tiffany says,

“It was mainly for the opportunities. My uncle came first and then the family sent for each other as they started earning more money and building a name for themselves and then eventually to bring the family back together.”

While Paula reflects a little on her journey in an emotional tone, she further emphasized the fact that living here in the U.S. was something that she knew was going to happen. Like several others, she discussed that it was inevitable and a decision that was already made. Her dad lived here and so the entire family had been waiting to migrate to the U.S. even though they did not know what to expect, they knew it was going to be for the better.

Furthermore, there is deep importance that these individuals place on the expectations that families have placed on them to achieve their goals today while living in the United States,

grounding them and setting them up for brighter futures. As discussed earlier, Lamont and Lareau (1986) also talk about this kind of cultural capital as a way for children to remember the habits and orientations that are valued in their culture to create more opportunities for themselves. This connection is important because in seeing how hardworking and ambitious my participants are today, we can understand how culture as an institution functions to impact how these individuals carry themselves, the attitudes they have towards their jobs/careers/education, and how much their families and/or social ties have influenced them overall (Hall and Taylor, 1966).

When asked about the influences of family on the decisions made about her job and her educational path, Cleo responded by saying,

“My family’s expectations are very imperative of what I choose to do because I feel like I’ve been given this opportunity that a lot of my friends and cousins don’t have. So having this platform and being able to go to college and pursue my Bachelor’s in Biology and work a full-time job, and support my mother and grandmother back home is a lot to do and I didn’t think I could do it at all. So I feel like because of these things the pressure is on but I cannot fail. I have to do it for them and make them proud. There is a sense of feeling and pride even though I’m not there yet. I feel the support and know so much is expected of me. Goals are still there for me to achieve and people are watching so I can’t back down for nothing. I won’t.”

Like Cleo, Marie also finds it important to make her family proud as she pursues a career in Law and Criminology. She recently graduated from John Jay’s College in New York City and is currently training in the Academy to be promoted to a higher position. She says,

“It is very important. I always want to make my family proud, showing them that the sacrifices they made were not in vain. So everything I do, I put my mind to it and ensure it gets done. Every morning I wake up and get through the cold weather no matter what, you have to get up and go whether it’s work or school or whatever. People like we have to succeed especially comin from a background where not many people are educated and get the opportunity to go to college so I just want to pave the way, you know?”

Like Patterson has emphasized, these traditional elements that are learned and constructed by institutions like the family, for example, the hardworking etiquette that these individuals possess are a result of this cultural learning, this model of tradition that was embedded from an earlier age. If these individuals, forgot their culture and where they came from, they would not have as nearly such a view on life and this comes to light at one point during the interview with Judy who is currently studying Biology, at the University of Buffalo. She says,

“I think that my grandmother was the one that instilled all of this in me as a child growing up and is the reason I am who I am today. She always said that she saw how smart I was growing up and that I would always strive to make her proud. I was born and raised in her hands and those days I feel like giving up, I remember how much time she invested and how coming here was such a big deal and a huge sacrifice. So when I have doubts and I wanna give up I remember how much potential she sees in me and I keep pushing by all means. My mother too. They always inspired me to strive for excellence and are still my biggest supporters.”

Randy also shared throughout his interview, how much these family expectations have guided his career path and choice to do nursing in college. He says,

“I want to help people, that’s my main goal in life. And my entire family did stuff in the medical field my aunt, my grandma, and my sister. They are all nurses and so family expectations were a big deal. It was sort of like a given. I didn’t have a choice but to do something in the medical field cause you know most Caribbean parents... If you ain’t a doctor or a lawyer, they gon ask what yuh doing with your life? So yeah, it was sort of a given but honestly, I don’t mind it. I just want to help people and be successful.”

In addition to maintaining cultural capital that connects and inspires them to further pursue their education and work hard, my participants also discussed how their goals have changed and what adjusting to the American lifestyle has been like for them. Many of them talked about how their families and friends have helped throughout adjusting here but more importantly, they acknowledge that how they think about some of their goals and values have changed their attitude in some ways since they’ve been living here in the United States.

This part of the interview process allowed me to further understand culture as a combination of tradition and structure that is subject to change when individuals are put in a society with different cultural behaviors. For many of them, there is much value in adapting to the American lifestyle. Sometimes, they criticize how often Americans work and how much interference this has with some important moments like traditional holidays however, they value the opportunity to do more with their lives. For example, Judy discussed during her interview how hard it is to celebrate some holidays because she’s so busy however, at the end of her

interview, she reflects on the broader “American” perspective that has allowed her to grow as a person expanding her horizons. She says,

“Initially, I wanted to go to an Ivy league and be a doctor because in Guyana that’s what everybody expect you to be when yuh smart or a lawyer. However, the American lifestyle has made me realize there’s so much more other than having this narrow mindset that I had in Guyana. Being a doctor is at the back of my mind but I’m so much more open to other things now in the field like there’s not just one thing I could do and I’m glad I see that now.”

Cleo adds, *“ It definitely shifted because there are more opportunities here, fields of study would not be possible in Guyana, and living here has broadened my horizons. A degree in Dental Hygiene would have been unheard of back home. I am more exposed to a lot more fields of study, the possibilities are endless and this has shifted my mindset and how I move.”*

Many of them speak about this love for Guyana but also talk about their struggles and hardships in terms of striving for excellence beyond the medical or law field. Like Judy and Cleo, Jasmine reflects on wanting to pursue her dreams but being pressured into nursing because it was the only thing that was seen as a way out in Guyana. Jasmine was born and raised in Guyana and she is now a manager at a fast-food restaurant, pursuing Economics in college and living in Lithonia Georgia. She says,

“Yes, when I left I wasn’t sure I wanted to pursue Economics because my family wanted me to do nursing. But when I actually started going to school, I just made the switch because there is so much more room here to be successful on different paths. So now I’m doing Business

Administration. You don't have to pressure yourself into one thing there are several other opportunities here."

Being American or being in America has allowed these individuals to adjust their mindsets and think differently about their career choices. They still have hard-working ethics built in them; however, they see beyond one possibility that their culture has taught them. Being here has taught them that things are more possible which is what many developing economies tend to lack. Paula adds,

"I wasn't much of a hustler, but now I know that I want to move up and be able to do things on my own time, be financially stable and free. I'm more into getting a job and being on the go because that's what living in America is like. It's like you have so many opportunities to do better, you'd be a fool if you didn't get up and get it done! I wanna move up and keep going. I wanna enjoy life and provide a way for my people."

So, Can you be both Guyanese and American?

As mentioned previously, the goal of this project is to understand and learn what Guyanese culture means to these immigrants and to discuss, using specific elements like language and food, to what extent these immigrants remain attached to their cultural identities. Also, I wanted to understand what relationships they had with individuals here in the United States and back home. In the accounts of the participants I gave earlier, we see a deep attachment to the Guyanese cultural identity and regardless of neighborhoods or states, this group of immigrants shows that culture is important in maintaining their roots and who they are as

individuals. It means participating in holidays in the simplest ways and replicating parts of the season or cooking meals like they would in Guyana. More of my findings show their acceptance of American ideals and their willingness to adopt or integrate some of the ways of thinking in the Host society into their lives. This led me to wonder if they considered themselves Guyanese or American or if they believed they embody both?

My participants were of the opinion that Guyana is such a diverse country that has thoroughly prepared them for what they are experiencing today. It is a cultural value to be understanding of diversity coming from a place of six different ethnic groups and one that has instilled the importance of perseverance.

Nanda says, *“Yes, it's like being bilingual. It's like living two lives. Guyana will always be in me and this is just an adopted home.”*

As the researcher, this response struck me however, noticeably it became a pattern amongst many of my participants. Randy believes that he can be both but he has to maintain the parts of himself that have grounded him in knowing his purpose, his Guyanese self. He says,

“If I stick to what I'm accustomed to, there will be no contribution to the American aspect of my life. I will only be used to the things I know and there's no room for growth. There's no way, I value a lot of things from my culture that already differentiates me from a lot of my American friends. Too many of my friends fall short of the American lifestyle, partying every night, forgetting their goals and why they came here. That couldn't be me. A lot of my American friends even drop out. But yeah, I still feel like it's important to hold true to yourself in the midst of this all because there's so much freedom, so many different kinds of religion, music, mannerism, and

everything is a lot to keep up with. So it's cool to have all this freedom and opportunities but it's also good to have this grounding factor knowing where you came from and staying true to the things you grew up with."

In Paula's interview, she says that she feels like she can be both however, it seems to add more value to her Guyanese side because like Randy, it is her true self. She says,

"I feel like I could do it cause I've adapted to the lifestyle, the meals they cook, the accent, etc. but my true self lies in Guyanese culture so the American side would get the lesser half. Just to go about your day and get through this but I'm gonna always be Guyanese, that's what I value, what I love."

Judy adds, *"I feel like you can be both because I do it on a daily basis. I go to work and forget about the culture but when I'm home I'm back to being Guyanese. It's crazy because the accent is the key factor that allows for that code switch. Even in school, knowing that you don't have access to certain things and you know the struggle you just know you have to do it. It is important to have some aspect of the cultural background because it is more structured and gets you through things. You make decisions easily because its nonguessing game, its what you've always been told to do. You see more results and my kids definitely gonna know their culture. It's a foundation that will make everything flow after. Discipline etc. even spankings too, is just part of the culture, when you enter a building you know you gotta take your hat off, just to have that respect man."* For these immigrants, there is no competition but rather a balance that they try to find integrating themselves into American culture while anchoring themselves in Guyanese culture; the Anchoring effect.

SECTION EIGHT :

CONCLUSION

The Anchoring Effect

This research project focused on a group of 1.5 generation Guyanese Immigrants living in the United States for at least two or more years and the strategies they have chosen to navigate adjusting to the American society. These immigrants challenged earlier theories of assimilation as they find it imperative to hold on to their “true selves” while also adapting a few American values; integration into the American society. This thesis mainly argues that culture informs the social ties that my participants remain connected with while allowing them to expand their social networks as they adjust to the new host society. Essentially having relationships with fellow Guyanese and other Americans while living here has allowed for a proper balance in becoming well adjusted but also anchored. Through these connections to home and replicated cultural behaviors, they are able to share and maintain a connection with the Guyanese community remembering their roots i.e. values, traditions, and more that they were raised with.

Likewise, the decision to also have friends or partners of American descent while living here allows them to integrate themselves into the American society learning new perspectives they might want to adopt. With a focus on culture, this project showed how specific elements of culture like language, food, and rituals/holidays can be used to navigate two different cultural realities. Moreover, this cultural and social capital that these immigrants build on allows for them to have an anchoring effect in their lives as they make decisions pertaining to long-term goals like education and career choices that influence their successes as individuals.

A key fact to remember is that my participants challenge the ways in which we define culture in the field of Sociology. Essentially, the term culture in this context has evolved to encompass more than what the family has taught an individual and more than something that is passed on. Culture is defined as a fusion of the old and new ways of thinking, living, and acting in any society. This includes the traditional elements that facilitate cultural behaviors like knowledge used in various social contexts, along with habits that become repeated and reciprocated responses (Berger and Luckman, 1967). This knowledge, however, is subject to change as it becomes informed by formal and informal rules, procedures, routines, and norms of a new society. Moreover, as immigrants in a new society, individuals are met with the demands of new institutions, frames, boundaries, and toolkits that they consume and give meaning to in different ways to define their new reality (Lamont and Small, 2008), (Ann Swindler, 1986).

The discussion of culture as a concept called for a broader perspective of its definition in this study as I noticed patterns about what my participants have said that are neglected when we think of it only as tradition or something learned in one particular context. With this understanding, I will argue that my participants do not conform to assimilation theories that emphasize anglo-conformity but rather are making conscious decisions and strong efforts to keep their culture alive. They do so by using language, foods, rituals, and holidays as ways to participate in Guyanese culture while living here in the United States. Cultural and social differences are still prevalent; inherently separate but manifests as a balance between the two cultural realities. Many of them emphasize the importance of speaking in their tongue when they

are around other Guyanese or Caribbean people but performing like an “American” when they are in other spaces that are ethnically different. This is a choice that they make to navigate various spaces efficiently.

Additionally, my participants emphasize the importance of venturing into Caribbean neighborhoods to connect and find the ingredients they need for their “cook up rice” on Sunday or Pepperpot on Christmas if they are lacking access where they reside. This along with their decision to eat mainly traditional meals throughout the week is indicative of a strong attachment even if these immigrants choose to live in neighborhoods that are ethnically different. They believe that these decisions to leave older ethnically dense neighborhoods that they previously resided in were due to work decisions and the convenience of the location. Furthermore, celebrating holidays is another way to ground themselves and remember who they are and where they came from. These elements are an important part of maintaining their roots and anchoring them in life; the Anchoring effect.

The Anchoring Effect is the most sounding argument of this thesis as it comes to light in cultural behaviors that interconnect with my participant’s social ties or capital further influencing this process of integration. As these immigrants choose to participate and anchor themselves in Guyanese culture, they stay connected with family and friends back home. They refer to these relationships as grounding factors that bring about a connection and a sense of purpose as they adjust into this melting pot. However, my participants show the effort to participate and contribute to the larger American society by practicing openness to having relationships and friendships with others outside of their ethnicity. They speak about Caribbean partners as a preference that makes life easier because of clear communication and specific meaning given to

actions that only Caribbeans themselves make sense of, for example, greetings. Sometimes they refer to their friend groups as diverse but having a stronger presence of Caribbeans like themselves. “Is only natural” many of them would say as they acknowledge the level of comfort that comes with this shared identity. However, this is not to say that they do not have American friends or rather stick to one type of friend group. They also mention how accepting they are of relationships with Americans as this could be an opportunity to learn something different.

Guyanese culture further helps my participants differentiate themselves from the majority group, however, it also helps them navigate these two different realities making sense of who they are. These Guyanese immigrants choose to hold on to their friends and families while also having American Friends because they see a deep non-detachable value in being born Guyanese and sticking to your roots while finding ways to adapt to a new American lifestyle. To them, achieving this “American dream” is working to the best of their abilities and taking all the opportunities they can to become successful. Even though this may interfere with how they traditionally celebrate Easter and other holidays, they are open and now conditioned to understanding why it is important that they make these sacrifices. With this mindset, they still manage to hold on to the most important aspects of themselves remembering their purpose which allows them to be successful as many of them feel like they are well on their way to acquiring the "American Dream".

Paula - “This entire experience has been a lesson. This is what I need to make it here in this country, if yuh don’t work hard yuh won’t make it. I am not giving into working 24/7 like these

Americans forgetting about the important moments in life but I know that I have to work hard like my parents always tell me. I'm not money hungry but I don't wanna suffer. I will use the economy to help me get where I want; independent, and financially secure. But I don't want it to change me. America is a resource to me and I will use it to get up as much as the people who were born here. Some expect us to work ten times harder and because you're a minority they don't think you deserve it but we can still be ourselves and make anywhere home and that's what I intend to do."

Randy - *"The American dream isn't all that realistic anymore in my view. I am working towards my goals and I am headed towards success though. I have a good head on my shoulders because my parents taught me this growing up so I will make it even if it doesn't happen overnight, I will make it and be successful. The American dream is different from the immigrant dream which is about working ten times harder if you want to make it in these people's country. Being from Guyana, I know they ain't gonna hand anything to me so I will do it because I have gotten through the fight from black and white Americans. It's definitely gonna happen. My family have good jobs etc. and I feel like we're gonna make it even as Guyanese living here because we know what it means to struggle and not have these opportunities."*

Cleo - *"To me, it means a lot of hard work, a lot of commitment, dedication, and perservanerane. The American dream is not handed to you. It feels like an uphill battle but it does not feel unattainable because I've been taught that I need to work hard all my life. It's a very prideful feeling because you achieve what you want and it means a lot to conquer these obstacles. Yes, I*

feel like I have the means to achieve my goals. I'm not where I want to be but graduating college is a big deal even though I still have a little way to go."

***Nanda** - "I think the American Dream exists but not unless you want to do the work to get that dream. I feel like I'm heading there, you have to stay on the right track. It's hard being an immigrant, you see a whole different dream when you come here, 2 very different dreams. If you don't keep a focused mindset you will not achieve it."*

In the final analysis, it can be concluded that anchoring themselves to Guyanese cultural capital and social ties allows for my participants to apply important values that they have learned growing up and applying them in the decision-making and commitment process to becoming successful. Essentially, they have emphasized how important it is to become successful today as many of them believe they have come so far and have chances at the "American Dream" because they have been taught to work hard for whatever it is they want to achieve in life. While they believe that they are going to be successful at this dream, it is not to say that they believe it is easy and accessible to them. They recognize that they have to work ten times harder, however, as long as they put in the effort, they believe they can achieve it. It should be noted that how this group has chosen to define, give meaning to, and adapt to the American melting pot could be used as a way of seeing other demographics especially other Caribbean immigrants who often have strong cultural attachments.

When I look back on the 15 years of my life spent in Guyana, I can undoubtedly say that I owe my success to my native land, my Guyana. To me, being Guyanese has shaped me into the

young woman that I am. Like many of my participants, I will forever value going home and speaking the way I want to my friends and family. Being able to speak creolese and eat Bakewell bread in the comfort of my home in 3rd street will always foster the safest feeling and best sense of comfort for me. I no longer have to pretend to have an American accent and try being proper. I have and always will value the shared meals and meanings behind our Ole years cook up and pepper traditions. I know that I will carry these moments with me for the rest of my life no matter where I go. While I could never consider myself American, I will always be grateful for what being American has taught me. It's not necessarily a dream, especially when you're not born here but rather a way to elevate yourself. Guyana lacked many resources to allow me to become the woman I wanted but America has provided a way for me to be her. I have moved so many times away from home because home is not always the safest for us and losing my brother changed my life in Guyana drastically. However, with everything that has been instilled in me as a child growing up in Guyana, I always knew that I would be successful because "*Home Is Where You Make It.*"

Future Studies and Limitations to Consider

If I were to further develop this project or conduct another study on Guyanese immigrants, I would look beyond 1.5 generation Guyanese immigrants to further develop and make conclusions about 1st and second-generation immigrants. I strongly believe that 1.5 generation is often forgotten hence why I wrote this project, however, the latter two are equally as important and would produce just as interesting patterns as this study. Additionally, I would want to interview my participants a few years from now, to understand if they still choose this method of adjusting to the American society, and if they feel stronger or weaker attachments to Guyanese culture in their older years further challenging current theories.

For future studies, there are a few points that should be considered when studying Guyanese immigrants living in the United States. More importantly, these are points I would consider if I were to be conducting another study on this demographic. Firstly, this study should not be generalized to make conclusions about the entire Guyanese immigrant population living in the United States due to the small sample size. This study only captured the experiences of 12 Guyanese immigrants mainly coming from New York City, therefore, there is a limitation based on where these immigrants are coming from. Additionally, this study suffered a gender imbalance as most of the participants recruited happened to identify as women. As the researcher, I do not suspect that the responses given varied much across genders, however, the number of men in comparison to women is not enough to justify this observation.

If the purpose of future studies is to understand patterns and strategies Guyanese immigrants will choose to acculturate to the United States, then the recruitment methods should

be expanded to thoroughly understand if individuals prefer integration only over other strategies. This study also focused only on 1.5 generation immigrants who were younger, therefore, many other generations should be incorporated into the study to further make stronger arguments about Guyanese immigrants in the U.S.

Due to my participants being younger, their attachments to their culture could change as time progresses, therefore, it should be noted that this argument could be made for younger generations however, the case might be different as these individuals grow and live longer in the United States. Lastly, this project does not approve or disapprove of integration as the only strategy Guyanese immigrants choose to acculturate into American society. Though it is not perfect, it represented the experiences of a group of Guyanese immigrants living here today and contributed great value to Immigration studies in the field of Sociology.

POST THESIS REMARKS

When I decided that I wanted to do a study on Guyanese immigrants, I initially wanted to explore the experiences of immigrants living in Little Guyana, an ethnic enclave located in the borough of Queens New York. I wanted to venture out into the streets of Richmon Hill and talk to the people selling in restaurants and lining the streets of this bustling neighborhood. However, after Covid-19 came into effect along with the social distancing and masks guidelines, I decided it wasn't safe for me to do this kind of research. Therefore, I decided to remove myself from the idea of studying a particular neighborhood so that I could capture the experiences of Guyanese immigrants around the United States. I decided that I wanted to broaden my pool of participants to get a greater sense of different places so that I could understand patterns around their culture, social life, and socioeconomic goals in the United States.

My question focused on what role culture, social relationships and socioeconomic values played in the lives of these immigrants as they adjusted to a new host society. I wanted to explore these three sections in depth however, after collecting data, I realized that a huge part of my project was going to be centered around the concept of culture, with social ties and socioeconomic goals being an important discussion that adds to our understanding of why these immigrants choose to integrate instead of assimilating. I did not anticipate exploring as many cultural theories however, it added a better understanding of what was to come from the voices of my participants. With such a large focus on culture and its definition, there was not much time left to explore the social and socio-economic aspects including family dynamics, or the role that these individuals played back home.

Nevertheless, this study has produced new findings on a group that has not been studied much, therefore, making a great contribution on its own to the field. I thoroughly enjoyed my interviews and collected so much data that it was hard choosing what to include. However, discovering the themes in culture was easy as I started finding patterns amongst responses making my analysis easier.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: *Sample of Survey Questions*

NB. This interview should last anywhere between 45 minutes to an hour as some questions may overlap with others and get eliminated organically within the interview process.

Social - Family dynamics, Roles, Neighborhood Dynamics

- ❑ How old are you?
- ❑ What do you identify as (gender)?
- ❑ Tell me about yourself (What does it mean to a Guyanese to you and how has that shaped who you are?)
- ❑ To whatever extent you feel comfortable sharing, could you talk about why you chose to migrate to the United States?
- ❑ Are you single, in a relationship, or married?
- ❑ Is your partner of Guyanese descent or not? What do you think about a Guyanese marrying someone outside of their ethnic/racial group?
- ❑ Do you have connections with friends/family in Guyana? If so, why do you remain closely connected or not?
- ❑ What neighborhood do you currently live in? How would you describe your neighborhood and Why did you choose to live in that neighborhood?
- ❑ Have you lived elsewhere? If so where and what was that neighborhood like?
- ❑ Are you familiar with the people living in this neighborhood? If so, are they friends/ other family members?
- ❑ What type of people do you like surrounding yourself with? Does their ethnic origin (Guyanese) matter to you?
- ❑ Do you feel any different when you leave the neighborhood? Any more or less comfortable?

- ❑ What role do you play in your family?
- ❑ Does your family have a relationship with your friend groups? If so, how? If not, why?
- ❑ In what ways has this neighborhood shaped or defined your adjustment to the United States? How has it helped/hindered you?
- ❑ Do you feel supported by the members of your neighborhood?

Cultural - Traditions, Food, Rituals, Holidays

- ❑ Do you still celebrate any traditional Guyanese holidays here in the United States?
- ❑ What type of religious beliefs did you grow up with? Has this changed since you've migrated and if so, how?
- ❑ What is your diet mainly composed of? Do you cook any traditional meals? How often?
- ❑ In what ways has Guyanese culture manifested itself in this neighborhood? Are there any Guyanese shops, stores, restaurants? Do you go to them and if so how often?
- ❑ Do you feel more or less comfortable speaking that creoles within your current neighborhood?
- ❑ What about when you leave? What kind of role do creoles have in your daily life?
- ❑ Are you likely to speak creoles outside of the neighborhood?
- ❑ Do rituals happen within your neighborhood?
- ❑ How important are these rituals to your life?
- ❑ Are there any particular holidays/events that occur yearly that are important to this community? What are those events and can you describe them?

Socio-Economic - Education, Jobs, Goals/Aspirations

- ❑ What does it mean to be American to you?
- ❑ Do you feel you can be both "American" and Guyanese at the same time? Why or Why not?
- ❑ Do you live with your parents?
- ❑ Do you and/or your family rent or own your home?
- ❑ What is your highest level of education?
- ❑ Are you currently in school? If so where and how would you describe the student body?

- ❑ What are you studying? Why?
- ❑ Do you plan on furthering your education?
- ❑ Are you currently employed? If so, what do you do?
- ❑ Is it within/outside this neighborhood?
- ❑ What is the ethnic makeup of your job?
- ❑ What are your career aspirations/goals? Why?
- ❑ How have your goals changed since you migrated to the U.S.?
- ❑ What is the reason behind your goal? Do you have any attachments to home (Guyana)?
- ❑ When making decisions about your educational and/or career goals, how important are your family and friends' expectations to you?
- ❑ Do you discuss it with them?
- ❑ Do you plan on returning to Guyana at any point? To live or to visit?
- ❑ What does it mean to be a second-generation Guyanese immigrant to you?

Appendix B: *Email Scripts to personal contacts*

Hello [name],

I am currently in my senior year writing my senior thesis in the department of Sociology so that I can graduate from Bard College. I am reaching out to you in hopes that you will be interested in participating or recommending participants you may know that qualify to be a part of the project! I am researching the experiences, attitudes, goals, and aspirations of first-generation Guyanese immigrants between the ages of 21 to 35 living in the United States for at least two years.

I am looking for volunteers to interview who are first-generation immigrants meaning that they migrated from Guyana and are currently living in the U.S for at least 2 years. In addition to this, participants should be between the ages of 21 and 35. If you know of anyone that fits this demographic and would be interested in the project please let me know!

I will ensure that each participant's identity is kept confidential and all data collected will be referred to in my project with the use of pseudonyms. Each participant will also have the chance to win one of two \$25 Amazon gift cards at the end of my research project.

If you are aware of anyone who would be interested in participating in an interview for my research project please forward this email itself or provide my email address (dm4375@bard.edu). They can also contact me on my personal phone number (929 293 8844).

I am extremely excited about this research project because I am adding to a field in Sociology that deserves so much more richness for which your participation will bring to this project. I hope that I can work towards shining light on the Guyanese immigrant experience because we are such a diverse and unstoppable force to reckon with no matter where in the world we are. I can only do this with your help and participation whether that is being a participant yourself or recommending a few others! I look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance!

I would greatly appreciate it if you could share this email and opportunity with those eligible. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions!

Best,

Daniella Mingo

dm4375@bard.edu

Appendix C: *Message Script for Social Media Platforms*
(*Facebook, Whatsapp, and Instagram*)

Hello Everyone!

I am currently in my senior year writing my senior thesis in the department of Sociology so that I can graduate from Bard College. I am currently gathering participants for my senior thesis on the experiences, attitudes, goals, and aspirations of first-generation Guyanese immigrants living in the United States. I am reaching out in hopes that you could recommend possible participants for this project based on your social networks!

In order to be part of my project, you **MUST**:

1. Be Guyanese
2. First Generation (meaning you migrated to the United States after being born in Guyana)
3. Must have been living in the United States for at least **TWO** (2) years!
4. Be between the ages of 21 and 35!

If you qualify or know someone that might feel free to contact me!

Email - dm4375@bard.edu

Your efforts are greatly appreciated!